

Dear Friends,

I hope your Easter Celebration was a time of spiritual refreshment.

Have you ever noticed the importance of the Sunday after Easter mention in John's Gospel? It is an interesting and informative section of scripture. In John chapter 20 we have the disciples gathering on Easter evening behind locked doors for fear of the Jews. Jesus appears, blesses them and shows them His wounds. Thomas is missing that evening and is told about their experience of seeing Jesus. Thomas declares he will not believe until he has personally viewed and touched those same wounds. On the Sunday after Easter he gets his wish. Jesus graciously offers His hands and side to Thomas who now enthusiastically declares his belief that Jesus is his Lord and God.

In verse 29 Jesus lovingly confronts Tom; "*Have you believed because you have seen Me?*" Of course the answer is yes! He then makes a fascinating and important statement. "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*"

The Contemporary English Version says "*Thomas, do you have faith because you have seen me? The people who have faith in me without seeing me are the ones who are really blessed!*"

The term believe is used 110 times and word faith 230 times in the New Testament. Webster's Dictionary states that faith is a strong belief or trust in... Some people have faith in their faith. They think that if they set their mind on something and 'believe' hard enough they will get their wish granted.

Biblical faith is much different because it is an unquestioning belief that does not require physical proof or evidence. It is trust that is based on what God's word says in spite of total lack of outward evidence. Biblical faith is not an intellectual understanding of tangible things but, a deliberate commitment to the Person of Jesus Christ, even though I have never seen Him. The faith that Jesus refers to when talking to Thomas, about us, is an unquestioning trust that Jesus Christ truly is God!

#### The Story of Tommy's Faith!

Some time ago, I stood watching my university students file into the classroom for our opening session in the theology of faith.

That was the day I first saw Tommy. He was combing his hair, which hung six inches below his shoulders. Tommy turned out to be my biggest challenge. He constantly objected to or smirked at the possibility of an unconditionally loving God. When he turned in his final exam at the end of the course, he asked in a slightly cynical tone, "Do you think I'll ever find God?" "No," I said emphatically. "Oh," he responded. "I thought that was the product you were pushing." I let him get five steps and then called out. "I don't think you'll ever find Him, but I am certain He will find you." Tommy shrugged and left.

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Later came a sad report: Tommy had terminal cancer and before I could reach out to him he came to me. When he walked into my office, his body was badly wasted, and his long hair had fallen out but, his eyes were bright and his voice was firm. "Tommy! I've thought about you so often. I heard you were very sick," I blurted out. "Oh yes, very sick. I have cancer. It's a matter of weeks." "What's it like to be only 24 and know that you're dying?" "It could be worse!" Then he told me why he had come. "It was something you said to me on the last day of class. I asked if you thought I would ever find God, and you said no, which surprised me. Then you said, 'But He will find you.' I thought about that a lot, even though my search for God was hardly intense at that time. But when the doctors removed a lump from me and told me that it was malignant, I got serious about locating God. Then when the malignancy spread into my vital organs, I really began banging against the bronze doors of Heaven. But nothing happened! Well, one day I woke up, and instead of my desperate attempts to get some kind of message, I just quit. I decided I didn't really care about God, an afterlife, or anything like that. I decided to spend what time I had left doing something more important. I thought about you and something else you had said: 'The essential sadness is to go through life without loving. But it would be almost equally sad to leave this world without ever telling those you loved that you loved them.' So I began with the hardest one: my dad."

Tommy's father had been reading the newspaper when his son approached him. "Dad, I would like to talk with you." "Well, talk." "I mean, it's really important." The newspaper came down three slow inches. "What is it?" "Dad, I love you. I just wanted you to know that." Tommy smiled at me as he recounted the moment. "The newspaper fluttered to the floor and my father did two things I couldn't remember him doing before. He cried and he hugged me. We talked all night, even though he had to go to work the next morning. "It was easier with my mother and little brother," "They cried with me, and we hugged one another. Here I was, in the shadow of death, and I was just beginning to open up to all the people I had actually been close to. "Then one day I turned around and God was there. He didn't come to me when I pleaded with Him. Apparently He does things in His own way and at His own hour. The important thing is that you were right. He found me even after I stopped looking for Him."

"Tommy," I added, "could I ask you a favor? Would you come to my theology-of-faith course and tell my students what you told me?" Though we scheduled a date, he never made it. Of course, his life was not really ended by his death, only changed. He made the great step from faith into vision. From sickness to health! He found a life far more beautiful than we humans can ever imagine. Before he died, we talked one last time. "I'm not going to make it to your class," he said. "I know, Tommy." "Will you tell them for me? Will you tell the whole world for me?" "I will, Tommy! I'll tell them!" (edited to fit).

Back to the story of the disciples. They were huddled behind locked doors hiding from danger and Jesus found them! His gave words of comfort and reassurance "PEACE TO YOU!" Inner peace is to have faith in our God we cannot see but trust completely. Blessed are those who believe and have not seen His wounds! Do trust Him like that?

Thank you for all your prayers and support,  
*Richard*