

Have you ever had to give an Eyewitness account of something that you witnessed? I was in a Pizza Hut in Cahokia, Illinois, with two other seminary students, eating pizza when one guy was followed in by two others who started beating him up. The three of us were starting to move to help the victim when one of the two pulled a gun and pointed it at the people in the room and told us to stay away. We dumped over our table and tried to hide behind it. Eventually the two men stopped and walked out. The three of us gave our eye witness accounts to a police officer. I'm sure our accounts were different from the people who lived there and knew about the big drug bust that had gone on early that day. We all agreed that two men beat up the third.

The Gospels give us varying accounts of Jesus' Resurrection. For example, the different Gospels report that either a group of women went to the tomb or names one, two or three women. They all tell us that the women were the first to go to the tomb. They also report that either one or two angels told them that Jesus had risen from the dead. After the women told the Disciples, one account says Peter and another says Peter and John ran to see for themselves. If the resurrection was a fabricated story, the details probably would have been the same in all four accounts. But they are not because the eye witnesses all saw and reported on different details.

That night Jesus just appeared to ten of the Disciples who were hiding behind locked doors. Remember, those ten didn't believe the eye witness report from the women who had seen Jesus after His resurrection. Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven." (vss. 21-23 NLT) Let's take a closer look at what Jesus said.

Jesus started by saying, "Peace be with you." Considering everything that had happened since they all saw Jesus get arrested on Thursday night, the Disciples didn't have any sense of peace. Their whole world had been turned upside down. Instead of following the One they believed was the Promised Savior, they had no one to follow. Their dreams died on the cross with Jesus. If that wasn't enough, Jesus just appeared. He didn't come through a door or climb through a window. He just appeared. When Jesus gave them peace, they felt a sense of health and wholeness that had been missing. Their sorrow was turned into joy. Like the Disciples, we can count on the Peace that Jesus gives to see us through the trials of faith and tough times of life.

Then Jesus said, "I am sending you." Other than a few trial runs when Jesus sent them out in pairs, the Disciples had been followers. That time was over. They were now given a mission, a purpose, a direct order from Jesus. They couldn't stay in place. They had to get moving. They had to go engage the world for Christ. We can't stay in place either. We can't just come together for worship services and forget that we have been give the same command by Jesus. He sends us out to our families, our communities, our schools, our workplaces. He sends us out to engage the people around us in a conversation about Christ. Our Sunday Morning Bible class starting this morning is designed to help us learn how to engage in those conversations.

Like the Disciples, we don't go alone. Jesus said, **"Receive the Holy Spirit."** He gives His Spirit to us, too. The Spirit fills Jesus' followers with energy and insight to move forward. The Spirit leads and guides. After the Disciples received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, they took the Gospel message into the world. They were on fire for the Lord. The Spirit empowers our witness and guides us to speak the truth about Jesus and His gifts of love and forgiveness.

Finally Jesus told the Disciples to **forgive sins**. Like Jesus and His Disciples, we are in the forgiveness business. Forgiveness is in short supply in our world today. People are quick to judge, quick to condemn, slow to forgive. Forgiveness means trying to heal broken relationships, helping and loving our enemies. Forgiveness is not an option. Because Jesus forgives us, we forgive others. Remember what Jesus taught us in the Lord's prayer, **"Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us."** (Luke 11:4 NLT)

Thomas wasn't with the other 10 Disciples when Jesus appeared. He came a little later and didn't believe what the other Disciples told him. Thomas said, **"I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side."** (vs. 25 NLT) Thomas gets a bum rap for this and is often called doubting Thomas. Like the other 10 Disciples, Thomas wanted to see for Himself. After all no one had ever come back from the dead on his own. Thomas saw Jesus bring other people back to life. But this was totally different.

One week later Jesus appeared to the Disciples again, this time with Thomas present. Jesus met Thomas' doubts with grace by saying to him, **"Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"** (vs. 27 NLT) Jesus showed his hands and his side to the 10 one week earlier. Thomas saw and believed.

It is easy to forget that faith and doubt can coexist in the life of the Christian. We may not talk about it, but I'm sure we have our times or areas of doubt. The Devil loves to plant the seed of doubt. We have a choice. We can focus on our doubts or we can focus on God and look to Him to help us overcome our doubts.

- Faith is belief held in the presence of doubts. We can believe that God loves and forgives us even if we don't feel loveable or know that we don't deserve to be forgiven.
- Faith empowers people to discuss their doubts. It is ok to have our doubts. It is ok to wrestle with our faith. We need to be free to do that in our homes, with our Christian friends and in our church. Faith is the assurance that God loves us despite our doubts.
- Doubts don't always lead to answers, but they can lead to growth. The more we explore our faith, the stronger it will get.

The Bible doesn't answer all of our questions. There are some things that it just doesn't address. But the Bible has a definite purpose. John tells us, **"These are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name."** (vs. 31 NLT) That is the answer to life's most important question.