

Honest Thomas:
April 12, 2026

When I was a sophomore...
In high school...
I won an award.

It was called the... **[1 I Dare You]**
"I Dare You Award".
It came with a book... written by William Danforth.
And a scholarship to attend a camp... in Shelby, Michigan!

The camp was all about challenging students...
To become better leaders...
And to make an impact...
On the world around them.

It was a two summer scholarship...
For two weeks each summer.

The first year at the camp...
You were a camper...
The second year at camp...
You were a counselor.

The program was taught...
By college professors... fancy.

Anyway... after I went through the program...
I became a full-time summer counselor...
Not just for the 'I Dare You' program...
But for the entire camp...
I did that for two years.

Then... when I was in college...
They asked me... if I would work...
As the Director of Religion...
For the parent organization...
That oversaw a couple camps...

It was called...
The American Youth Foundation.
Based in St. Louis, MO.

It was an honor... I was flattered.
But I was a kid... somewhere between 18 and 20.

Then they called me... one day...
Flew me down to St. Louis... for a meeting...
Where people wanted to talk to me...
About the direction of the camp.

Now... one of the really great things...
About the camp... is that it was based on Jesus.
It was all about growing in leadership...
The same way that Jesus grew. He was the example. **[2 Jesus Grew]**

The Biblical justification... came from Luke 2:52....
That says that Jesus grew...
Wisdom and stature...
And in favor with God...
And humans.

So there were four ways he grew...
Mentally...
Physically...
Socially...
Religiously...

Same as us. Cool cool. Right?

Anyway... I met with this group of older adults...
All of them at least in their 40s...
Powerful and important people...
Women and men...
Dressed in suits.
Ready for action.

I was a college kid.
Wearing blue jeans.
Not sure if I owned a collar shirt.
I sat opposite this force...
At a huge conference table.

They said... collectively... they had a problem...
With Jesus being the Savior of the World...
The Son of God...
The Messiah...
All that.

They said... they were ok... **[3 Buddy Jesus]**
With saying that he was a great teacher...
And even a prophet... a nice guy...
But not the Son of God.

I was out numbered...
Out classed...
Out witted...

Did I mention...
I was pretty young.
And honestly... I was just developing... working out...
What I believed about God...
For myself.

And I was also... taught to be respectful.
Especially to my elders.

So. I agreed.
I agreed with them.
That Jesus was...
Just a good guy.

And immediately...
The cock crowed...
In my head.

I knew it was wrong.
I knew I had betrayed Jesus.
I knew that... I had not spoken up...
And told the Truth...
That lived inside of me.

I didn't say...
What I really believed.

And that was my fault.
I was not honest... authentic... or genuine.

And why???

Because... I wanted to make them happy.

You ever do that?
Have you ever settled...
For less than the truth...

Have you ever denied...
What you believe...

Have you ever acted differently...
Around someone who doesn't share your values.

Have you ever spent...
Your time... your life... your energy...
Trying to guess...
What might make other people...
Happy with you.

Trying to prove...
That you are relevant or hip...
Or cool... or special.

Trying to be...
What other people...
Want you to be.

So I like this gospel lesson... because... **[4 St. Thomas]**
Thomas DID NOT DO THAT.

Everybody else was so excited...
They were saying...
Jesus was here.
We have seen the Lord.

We saw him... with our own eyes.
We don't have to go on faith... anymore...
Because we KNOW it's true.
He is alive!

Well... Thomas didn't get that.
Thomas didn't get to see the resurrected Jesus.
He didn't know if it was true or not.

And here's the crucial part... for me...
He didn't want to pretend.
This was too important to him.

So he did something...
That took an incredible...
Amount of personal...
And spiritual STRENGTH.

He stood up...
In opposition to everyone...
Who was rejoicing... and happy...
Everyone who had their faith confirmed...
By this amazing experience.

And Thomas said... no.

No. I'm sorry.
Don't get me wrong...
I really want to believe.
It's just that... I want what you have.
Is there something wrong with that?

I want to see Jesus.
I want to see the marks of the nails... in his hands.
I want to put my hand in his side...
Where he was pierced by the spear.

I want to know Jesus.
And the power of his resurrection...

And until I do...
I'm not to say... I believe.
I'm not going to pretend.

So today... I want to go against...
2000 years...
Of popular opinion...
And conventional wisdom...

That says... Thomas...
Should henceforth and forever more...
Be known... as Doubting Thomas.

I don't accept that.
He is not doubting.
He is honest. **[5 Honest]**

We should call him...
Honest Thomas.
Authentic Thomas.
Genuine Thomas.

Because he didn't want to lie...
About what he believed.

He didn't want to pretend...
Like he was ok.
It was not ok... for him.

He had questions.
He was struggling.
He wanted to know Jesus.

And listen.
If there isn't room...
In the church...
For people who are struggling...
Who are working on their faith.

People who are trying to figure out.
What they really believe...

People who look at us...
And honestly say...
I don't get it.

Then... I'm not sure...
There's a place in the church... for me.

You know...
It does no good to pretend.

Are you ready for the obscure bible verse of the day? **[6 Chronicles]**
Well... this is from 1 Chronicles 28:9.
That's right... Chronicles.
I didn't make it up.
It's in the bible. ...

Here's what it says...
The LORD searches every mind,
And understands every plan and thought.
If you seek him, you will find him.

So what good...
Could it possibly do...
For us to pretend...
To believe something we don't believe...

What good does it do...
To pretend to be something we are not...
In front of our God.

God knows.
God knows.
We might as well...
Be honest.
Authentic.
Genuine.
And truthful.

There comes a point in our lives...
When we need to stop living for other people...

We need to stop trying to please others...
In order to make them happy...
At the expense of what we really think...
Believe... or want.

We compromise.
Not in the good sense...
Working together...
With other people.

We compromise...
In the sense of not saying...
And not pursuing...
The Truth... for ourselves.

But remember... **[7 Truth]**
It was Jesus himself...
Who said...

You will know the Truth...
And the Truth shall set you free.

So. If you want to know Jesus.
Then I think it makes sense...
To do what Thomas did.
Be honest... like Thomas.
Ask to see Jesus.
Ask to know him.
Ask to touch him.

Ask to be smacked over the head...
With the love of Jesus.

Ask Jesus to break your heart.
Break your stubborn will.
Break into your life...

Ask. Ask. Ask.

Because without God's intervention...
None of us... are able to believe.

Those disciples who were there...
When Jesus came to visit...
Had a huge advantage.
Jesus breathed on them.
And said... receive the Holy Spirit. **[8 Holy Spirit]**

And you know... it's the Holy Spirit...
That causes faith...
To grow in our hearts.

That is what the Holy Spirit does.

Martin Luther wrote...
In the Small Catechism...
In the explanation...
Of the Third Article...
Of the Apostles Creed...

You know... that thing we say...
Every week... that goes like this:

I believe in the Holy Spirit.
The holy catholic church.
The communion of saints.
The forgiveness of sins.
And the life everlasting. Amen.

Luther asked...
The most Lutheran of all questions:
What does this mean?

THEN he explained:
I believe that I cannot
By my own reason or strength
Believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord,
Or come to Him;

But the Holy Spirit has called me...
By the Gospel,
Enlightened me with His gifts,
Sanctified and kept me in the true faith.

In the same way the Holy Spirit calls,
Gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies...

The whole Christian church on earth,
And keeps it with Jesus Christ...
In the one true faith.

I'm sure Luther was saying...
We need to open our hearts and our minds...
To the working of the Holy Spirit.

Thomas did NOT say...
That he was NOT open...
To the power of God.

He just said...
I'm not going to believe...
Until I see it for myself.

Which is just another way of saying...
I want to see it for myself.
I want to know Jesus.
I want it so badly...
Please God...
Let me see.

So. If you are struggling.
With your faith.

If you are feeling pressure...
To believe something...
You just don't understand.

If you want to know Jesus.
Then the first step...
Is always the same. **[9 Ask]**

Ask the Holy Spirit...
To work in your heart.

Ask the Holy Spirit... to give you faith...

Ask the Holy Spirit... in a simple prayer.

Be honest. Be authentic. Be genuine.

And remember. God already knows you.

God knows you...
God loves you...
And is just waiting...
For you...
To ask.

Thanks be to God.
Amen.

Children's Sermon...
Today I have decided...
You can ask me any question...
You want to ask.
Ok?

Go.

I don't know.

Is it ok to say... I don't know?
What if it's the truth.
What if I really don't know.