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The Gospel of John
“My Lord and My God”
John 20:19-32

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Like a lot of people my age, I listen to a fair amount of podcasts while I'm driving or walking the dog. I promise that not all of them are faith related podcasts, but there was one episode of a show about reformed theology that I was listening to last week that made me take a step back and think. And the episode was all about providing evidence of the resurrection of Jesus. A fitting topic for the first week of Easter. And in the podcast, the four hosts took turns presenting common arguments against the resurrection, and then they would all chime in and say why those arguments were false. Which was fun, because they made some pretty compelling arguments. Rational arguments. Almost scientific. But after the episode was over, I started to wonder whether I would have found their arguments in favor of the resurrection to be as compelling if I didn't already agree with their conclusion. I believe that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. Really and truly, I believe that I believe. If I didn't, I would probably need to find a different job. But what if I were not already a Christian? Could I argue my way rationally into belief? Maybe. I honestly can't say what it would take to make me a Christian if I wasn't already one.

A few hundred years ago, scholarly people used to refer to theology as “the queen of the sciences.” Now, when you and I hear the word “science,” we think of biology and chemistry and physics. But theology used to be in that club too. In fact, theology was the greatest of the sciences because its subject matter was the greatest of subjects: God. God stands over all of creation, therefore the study of God should stand similarly over the study of all of creation. I've got a lot of books on my shelf in my office about the study of God. There's much to be said about God. Most of it is really helpful. But is theology really a science? Can God be quantified?

It was evening in Jerusalem, and the disciples were gathered in a locked room. Mary Magdelene was saying that she had seen the Lord, but it wasn't enough to convince the others. How could they believe her? They were far too afraid to accept that what she said was true. That is, until Jesus himself proved it to them. Suddenly, Jesus entered the locked room and he spoke peace to their anxious hearts. “Peace be with you,” he said. In fact, they were so shaken that he had to say it twice: “Peace be with you.” And then he showed them his hands still pierced from where the nails had been, and his side still open from where he'd been struck by the spear. It really was him! And they believed.

But Thomas was not with them. Maybe he was out trying to clear his head. After all, it was a lot to take in. Jesus had died, but a few days later, Mary's saying that he's actually alive. Just a few weeks ago, Thomas had been the one to foresee the doom that lay ahead. When Jesus told them they were returning to Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem, Thomas knew that death awaited them. He knew that Jesus was a wanted man there. And he believed Jesus when he said

that the Son of Man would die. But, at the time, he wasn't frightened by that prospect. He was so dedicated to Jesus that he was willing to stake his life on his master's mission. You remember what Thomas said, "Let us go, that we might die with him." He wasn't under any illusions about what was coming. He knew that death lay ahead, and yet he went on regardless.

If anyone believed in Jesus, it was Thomas. In fact, Thomas believed many things about Jesus. Thomas believed that Jesus was a good man. Perhaps the greatest man to ever live. Thomas believed that Jesus spoke the truth about God and his kingdom. Thomas believed that Jesus was worthy of following. And that's precisely what he did. He followed Jesus all the way to certain death.

And yet, this report from Mary and the other disciples was not something he could bring himself to believe. It didn't make sense. It was unreasonable. For all intents and purposes, it was impossible. What Thomas believed ... what we all believe, I think... is that, with a few notable exceptions, people who die tend to stay dead.

Jesus was dead. He was crucified. We buried him in a tomb. He's as dead as you can get. There's no way I could believe that Jesus is up and walking around, appearing to people. There's no way he's alive like you and I are alive. *"Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."* No, I will never believe.

There's a window in my office. And just outside the window is a crepe myrtle tree. And at the right time of the year, the branches of the tree are full of beautiful flowers. And at other times of the year, a red cardinal will come and sit on its bare branches. This past Friday, the green leaves were filtering the sunlight before it poured onto my office floor. But it's just a tree. Lots of trees just like it. If we wanted to, we could chop it down and go about our day. We wouldn't even need a reason other than the consent of the grounds committee. After all, it's just a tree.

But if it was gone, I know that I would miss it. Well, why? What reason would I have to miss it? Here, let me provide you with a numbered list of logical reasons:

- 1) It gives me shade so that the room doesn't get too hot
- 2) It provides me with oxygen through the process of photosynthesis
- 3) It gives me something to look at when I'm on the phone.

And I'm sure I could go on, but we're doing communion in a little bit and I don't want to take up too much of our time. And besides, none of those reasons is the real reason that I would miss the tree if it were gone. The real reason I would miss it is because it's beautiful. And beauty can't be quantified, can it? It's one of those intangible things which stand outside the realm of reason.

C.S. Lewis, one of the great popular theologians of the last century, talks in his memoir, "Surprised by Joy" of coming to accept that God was real from an intellectual perspective.¹ He was persuaded on the merits of the evidence based on the things he was reading from influential Christians like GK Chesterton and George MacDonald and the things he was hearing from his friends and colleagues like JRR Tolkien. Much to his dismay, he became convinced that God existed, calling himself, "the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England." His mind was

¹ [Sunshine In September: The Story of C.S. Lewis' Conversion](#)

convinced, but his heart had not been stirred. He believed in the existence of God, but did not call himself a Christian.

And he went on like that for a full two years, until one fateful day in 1931. He went for a walk through Oxford with his friends, Tolkien and a man named Hugo Dyson. And all during the walk and into the evening, they talked about their love of great stories... great myths... and they marveled at how the story of Christianity was the one true myth of history. The one that actually happened. And over the next eight days, that conversation was turning over in Lewis's mind and in his heart until suddenly, on September 28th, 1931, something incredible happened. Lewis and his brother were riding by motorcycle to the zoo. Lewis says,

“When we set out, I did not believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, but when we reached the zoo, I did... It was more like when a man, after a long sleep, still lying motionless on the bed, becomes aware that he is now awake.”

We cannot cause our hearts to be moved by reason. There is something in us that lies beyond our ability to control. Beauty can move the heart in a way that reason can't. Love is like that too. In *The Reformed Imperative*, John Leith says that

“The human will is a remarkable capacity. It can organize the energies and vitalities of life in pursuit of a freely chosen goal. Human beings are not at the mercy of impulse and instinct and momentary need as animals are, so far as we know. We have a will... But there are depths in human life which are beyond the will. We cannot forget ourselves by trying hard... We are not grateful by trying hard... We cannot be humble by trying hard... We cannot love by trying hard. To say we ought to love comes very near to being a contradiction, for there is a spontaneity about love that is beyond the power of the will.”²

Logic and reason are important, but they can only take us so far. Logic and reason can uncover facts, but they cannot by themselves reveal the truth. “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will not believe.” Because that is the sign which reason demands. But the truth is something different entirely. Yes, the truth is far deeper than fact. Facts can be known in the mind, but the truth is known only in the heart.

Eight days later, after Jesus's appearance in the upper room, the disciples were gathered again. But this time, Thomas was there with them. And suddenly, without warning and in the same way he had before, Jesus appeared to them in the middle of the locked room. “Peace be with you,” Jesus said to his disciples. To each of them, “peace be with you.” But then he looked at Thomas, with what I imagine is a tenderness that we all have longed for in moments when our lives are not as they ought to be. And Thomas's eyes were fixed on him with awe and amazement and not a little bit of fear. And Jesus said something to him, and maybe he took it in. Maybe Thomas heard Jesus invite him to do what he demanded over a week ago, or maybe he didn't. Maybe he was too lost in the beauty of the one who stood before him with wounded hands and side. And all he could do in that moment was speak the truth which beauty and love itself had written upon his heart. Perhaps only in a whisper³ he confessed, “My Lord and my God!” As if to say, It's you... My God, It really is you.

² The Reformed Imperative – John Leith

³ Frederick Buechner – The Seeing Heart – from Secrets in the Dark

Finally, he understands who it is that he's been following. For the first time in 20 chapters, someone finally speaks the truth that we first heard in chapter one. This truth which sits beneath the surface of the entire book. The truth which sits beneath the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation. All of it, that our hearts might be moved to believe the truth about who He is: The truth that, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. And the Word was God."⁴

If facts could cause us to believe, then the Bible would be terribly short. One page. One sentence: Jesus Christ is God. End of story. But God moves not in facts, but in truth, in beauty, and in a love so deep that our hearts can hardly take it in. He invites us into a story... into His story about his love... so that we might see him. So that we might truly see him with the eyes of our hearts wide open and confess, "My Lord and my God." It's true. Oh, Thanks be to God, it's true. Amen.

⁴ John 1:1