

Legacy

My parents used to do the craziest thing. Well, at least I used to think they were crazy.

When I was a kid, I remember my parents flipping through the paper and always stopping to read the Obituaries. I never understood why they would do that. I had asked them if someone they knew had died, but no, nobody they knew. They both just liked to read the 'obits' as they called them.

I had always thought that was strange, until about a year ago I caught myself reading the 'obits'. I don't read every one, but I find myself stopping and reading random ones, especially the really long ones, because that person must have done something really special during their lives to have an obituary that long.

Right before Good Friday, about 10 of you forwarded an Obituary to me and I thought I would share a couple excerpts out of it for you. The full version will be available to you as you leave today.

Jesus gave us many things – great teachings, a way to live our lives. His Legacy lives on through you and I. He has a living legacy.

When we interact with each other, when we hold each other up, when we support one another – and when we do this because of our faith, we end up spreading the living legacy of Jesus Christ.

But we aren't Jesus. So sometimes I wonder what type of legacy I will leave behind. Will people remember me as a committed Christian, a good father, a loving husband, a mediocre preacher?

Then I look at the disciples of Jesus and wonder about them. Let's look at Thomas for a minute. In our second scripture today, we heard how Thomas doubted that Jesus really appeared to the other disciples.

He said, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Thomas was one of Jesus' disciples. He was there when Jesus talked about rising from the dead, but he still had doubt. Today, we remember him in an expression, "Don't be a doubting Thomas."

But was Thomas much different than many of us? Don't we doubt our faith now and then? Have we ever said, "come' on God, give me a sign and I will believe. Show me something I can put my finger into."

But if we read the passage closely, we realize that Thomas had a little more faith than he let on. He said in the passage, "Not until I stick my fingers in the holes in his hands and my hand in the place where he was pieced with the spear will I believe it."

Jesus appeared and said, "here, stick your finger in these holes" - but Thomas never did. He believed - just by seeing Jesus - he didn't need further proof.

Thomas went on from there to be one of the biggest evangelists, spreading the word of Jesus to many people – including parts of India. He gave up everything he had to share the Word of God throughout the land.

So we might remember him as doubting Thomas, but his legacy lives on more as one who truly believed and helped spread Christianity in the early days.

So I think Thomas' Obituary would read something like:

72 AD Thomas the twin died today while spreading the word of Jesus Christ throughout India. Thomas, an Apostle and believer in Jesus, was known for doubting that Jesus had risen from the dead, but after confronting his doubt, his faith became stronger than ever before.

Then we have Peter. At last week's sunrise service we talked about how the Apostle Peter denied he knew Jesus. He didn't deny Jesus only once, but he strongly denied he knew Jesus three times in the same night.

It was a time of doubt for Peter. See, Peter had believed that Jesus was someone great, but at this point Jesus was arrested – and if Peter had said that he was a follower, Peter himself might be put to death. Peter just thought to himself, what if I have been wrong – am I willing to die for someone that might not have been anyone special?

But Peter, like Thomas, overcame his doubt. He realized that Jesus had risen from the dead – he realized that Jesus was alive. In the first scripture reading we heard how Peter strongly proclaimed that Jesus was and is God and has risen from the dead.

Peter said this as one who had authority and he said it to the exact same people that he had previously told he didn't know Jesus. Why the change in attitude? Faith. Peter overcame his doubt and truly believed.

How would Peter's obituary read?

64 AD – Simon Peter was crucified in Rome today for spreading the Word of Jesus Christ. Peter was an Apostle and believer of Jesus but was once known for denying that he even knew who Jesus was. Later, after confronting his doubt, Peter became one of the strongest believers and an extremely important figure within the Christian community.

Neither Thomas or Peter were perfect. They both had their times of doubt, and times of questioning their faith. But through their doubts and questioning of their beliefs, their faith grew stronger!

At some point, something changed for them. At some point they realized in their hearts and minds that Jesus was real. His message was real. His sacrifice was real. His resurrection was real.

When they came to this point, something changed. They kind of believed in Him before this point, but now they didn't have the same doubt, the same denial. They went on to be committed to Jesus through everything – even death.

But what about us today? For some of us we have a moment in our lives that we can point to where we felt or told ourselves something like, “yes, I believe – with my heart and my mind, I believe. I accept Jesus as real and accept his sacrifice for me.” Before that point we might not have been sure, but at some point in our lives, we do truly believe.

For others, you have believed since childhood. Many of you don't have a time and place that you can point to where you began to truly believe, you just always have.

For others yet, you may still be searching, asking yourself if this is real or not. Do I really believe in Jesus? Do I really believe in his sacrifice? Do I really believe he was resurrected?

Whether you have always believed, can point to a specific time when you started to believe, or if you are still searching, many of us still have times in our lives where we might say to God, "Let me stick my finger in the holes of his hand and I will believe." But let's remember, not even Thomas had to do that. And I don't think we need to either. Thomas saw Jesus with his own eyes and believed. But, for us, we don't have Jesus walking around here today, do we?

I think we do. We might not have the man, Jesus, walking around this earth, but we have his Spirit here for sure and his Living Legacy.

Let me read you a real obituary from Wednesday's paper.

I don't know about you, but I think that could have been Jesus' obituary.

Beyond a doubt you could have seen Jesus living in her.

Jesus is alive today and he can be seen in the hearts of those around us. He can be seen through our prayers for each other, our presence at church events, our gifts to help others, and our service to the community. Christ is alive in each and every one of us.

So yes, we have times of doubt and times of denial. The question we need to ask ourselves is: Do we just stay in those times of doubt and do nothing? Do we stop going to church, stop praying for others, stop caring? Or do we look to find Jesus still alive in the world today and in those around us?

Seeking out and finding Jesus in the world around us will renew our faith; we will have a stronger faith than we did before our doubt. Questioning our faith is just the next step to growing in our faith.

As we continue to grow in our faith, other people around us will see Jesus through us – and grow in their faith – and that might just become part of our legacy.

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