

## Sermon from 04/15/2007

### Touching Belief

Texts: Rev. 1:4-8, John 20:19:31

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Sabbath / Locked-in / Fear / Peace / I Send You / Breathed / Holy Spirit / Sins / Thomas  
the Twin / Except I See / Locked-in / Be Not Faithless / Lord / God / See / Touch /  
Believe

I'm curious.

How many of you have ever used a coupon to make a purchase?

Good!

Our consumer-orientated culture has trained us all well.

Well, this week I saw an interesting story on the local news.

It was about a lady who took her manufacturer's coupons, that she had downloaded from the Internet, to Krogers to reduce the cost of her weekly grocery bill.

Unfortunately, and you may not have heard the news: but Krogers no longer accepts these coupons that are, with the click of a mouse, printed off your computer's printer.

Why?

Fraud.

With a coupon printed from your PC, it is all too easy to change the expiry date of the coupon...or doctor the bar code.

So, Kroger's Supermarkets now only accepts 'Sunday Paper' coupons or the glossy type coupons in the 'weeklies.'

Today, verifying a person's identity can be equally challenging.

See these? [This is a U.S. passport...and this is a U.K. passport].

Do you know what someone from a war-torn African nation or a nation espousing a fundamental religious regime would do for one of these?

Having worked with asylum seekers in Britain, one of the first steps in claiming asylum is to lose your passport.

For asylum seekers, it is a common practice to “somehow” lose your passport upon entry to the ports of Dover or Southampton.

Why...because without a passport, a government cannot substantiate who you are.

If they [a government] cannot substantiate who you are and what your country of origin or citizenship is, the government where the petition is filed, has an enormously hard time sending you back to where you came from.

So what is it that verifies who you are?

Is it your passport, your Social Security number, your driver’s license, some I.D. related to *The Patriot Act*?

[And heaven help you if you get lost in...or ‘Big Brother’s’ supercomputer wrongly references your middle initial to a known mass murderer.]

Well, what if I were to tell you, I am not Daniel Meister.

Would you believe me?

Do you really, really know—beyond a shadow of a doubt—who I say that I am?

What if I was a fake?

What if Janet and Brittany were paid actresses in a grand ruse to “pad” my story and make my false identity compelling?

What if I were to say, “I am not who you think I am and that actually I am in the *Witness Protection Program* of the U.S. government...and that my name isn’t Daniel Meister, but that, as part of the *Witness Protection Program*, I have been given a Bio, a false identity, and a script to follow.

None of my credentials and accomplishments are real and that you have been “had.”

What if I were to tell you that I am a hired “plant” from UCC [United Church of Christ] headquarters in Cleveland sent here to study and monitor congregational life from the inside out...and that really I am a white-collar executive who doesn’t have a clue about how to pastor a congregation?

Can you persuade yourself that what I have just said about myself *isn’t* true?

Can you prove that I am Daniel Meister even though, today, I’m telling you that I’m not?

For those of you with a very tight knot in the pit of your stomach...you can breathe now!

Relax!

Thank the Good Lord that you raised up a prayerful and dedicated group of people called your Search Committee [their work is now done—I think 😊]

And a part of their work was to verify, checkout and insure that who I say that I am IS, in fact, who I say that I am (although I did find it suspicious when Donna McMullen made a copy of my passport—I understand—just to be on the safe side, ya know)...

...that churches I pastored...I, in fact, pastored.

That people I ministered to, I indeed ministered to.

That prayers that I prayed came true...that initiatives and visions that I led and experienced, through the years, can be confirmed.

Now how did your Search Committee do this (aside from photocopying my passport 😊)?

Witnesses!

They asked others.

They said to the witnesses: “Tell us this man’s story...tell us about his journey...is it true?”

Is he who he says that he is?

And then the witnesses either go on to deny or corroborate the statements upon my pastoral profile!

Well, unfortunately, for many-a search committee, they reach a place of identifying a final candidate and they bring he / she in for a live, in-person interview.

If that goes well, with God’s blessing and the Holy Spirit confirming, then the search committee must bring that candidate to the church.

Why?

Because even though the search committee read the profile and met the candidate, the congregation is entitled to adopt the stance of skeptic.

“Show us the candidate that we might hear their voice, feel their touch and watch how they behave—then, we’ll determine if what the search committee says is true (or not).”

Well, such was the case for Thomas.

The other disciples (the first **Search** Committee) said, “We’ve checked Him [Jesus] out. He’s real. He’s alive. He’s risen as He said He would do.”

To which Thomas employs the same skeptical doubt that many congregations do: “Show us the candidate and then we *might* believe.”

So Thomas, even though he knows the other disciples really, really well—he isn’t convinced by their witness.

He doesn’t call the other disciples liars...or anything like that.

He just says, “That for me, I need a little bit more” (really a lotta bit more).

“I need to see the nail prints and look at the open wound where He was lanced by a Roman spear.”

“In this way,” Thomas goes on, “I will verify His identity and this will categorically prove to me that it is Jesus.”

You see, “Doubting” Thomas is only half the Gospel, isn’t it?

If we only remember his doubt, we make a mockery of the biblical text.

For Thomas...when shown, immediately believes!

You see, what we often miss here is a key point that the writers of the Gospels wish to drive home!

In today’s profoundly skeptical age, that requires this proof...or that proof...or another—Thomas was clever enough to understand that the “true” identity of the Christ is inextricably bound up with the cross [which goes on to form the heart of Pauline theology. See: *But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: <sup>14</sup>And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. <sup>15</sup>Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. [1 Cor. 15:13-15].*

In Thomas’ heart and mind, that’s the point that proves it all!

Thomas wasn’t about to be bamboozled by any Tom, Dick or Harry pulling the wool over everyone’s eyes...walking in and saying he was Jesus.

Uh uh.

**For Thomas, if you don’t have a cross...you don’t have a Christ.**

All the others, he reasoned, are fakes, pretenders, charlatans and wanna-be Saviors.

And so when you talk about Jesus and share your faith with your friends and family, you can present Jesus in all kinds of dressed up ways, packaged and wrapped up in this way and that.

But if we skirt, ignore or dance around what was so evidently important to Thomas: **THAT THE CROSS and THE CHRIST CANNOT BE SEPARATED!**—then people will always be suspicious that we've never met the man.

You see, Thomas knew of, pal'd around with and was a close friend of Jesus—knew Him for years—but He had never met ***The Risen Christ*** until he reached forth to feel, hold and touch our Savior's hands and sides.

For Thomas, the proof wasn't in the witness or the believability of the disciples report—**the authentic proof was in the touch!**

And so mark this: ***no seeker ever believes until they touch.***

I could preach 1,000 persuasive sermons, but without that one singular touch, a soul will never, ever believe.

Are you with me, friends?

On Good Friday this year, I encouraged our ecumenical gathering and later the congregation of Zion Church to come forward to touch the cross and many said that this was a particularly meaningful moment that enhanced their belief...and faith entered their soul.

So remember: ***No one believes until they touch.*** Amen?

Oh, you may live 21 centuries after the fact, but have you touched Him?

You might have been raised in the church, but have you touched Him?

You might be an Elder in the church, but have you touched Him?

You might be a "good person", but have you touched Him?

You might stand up for biblical standards, but have you touched Him?

You might have all gifts of the Spirit, but have you touched Him?

Amen.

#### Questions for Reflection

1. Who are you?
2. What is your identity?
3. In what way are you able to 'verify' your faith in Jesus Christ?
4. Have I ever faked my faith?

5. Do you always believe what others tell you about Jesus or are you willing to find out for yourself?
6. Have you touched Him?

[Internet readers will want to reference the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 17 and following to more fully read St. Paul's treatment of the cross. There can be no doubt that the centrality of the cross in Pauline theology will have been greatly influenced by the persuasion of the original disciples and the early church.

See also: *But God forbid that I should glory, save in the **cross** of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.—Galatians 6:14 and And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the **cross**, having slain the enmity thereby:—Ephesians 2:16.*