

SEE MY HANDS!

John 20:19-31

When you were little mom and dad were brilliant. They had all the answers. Mom had a way of making every hurt feel better. Dad was stronger, faster, and taller than anyone else. You lived in the best neighborhood, with the best house, and your family was the best. And for a while you could believe that your team was the best and that America is perfect.

But that can all change as we grow up. Moms and dads don't know everything. You learn things in school that can reveal that your parents are prejudiced or aren't so smart about caring for the environment or don't understand other cultures or don't know things that our friends know better. That is even more pronounced today than ever because for the first time in history children often know the technology better than their parents do, which is why the parents ask them what is wrong on their computers.

As we go to school, we learn that America and Americans have many faults. We see that we use up more than our fair share of the world's resources and that there is much in our society that is wrong.

Those doubts can also affect our faith. Jesus talked about having the faith of a little child. We know when we have children's sermons the standard answer kids give to any question is "Jesus." We go to Sunday School which is fun at first because we sing songs, play/act stories, and do crafts with teachers who really love us. But that changes. Bible stories aren't as fun as finding videos on You-tube or texting our friends. Jesus and church doesn't seem to have much to do with having pimples on our faces, feeling excluded by groups at school, being not as good an athlete as other guys, wanting some guy or girl to be interested in us who probably never will be. And that struggle can come true as we go to high school and wonder where we fit. As we think about college, people ask, "What do you want to do with your life?" It goes on in college as we think of our major and passing classes, as we date, think of marriage, struggle to get a job, get married, raise children, work toward retirement, and leave good a legacy for our grandchildren. What does the Bible, Jesus, and all of that have to do with dragging ourselves out of bed, paying bills, passing tests, and relating to our friends?

Thomas was looking for something definite. The other disciples had told him that they had seen Jesus alive, risen from the dead. But that seemed all too good to be true. Thomas wasn't going to believe until He saw the real Jesus, a Jesus he could not only see, but one he could touch and know was real.

One of the most horrible illnesses is schizophrenia. It is often mistaken, seen as having a split personality. We say a person is "schizoid" if that person acts like two or more people. But actually schizophrenia is the inability to distinguish reality from imagination. A person afflicted by this sees things as real to him or her that are only illusions.

We suffer from spiritual schizophrenia. We see things as so real and so important—the latest electronic device, an athletic or music award, a striking girl or a hunk of a guy, a new car, or a vacation home, a big promotion—and then find out too late how unimportant those things really are. We think we have a better reality—that it's okay to have sex outside of marriage, that our needs are more important than others, that our parents or adults are so backward, that going to church is not worth the effort. We think that way because we are convinced that we know better than God.

In the story Jesus tells about the Rich Fool, a rich man has so much that he goes to bed thinking, "I've got it made!" But he is not seeing reality, not when that night he dies and is left with nothing.

The movie, "A Beautiful Mind" shows the struggles of a man with schizophrenia. He is a brilliant man who becomes convinced that he is being harassed by enemies of the United States who want to find out about secret government code work he is hired to do. We see things in the movie through his eyes, so we are convinced that he is being persecuted by all sides and no one believes that there is a conspiracy against him. The movie reaches a climax when he is confronted with what is really real. He can trust that nothing he sees is real—except his wife who loves him unconditionally. Her love becomes the starting point for him. He knows that she alone is real. And from there he works to distinguish reality from illness. For example, near the end of the movie a man comes by his class to interview him. He interrupts the man to ask his students, "Is this man real?" They assure him the man is.

We need something real, definite to deal with our schizophrenia. Thomas found that in Jesus. Jesus appeared to him. But even more He told Thomas, "Put your finger here, see My hands. Reach out your hand, and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Jesus was not some apparition. He was real, alive. Even historians who are not Christians, who don't believe in miracles, say something incredible happened on Easter. The disciples didn't make up a story. They truly believed as real that Jesus rose from the dead!

That is the basis of all reality for you and me. Jesus rose from the dead. So what? So everything! Easter means that everything Jesus said and did is real. When He says that He took the sins of the world on the cross, then it really did happen. "I am the resurrection and the life; He who believes in Me though He die, yet shall He live." "I am the Good Shepherd." "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." "I am with you always to the end of the earth." "Come unto Me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "On this rock I will build My Church and the gates of hell will never prevail against it." "No one can snatch you out of my hands." "Your sins are forgiven." "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." "In My Father's house there are many rooms. I go to prepare a place for you." "Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again, and you will rejoice, and no one can take away your joy."

Real is our God who made the world and you and me. Real is our Savior who became one of us to die with our sins and restore us to God. Real is the Holy Spirit who lives in you and me to assure us that we are God's. Other people and culture will tell us, "You're not good

enough. You're dumb or fat or ugly or awkward or worthless." God says, "I love you totally." Our experiences will tell us, "Live for things, for what you can enjoy." God tells us, "Live for others, live for what lasts." We can look to the risen Jesus and see what is real. And everything is based on that. We may not have Jesus standing in front of us as he did with Thomas, but we have His body and blood in Holy Communion. That is not some vision, some make-believe. It is real, more real than anything else we experience in this life.

What is real? "See My hands." Look at Jesus.