

Centre Street Congregational Church, UCC

April 19th, 2020 (John 20: 19-31 "Doubting Thomas")

Show Me the Data!

Ernie Atkinson

I think if Thomas was alive in this day and age he'd be from Missouri. Because he would say "Show me!"

If you know me even a little you know that I study Atlantic salmon, a species that is critically endangered and may be functionally extinct in the next 30 years. Along with my colleagues we use data that is gathered to make decisions based on the results of these data. But we face challenges in effecting change due to skeptics of our process. Especially if those skeptics belong to groups that will have their own way of life altered by our proposed changes. Interestingly, many of our recommendations we give to protect salmon are also good for people because at their heart, it means healthier ecosystems, clean water, and a better balance of civilizations' use of natural resources.

So it goes with religion, we are asked to adhere to a doctrine that puts some checks on our behavior. Our lives will be altered in ways we don't

like and that can be very difficult to accept even if in the end it will make us better people and better citizens in our communities. The chief difference between science and religion is that with religion we are asked to go on faith and believe in or at least consider a story that happened in ancient history. Show us the data.

I've had several really great conversations with my son Isaac and he asks some really good questions. "How do I believe in something that I can't see, touch or interact with? If God is all powerful, why are there so many awful things and atrocities? Why can't God just fix all of this?" Trying to convince someone that God is good and all powerful is not without challenges. The data gives us never ending wars, extreme poverty, crimes, abuses of power, slavery and all other sorts of really bad things. But there are also laws, organizations and people who do good things because of their faith and beliefs -- regardless of their religious affiliations.

It's a fair question for someone to ask, being told you need to have faith and believe in the process is not enough. Show us the data.

So, we come back to Thomas. Thomas was one of the twelve. He certainly would have observed with his own eyes the miracles Jesus performed. So why didn't he simply believe the word of his friends? Maybe because he didn't fully comprehend who Jesus was. Would you

be any different? If you had seen with your own eyes your friend and mentor executed and had seen his dead body laid in a tomb would you believe he was alive three days later? Of course not! And we are all Christians who have grown up accepting that Jesus did the same thing. But if it were to happen in this day and age there would be skeptics a plenty. Show us the data!

Here we are one week after Easter and we're talking about a disciple who wanted proof that his teacher had risen from the dead. If anyone was prepared to accept a miracle it would have been one of the twelve disciples. So how do we show somebody something we ourselves just know but have never actually seen? Where's the data? The data is out there like the truth that Moulder and Scully searched for. God's love is demonstrated when people will come out of their shells to help someone in need whether they believe in God or not. And, I agree with the motto of this church, "God is still speaking!". When we take time to quiet our minds we can hear. When we take time to observe we can see. What I tell Isaac is he doesn't have to believe in the story of Jesus but he should believe in the process that means there is a greater design and plan in action. Because, the way of life demonstrated in the story of Jesus should be the rule and guide for us all to follow. Most of the major religions have a similar code of conduct. I don't think that's a

coincidence and in the end, this is the one piece of data I need to believe in God and the story of Jesus.