

<sup>27</sup>Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. <sup>28</sup>"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." <sup>29</sup>Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! <sup>30</sup>The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. <sup>31</sup>God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. <sup>32</sup>We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." <sup>33</sup>When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. <sup>34</sup>But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. <sup>35</sup>Then he addressed them: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. <sup>36</sup>Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. <sup>37</sup>After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. <sup>38</sup>Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. <sup>39</sup>But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God." <sup>40</sup>His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. <sup>41</sup>The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. <sup>42</sup>Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

With what can you just simply not be bothered? You know, something that you think you probably should be concerned about but you're not concerned about, in spite of your best efforts to be concerned about it? For instance, my father, a decent fellow and yet, he just can't be bothered with what other people think of him. He doesn't beat around the bush, he avoids small talk, and if it weren't for my mother, he would wear ripped jeans and stained t-shirts in public. Other folks I know just can't be bothered with house work—they simply don't care if the house is spic and span. Still others can't be bothered with following politics—they know they should know what is going on—but they find it tedious and depressing to know what they feel they should know and so they simply block it out. What about you? What's the thing with which you just simply can't be bothered?

Personally, along with not being bothered with removing the dog hair in my house, my cars, and on my clothes, I can't be bothered with Christian apologetics. Now, in case you're like I was before I went to seminary and think that Christian apologetics is about people who love Jesus saying they're sorry, allow me to define the term. "Christian apologetics is a field of Christian theology that aims to present a rational basis for the Christian faith, defend the faith against objections, and expose the perceived flaws of other world views . . . Apologists have based their defense of Christianity on historical evidence, philosophical arguments, scientific investigations, rhetorical persuasion and other disciplines."<sup>i</sup> Throughout college, seminary, and my career I've felt like I should be bothered with Christian apologetics, that it should be important to me to prove the existence of God and provide a rational basis for Christian faith, but, I just can't bring myself to be concerned. Indeed, I avoided introduction to philosophy courses in college because I feared they would ask me to write a paper proving the existence of God and, to be honest with you, I didn't want to dilly-dally around with mental gymnastics when it felt like the God whose existence I would be asked to prove had other things for me to do. Besides, if I had been asked to prove the existence of God to a philosophy class at Miami of Ohio, I would have had to load them all up in a bus and drive them 4 hours north to my home church, St. John's United Church of Christ in Archbold, Ohio where I would have introduced them to Norma Fish and Opal Lauber, Richard Heer and Ted Lovejoy—folks who were so loving and faithful that they could only have been created by something divine. Proving the existence of God to someone who doesn't believe in God is like trying to explain how red licorice tastes to someone who has never tasted it and quite frankly, either endeavor is one with which I just simply can't be bothered.

And so, when I encounter someone like Thomas declaring "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it", when someone wants PROOF of the risen Christ, I'm a bit stymied. Indeed, though I successfully escaped those introductory philosophy courses in college and never did have to write a paper proving the existence of God, I have not been so successful at dodging the questions about the existence of God that I'm asked by over-bearing and often over-inebriated people at cocktail parties who ask me questions like, "How can an educated person such as yourself actually believe that stuff?" To answer their question, I'd have to load them up on a bus and bring them here on a Sunday morning and introduce them to all of you to show them the most proof I've ever experienced that God is real. Because for me, God just IS real. Now this is NOT to say that I don't have my doubts, because I do. And, truth be told, doubt is not necessarily a bad thing—doubt helps us to define, refine, and, in the end be more fine

God—now that’s just not something I can do because there’s just a certain core assumption that needs to be accepted, not proven, but accepted, when it comes to faith and that’s why they call it faith. And perhaps that’s why it’s called a leap of faith and not a hop of hunch. It’s not a matter of a comfortable little hop like the Easter rabbit made down the bunny trail last weekend. Nope, it’s a leap as in putting-everything-you-have-into-it-so-that-you-can-arrive-on-the-other-side kind of a leap—it’s not an educated risk, a safe bet, or a proven likelihood. It is a leap of faith, and like any other leap, it takes you to another place.

For Peter and the disciples, making the leap of faith brought them right into the middle of the Sanhedrin for questioning. The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of ancient Israel. It was made up of 71 members—sort of a super-sized court marshal where Peter and the other disciples were interrogated by the highest priests in the temple. The disciples had been ordered to cease and desist in their teaching and preaching about Jesus but they refused saying, “We must obey God rather than men!” Now that’s a leap of faith, not just believing in, but going so far as to obey God, even when obeying God means disobeying men and, in this case, disobeying men means being flogged and even after being flogged <sup>41</sup>*The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.* <sup>42</sup>*Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.*

The disciples took a tremendous leap of faith and then they just kept taking leaps of faith. In some Christian circles, there is high emphasis put on the initial leap of faith, the moment a person “is saved” and accepts Jesus Christ as lord and savior. While an important and sacred moment, there can be a danger in over-emphasizing that one moment as the be-all-end-all of the person’s faith experience. Yes, it was an important, initial, leap of faith. But when it comes to being a Christian, one leap of faith doesn’t cut it. Indeed, we are called to make leaps of faith over and over and over again, just as the disciples did. Take the example of doubting Thomas. He took that initial leap of faith, declaring to Jesus, “My Lord and my God” even though he never did put his finger into Jesus’ nail holes or his hand into his side. Even Thomas, doubting, skeptical, “show me the money” Thomas, was able to take a leap of faith even though he didn’t have all the facts and couldn’t “prove it”. Indeed, of all of Jesus’ disciples, Thomas is the only one who was thought to go outside the Roman Empire to preach the Gospel, many believe he went as far as India.<sup>ii</sup> It wasn’t that initial leap of faith that inspired Thomas to journey as far as India to proclaim the gospel, no, it was the leaps of faith he took day in and day out that inspired that kind of discipleship. And obviously, the same is true of us.

Though none of us have been tried in the Sanhedrin as the original disciples were, it’s not an exaggeration to say that every day of living in the culture in which we live can be a kind of trial for a Christian that requires many leaps of faith. Every day we are tempted to obey the expectations of men instead of obeying God—we’re tempted to write papers proving the existence of God instead of striving to live a God-like existence. The expectation of men is that the things of this world—money and success are the most important things, and yet Christians choose generosity over greed and humility over success. The expectation of men is that we who live in a death-defying culture will fear death and yet Christians recognize that God is the maker of life and the victor of death and therefore, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we DO NOT FEAR. The expectation of men is to compete and win and divide and conquer and yet Christians proclaim that *the first shall be last and the last shall be first* and that one day *we will all be one*. When you live as a Christian in a world such as ours, everyday is a leap of faith. Every kind word, generous action, selfless deed, courageous word, loving hug, just act, compassionate smile, unconditional acceptance—each and every action that reveals that you are a child of God is a leap of faith.

And so how do we do it? How do we make the leap of faith? We leap when we come to church, surrounding ourselves with other leaping people—folks who have leaped where no other has dared to leap before and because we have faith in them, it can be easier for us to have faith in God. We leap by praying, after all, faith is the product of a relationship and how can we have a relationship with God if we don’t talk to God? We leap by singing, as I’ve said in the past, a former professor of mine, indeed the one who is coming here for the workshop on evil with the Rabbi and I, once said that sometimes there are matters of faith that can be sung even if they can’t be said. Indeed, there are many ways to make the leap of faith, the important thing is not why we do it or how we do it but just that WE DO IT—that we declare “My Lord and my God” and then leap into the world to live accordingly. Thanks be to God.

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<sup>i</sup> [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

<sup>ii</sup> <http://nasrani.net/2007/02/16/references-about-the-apostolate-of-saint-thomas-in-india-records-of-indian-tradition-of-thomas-statements/>