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A Brain, A Heart, and Courage

How many have seen the Wizard of Oz? Let's review some of the things that the characters wanted: the Scarecrow wanted a brain, the Tin Man wanted a heart, and the Lion wanted some courage. We all want to be able to think, love, and have enough courage to pursue something in which we believe.

I'd like to turn our attention to the Apostle Thomas. Even though he is only mentioned about 8 times total in the gospels, poor Thomas gets the rap of being "Doubting Thomas." If that is all I said to you, "Doubting Thomas," you'd know exactly who I meant and the story that surrounds the title. However, from what little we know about him, we see that Thomas certainly had a brain. He was able to reason, even to the point where, when Jesus wanted to go to Jerusalem after he had raised Lazarus from the dead, Thomas said, "Let us go to Jerusalem and die with him." Thomas had a pretty good sense of what may lie ahead for the Master. He only sought to protect him and hoped that what the Master had said would not be true.

We also know that Thomas had a heart. He loved Jesus; I believe that his actions showed his love for Christ, even though we do not hear much about him. Sometimes, our grieving and mourning get in the way of believing. I think this was the case for Thomas in the Gospel reading this morning. It is almost as if the heart and brain didn't want to communicate, much like what we may experience when we deal with the loss of a loved one. Eventually, even though he "had" to see and touch to admit his belief, Thomas was able to reconnect the brain and the heart as he uttered, "My Lord and My God."

It took a while for the Apostle Peter to summon up the courage to go out and preach after Jesus died and resurrected. We can only surmise that he was terribly afraid of what the Romans would do to him after what they had done to Jesus. Let's review Peter's actions: he told Jesus that he would always defend him, then he denies that he even knew Jesus, and then he leaves the scene of the crucifixion for safety. If we were watching a silent movie of this, we'd want to "boo" at Peter the Villain. He almost looks worse than Judas.

As we look at our Christian History through the Acts of the Apostles, we find that the Pentecost event of the descent of the Holy Spirit allowed Peter to muster up the courage to preach and begin to spread the Gospel message. He breaks it down with the skill of a lawyer with evidence: he gives evidence that Jesus lived, evidence of Jesus' death and resurrection, and the evidence of the disciples.

Peter gives witness to the wonderful deeds and miracles that God did through Jesus. For some of those gathered, this was nothing new as they, too, had been witnesses of what Jesus had done. Heck, they could have been called as witnesses in the trial. But Jesus' unique life: born in Bethlehem to Mary, sinless before men, loving and compassionate, one he can heal the blind, lame and even raise people from the dead. Peter could also give witness to Jesus' remarkable teaching and preaching abilities.

This leads Peter into reminding those gathered about Christ's death and resurrection. We can take note that the author does not include any admission of Peter to abandoning Jesus. But, again, those who have gathered can also give witness to the events that led up to the death and how Jesus had been sentenced to crucifixion. There is absolutely evidence of the

death and even the resurrection of Jesus. Peter is able to demonstrate that he has indeed found the courage to preach Christ crucified and risen from the dead.

The Scarecrow, TinMan, Lion, Thomas, and Peter all had to find what they needed to get what they wanted or to follow their calling to lead as in the case of the characters of the Wizard of Oz or in that Thomas had to find what he needed to allow his brain and heart to work together to profess his belief in the Risen Christ. Peter, too, was able to summon the spirit to be the leader of those who practiced Judaism but wanted to follow in “The Way” of Christ. The other thing in common with all of the above is that they had the capacity all along to do these things. They just needed a little nudge. Thomas needed to use his senses and Peter had to dig a little deeper—both of them to be true to their convictions.

In order for us to be true to our own convictions of following Christ, we have to summon what lies deep within our brains and hearts to have the courage to proclaim Christ risen from the dead. We have the means to do so because we have been taught, most of us since we were small children, our history through the Old Testament, Gospels, and New Testament. We weren't there to witness any of this but we have been told. So, we continue to sit or stand and profess our faith. When we see things happening around us with the disasters and shootings, we can almost sound like Colonel McKean in 1776, “Och, John, what's the use?” Yes, we may sometimes doubt or even question, we use our brain and then we talk to our heart. Our brain and our heart allow us to be courageous as we strive to bring about the Reign of God in Westfield, Southwick, and beyond our borders.

Again, just like Thomas and Peter, even like the Scarecrow, TinMan and Lion, we can do this. We've have been told, we've seen his face, and heard his voice alive in our hearts. We

have always had the power of conviction but now we can recognize it and go forth to spread the Good News. Amen!!