

Creating Faith
(John 20:19-31)

Imagine for a moment that there is a family of mice living in Ron's piano. We'll call them the Mouse Family. When the Mouse Family first moved in, it seemed to be an immense world that was dark and gloomy. That is until they discovered that their home was a "piano world" that was frequently filled with the sweet sounds of Ron's musical talent. Ron's music was soon brightening the dark spaces where the Mouse Family lived.

When they first heard the pleasant sounds of the music the Mouse Family was filled with joy. In fact, they were in awe of the very idea that there was someone or something from "up above" that was creating the music that filled their otherwise dark world inside the piano.

This "someone" was invisible to the Mouse Family and was, they thought, very distant from their small world. But at the same time this "higher power" seemed to be close to them as the music brought them great joy. The Mouse Family, being highly educated and intellectual, spent many hours contemplating the Great Unseen Player (Ron).

And they debated the origins of the Great Unseen Player and speculated as to how the music was created and brought so close from such a distant place. Then one day, a very daring mouse decided to explore the piano to see if he could discover the mystery of the music.

He returned from his adventure full of excitement. He had discovered the secret of the music. The little explorer discovered a network of many fine wires, tightly stretched, and of different lengths.

These wires, he told his family, tremble and vibrate to make the music.

The mystery was solved and the Mouse Family forgot their old belief in the Great Unseen Player. It was the wires, after all that created the music. Soon, another daring explorer set out to see these wires that gave birth to the music. She ventured further than the first explorer and returned with a more detailed explanation that went well beyond the "wire theory." She told the Mouse Family that it was really many magic hammers made of wood and covered with soft felt that danced and leaped on the wires. Yes, in fact, it was these magic hammers that created the music.

Now this new hammer theory presented a much more complicated view of the Mouse Family's world and the music that filled it. The conclusion was that they must live in a world that is highly mechanical and defined by mathematical formulas and the laws of science. As the more intelligent members of the Mouse Family contemplated these discoveries of wires and hammers it became apparent that other explorations might reveal even more about the music.

In time, the image of the Great Unseen Player became just a myth – an urban legend. Belief in the Great Unseen Player was replaced with a more sophisticated theory based on physical observations and facts. But unbeknownst to the Mouse Family, its daring explorers, and its intelligent thinkers, Ron continued to play the music while they believed in

wires and magic hammers. Please pray with me.

And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you this day, most gracious and faithful God. Open our hearts and minds to the scripture read and the word proclaimed. Lead us we pray into the faith that you have created for us in the Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.

Jesus is dead! And the disciples are alone, huddled in the Upper Room. The door is locked. They are afraid – afraid of the Jews and what they might do now that they have had their way with Jesus. They were all there in the Upper Room, except for Thomas. Rumor has it that he was also called Hungry Thomas and was out getting groceries just in case the disciples had to lay low for a while longer. So, as the story goes, Jesus comes to the Upper Room and appears to the disciples – except for Thomas who is over at the Jewel bringing home the bacon.

When Thomas returns, the disciples tell him about this resurrection appearance. And Thomas, true to his future reputation, doesn't believe his comrades in ministry. You will recall that Thomas says, "Until I see the marks of the nails in his hands, and put my hand in his side, I will not believe." Thomas needed proof – physical evidence, hard facts – that Christ had risen and was among the living.

The doubting of Thomas is just a little like those mice that are living in your piano Ron! Like the mice who have stopped believing in Ron – that Great Unseen Player in the sky – Thomas must see in order to believe. Like the mice who abandoned faith in Ron and began to believe only in what they could see and

touch, so Thomas doubts the truth of the risen Christ.

But this story is about more than believing in things that can't be seen or explained. It's about more than having faith – faith in that which can't be seen or explained. It's about God creating faith in us. The author of the Gospel of John wrote with the expectation that future generations would be able to experience the revelation of God in Jesus Christ tens and hundreds of centuries later. He also wrote with the expectation that there would be times when we would express doubt, times when our faith would waiver and we would question the existence of The Great Unseen Player, times when we would stray from our faith believing in only that which we can see and touch.

To focus primarily on the traditional "negative" aspects of Doubting Thomas in this passage is to miss the point of the resurrection. This story is about Jesus, not Thomas. At the very heart of this story is a generous offer from Jesus to create within Thomas – and within us – the right environment for nurturing our faith. God in Jesus creates faith!

In the telling of the resurrection appearance in the Upper Room, Jesus doesn't criticize or shame Thomas for his lack of faith – although he could have easily done so. No, instead, Jesus gives to Thomas just exactly what he needs to come to faith. Jesus says, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Although scripture suggests that Thomas doesn't take the offer to touch Jesus' wounds, he does take Jesus' offer of faith and believes. Faith has been created in him by the Risen Christ.

That Thomas comes to faith is more important to Jesus than how it happens. Jesus' love for his own community of faithful believers didn't end with his death.

And we know that Jesus' love for the generations of faithful to come – Jesus' love for us – continues in the Risen Christ today. This "love for all times" is made real in the blessing that follows Thomas' coming to faith. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." It's through this blessing that the Doubting Thomas story transcends generation upon generation for tens – even hundreds – of centuries into the future.

The Doubting Thomas story is a story of hope and promise, not judgment and reprimand. It stands as a pledge and a promise to later generations – to us – that we too will experience the grace of God in Jesus Christ even though we may, from time to time, have doubts about our faith. In his blessing, Jesus reveals to us that his care for the faith of those who will come after Thomas – those who will not see – is equally without limit or measure. God is patient and is more than willing to wait for faith to be created, even recreated!

A significant hymn we use to retell the "death narrative" asks the awesome question: "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" From the perspective of this story about Doubting Thomas, our answer to that question should be "Yes, indeed we were there." Not from a historical perspective of course. But certainly from a spiritual perspective the answer is "Yes" – "Yes" with respect to the full experience of God revealed in and through Jesus Christ. The revelation of God in Jesus is grounded in history, but it goes beyond history through the Gospels to bring us a message of hope and promise for all times. It is as though we really were there when he died as well as when he was resurrected.

And so it is that the risen Christ lives on in us as God is actively at work to create faith within us. Believe in the risen Christ, not because you have seen him,

but because of his most gracious offer of faith.

Now, let's get back to the Mouse Family that was so intent upon exploring their faith, seeking out something to believe in. Actually, it's essential that we explore our faith; like the Mouse Family. But a word of caution is appropriate first.

As we explore our faith – as we venture forth up into the piano that is our world – we will surely discover networks of fine, tightly stretched wires, and hammers that dance and leap on those wires. But our faith is best served by not forgetting that there is a higher power – that Great Unseen Player – that is behind the wires and the hammers. The truth for our lives remains in our belief – in our faith – that the world is much, much more than a collection of mechanical systems governed by mathematical formulas, scientific laws, and physical explanations. God revealed in and through the risen Christ is the One who makes the music that brightens the dark corners inside our "piano world." Remember always Christ's blessing. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Believe and let the Great Unseen Player create faith from within you!