

Prove That You Are Alive

I recently saw a news report about an Army veteran named John Crabtree who had been receiving benefits from the government. Evidently he had been wounded in Vietnam and was now on permanent disability. One day, out of the blue, he received an official notification from the government of his own death. Needless to say, this was quite a shock! Mr. Crabtree wrote the government a letter stating that he was indeed very much alive and would like to continue receiving his benefits. The letter did no good. He then tried calling the government. (Have you ever tried to call the government? This required the patience of Job and the persistence of Noah!) The phone calls didn't change the situation either.

Finally, as a last resort, the veteran contacted a local television station, which ran a human-interest story about his situation. During the interview, the reporter asked him, "How do you feel about this whole ordeal?" The veteran chuckled and said, "Well, I feel a little frustrated by it. After all, have you ever tried to prove that you're alive?"

That's a pretty good question for all of us. Could you prove that you are alive? Really, genuinely, deep down alive? When was the last time you had an alive moment? Not the last time you took a breath or had your heart beat inside your chest, but the last time you felt yourself alive to your living, alive to your loving, deeply present with the gift of life itself?" (R. Scott Colglazier, *Finding a Faith That Makes Sense*, St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1996, 116-117)

See My Hands and My Feet Sermon Starter

Tolstoy once told a story of a Czar and Czarina who wished to honor the members of their court with a banquet. They sent out invitations and requested that the guests come with the invitations in their hands. When they arrived at the banquet the guests were surprised to discover that the guards did not look at their invitations at all. Instead they examined their hands. The guests wondered about this, but they were also curious to see who the Czar and Czarina would choose as the guest of honor to sit between them at the banquet.

They were flabbergasted to see that it was the old scrub woman who had worked to keep the palace clean for years. The guards, having examined her hands, declared, "You have the proper credentials to be the guest of honor. We can see your love and loyalty in your hands."

A similar story is told of the great missionary to Burma, Adoniram Judson. Judson went to the King of Burma to ask him if he might have permission to go to a certain city to preach. The King, a pagan, but quite an intelligent man responded, "I'm willing for a dozen preachers to go but not you, not with those hands. My people are not such fools as to take notice of your preaching but they will note those calloused, work scarred hands."

After his crucifixion, the disciples of Jesus were trying to sort out the meaning of the reports they had been receiving about appearances of the risen Christ. It was most confusing to them. Was it a hoax? They were not completely immune to superstition. Perhaps it was some kind of ghost. Suddenly it happened. Jesus himself stood among them. The disciples were startled and frightened. Then Jesus said to them, "Why are you troubled and why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself..."

The response of the disciples is a sermon in itself. Luke tells us that they "disbelieved for joy..." It was simply too wonderful to be true. He was alive and he was with them right there. No wonder they had difficulty believing. Some persons still have that problem today. Many desperately want to believe but something holds them back. "See my hands and my feet..."

The Living Christ

As a young man, Mahatma Gandhi studied in London. After learning about Christianity, and after reading the Sermon on the Mount, he decided that Christianity was the most complete religion in the world. It was only later, when he lived with a Christian family in East India, that he changed his mind. In that household he discovered that the word rarely became flesh -- that the teaching of Jesus rarely became the reality of Jesus. How "fleshy" is Jesus in our congregations? How persuasive is our teaching? How passionate is our preaching? How much do our hearts burn within us when the scriptures are opened to us? And how often do we recognize the stranger as the living Christ in our midst? (by Susan R. Andrews from *Holy Heartburn*, article in the *Christian Century*)

Go to the World

Jesus did not command the whole world to go to church. Jesus commanded his church to go to the whole world.