

The Park Road Pulpit  
*Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church*  
Russ and Amy Jacks Dean, Pastors

***Something Understood:  
The Subject of Our Doubt***  
*Job 42.1, 3-5; John 20.19-21, 24-29*  
Russ Dean, April 18, 2010



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Such is the subject of our doubts. Do we understand God? Or is God, “understood”?

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Following that mass, as he tried to true his sensitivities, to right his listing ship, he sat in prayer, and though “nothing much happened (he said)... yet something changed.” He describes that something using those two simple words from George Herbert’s sonnet on prayer which is printed on the cover of our bulletin.<sup>3</sup> Like faith, prayer engages the full range of human experience. It is at times a “banquet,” “joy,” inexpressible “bliss.” In other moments faith meets us with the pain of a “side-piecing spear,” or in a fit of rage – our own “reversed thunder.” But the final word, which Herbert undoubtedly chose deliberately, is a word which defies understanding. It is the experience of Job, who after defending himself and raising his questions, stands in the face of that void and says *I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know* (Job 42.3).

God, like the absent subject of some sentences, is understood. Unseen, but essential. And we will never understand.

On Thursday morning I stood at the hospital bedside of my friend Emil Mialik. Emil is in Intensive Care and his situation remains critical, but he knew me, and we shared holy moments

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together. Those moments to which I'm referring come only in the presence of pain or trauma; they are the moments of truth that cut to the very quick of our humanity because we come to them on some teetering precipice from which we gain rare views of life at its deepest – because we can also view death at its nearest. So Emil and I shared the morning. Pastor and failing elderly parishioner. Pastor and grateful student. Colleagues and intellectual sparring partners and friends. The conversation was spotty and broken by Emil's condition; there were no in-depth debates on the divinity of Jesus or the doctrine of atonement, but after I had fed him breakfast, and cleaned his mouth, Emil asked about Sunday's sermon. Who's preaching? What's the topic? When I said the text was Thomas, without a beat, his withered frame nearly shouted, "He is to be praised!"

And he is. My friend, Emil – and our friend, Thomas. For after the traumatic death of Jesus – inspiring teacher, charismatic leader, life-changing friend – reports began to surface. Confusing, unbelievable, implausible reports began to whisper their way through that broken community. "I saw him... He appeared to us... He is alive.... Just as he said!" That rumor was running through the community of Jesus' friends like electricity in search of ground, until it found Thomas, whose honesty sent the energy of a hope that was too good to be true into the air around them, stopping them all, cold: I'll believe it when I see it!

Silence...

That's what a good doubter will do, you know. Not just throw a wet blanket on the party (though they do that pretty well, too!), but put the questions of the crowd in the air. Good doubters help those who believe too-easily to see the questions we would ask if we weren't inhibited by the god called fear, or the devil called religious certainty. Every religious community needs a few good doubters, those who can sing the praise of the integrity and the

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May our doubters teach us honesty in faith, that the doubter in each of us would be attentive to the *burning within our hearts*.<sup>6</sup> And may God give us the grace, that though we may never understand, we might learn to sing and pray and praise Something Understood.

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***Something Understood:  
The Subject of Our Doubt***  
*Job 42.1, 3-5; John 20.19-21, 24-29*  
Russ Dean, April 18, 2010



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And he is. My friend, Emil – and our friend, Thomas. For after the traumatic death of Jesus – inspiring teacher, charismatic leader, life-changing friend – reports began to surface. Confusing, unbelievable, implausible reports began to whisper their way through that broken community. "I saw him... He appeared to us... He is alive.... Just as he said!" That rumor was running through the community of Jesus' friends like electricity in search of ground, until it found Thomas, whose honesty sent the energy of a hope that was too good to be true into the air around them, stopping them all, cold: I'll believe it when I see it!

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