

## **Blessed to Have not Seen**

I was starting to get used to the fact that “Blessed are” the poor, the meek, and the persecuted. But in this week’s gospel text, Jesus goes and gives me an even harder one: “Blessed are those who have not seen” (John 20.29). He says this in the context of Thomas seeing the scars in the risen Jesus’ hands and side. Jesus is saying that it’s nice that Thomas gets to scientifically verify the resurrection, but the REALLY fortunate ones are the billions of us who can’t. What? Thomas has direct access to the data, and I have to rely on hearsay, and I’M the lucky one?

I’ve been wrestling with this problem for awhile, and I’m coming to a conclusion: The data of our theological science is not primarily historical data. It’s true that some people saw something happen 2,000 years ago and jotted down some notes about it. But when it comes to the *real* data (whatever that is), they had no better access to it than I do. Indeed, Jesus seems to indicate that, by witnessing the historical event firsthand, they are put at something of a disadvantage, perhaps because the historical data might cloud the real data for them.

Karl Barth never put much stock in historical research about Jesus. This always bothered me. But Jesus’ conversation here with Thomas makes me wonder if Barth was right. That the primary data of theological science is that irreducible “encounter” that the Triune God has with us. Our data is the “*I-Thou*” relationship that is there in the Incarnate Risen Son, binding us to the Father in the Spirit. It’s a relationship that is infinitely beyond our ability to control, and it cannot be argued using data from history or science.

I’m still figuring this one out, but I can take a simple lesson from it, one that I barely understand but can take on faith: Thomas, who saw and touched Jesus’ scars, is no more blessed than I am.

~ *John Stonecypher*