

On February 22, 1980, in the 1980 Winter Olympics' the Men's U.S. Olympic Hockey Team defeated the Soviet Union's Men's Olympic Hockey Team in what has become known as the "**Miracle on Ice.**" The Soviet Union when entering the 1980 Olympics had won the gold medal in five of the six previous Winter Olympic Games, and to say the least they were heavily favored to win the gold again in Lake Placid. The Soviet team consisted of mostly professional players with experience in international play. The United States team consisted of mostly amateur players of which four had minimal minor-league experience. In addition, this U.S. team represented the youngest team in the tournament and in U.S. national team history.

The United States Team was able to get to the medal round through a 2-2 draw with Sweden and my defeating Czechoslovakia 7-3 in an upset victory. The Czechoslovakian's were favored to take the second overall place in these Olympics. In the first game of the medal round the first quarter ended in a 2-2 tie, the second period ended with the Soviets holding a 3-2 lead. But midway through the third quarter the United States scored twice and held on to defeat the Soviet Union 4-3. The U.S. then when on to defeat Finland to take home the gold. In the final seconds of the game, Al Michaels for ABC Sports declared: "*Do you believe in miracles? YES!* The doubters of the sports world became believers because for what they have seen. The "Miracle on Ice," went on to become a best-selling book and inspired two movies.¹

This morning's Scripture takes place "*on the evening of the first day of the week.*" This was the evening of the first Easter, earlier in the day Jesus rose from the dead. There was the witness and wonder of the empty tomb. There was the reality which "*Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the **stone** had been removed from the entrance.*" Yet Easter evening found the disciples bewildered and disbelieving, behind locked doors. Then suddenly Jesus appears in their midst. I have no doubt that His sudden appearance shook and frightened the disciples. (Luke 24:36-37), states, "While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them," "*Peace be with you.*" "They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost."

The first thing Jesus did was to prove that it was really Him. He did this by doing two things. First, He used the simple day-to-day greeting that was common among Jews, "Peace be with you." Using this greeting so familiar to the disciples would put them at ease. The fact he spoke just as He had **always** spoken would give them some indication that it was really, He and not a vision or spirit. Secondly, He showed them his wounds. This must have been a dramatic and touching moment, a moment that just exploded in the minds of the disciples. Jesus probably moved around to each of them, allowing each one to see the wounds. This convinced the disciples. They knew for sure they were not seeing a vision or a spirit.

Seeing is believing, isn't it? The disciples didn't believe with all the proof Jesus had left them. Three times He told them he was going to die and on the third day rise from the dead. The empty tomb, the women and Mary Magdalene telling them Jesus was alive but they still didn't believe. But when did they believe? When Jesus appeared to them.

But aren't there times in our lives when we must believe without seeing? When you are driving and you proceed through a green light, you believe that you will make it through that light, you have faith that no one is going to run the red light which is stopping traffic going the opposite way

- correct? But when do you know you are safe? When you have cleared the intersection and made to the other side. You believe because you have seen it.

Notice what happened next, Reverend King Duncan puts it this way: Jesus breathed on them and said, “*Received the Holy Spirit.*” This was Jesus’ way of commissioning the disciples for the work he needed them to do. The Holy Spirit **would not come** on them with power until the day of Pentecost, but Jesus was preparing them, getting them ready. They would no longer be disciples, or learners, but apostles, “those sent in His behalf.” They would be putting their lives on the line as His representatives. Jesus knew what waited for His disciples in the days ahead. He unlocked their fears, and He was now sending them into the world to unlock the door for others. He wanted them to have a sure foundation. A foundation that would give them an assurance, an inner witness to the faith that they would proclaim. Jesus breathed on them saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” That same Spirit which comes to us when we follow Jesus’ ways.

The architectural world knows a lot when it comes to foundations. Early in the 20th Century Frank Lloyd Wright was called upon by the Japanese to build a hotel in Tokyo that would be capable of surviving an earthquake. The reason, Japan, has over 5,000 minor earthquakes recorded each year with more than half measuring between 3.0 and 3.9 on the Richter scale. Most of these go unnoticed. However, approximately 150 earthquakes register on the Richter scale at 5 or higher which can cause major damage. Frank Lloyd Wright went to Japan and he found the ground where hotel the was going to be built was only eight feet deep. Below this depth was sixty feet of mud that slipped and shook like Jell-O. No matter where the test holes were drilled, he found the same soil. But Frank Lloyd Wright did not give up.

Since the hotel was going to be built on this unstable ground, Wright decided to build the hotel like a ship. Instead of anchoring the hotel to the ground to keep it from moving during an earthquake he decided to incorporate features which would allow it to move and ride out the earthquake because of the fluid ground it was going to be built on. Wright also knew that during an earthquake most buildings burn because water pipes break allowing no way for the fire to be put out or contained. So as an added safety feature, he **insisted** on a large outdoor pool be built in the courtyard of the hotel, “just in case.”

Then on September 1, 1923 the test case happened. Tokyo experience one the greatest earthquakes in its history up to this time. The earthquake caused numerous fires all over the city, and more than 140,000 people lost their lives. News reports of this disaster were slow to get to the United States. One newspaper wanted to print the rumor that the hotel, the Imperial Tokyo Hotel, which was the hotel that Frank Lloyd Wright had designed had been destroyed. When a reporter called Wright, he told him about the tentative story, he said they could print whatever they wanted but they would be running a retraction soon. Sometime after this incident, Wright received a telegram from Japan. It informed Wright that the Imperial Hotel had completely survived the earthquake and when fire threatened the hotel fire brigades were called upon to douse the fires from the water taken from the pool.

Frank Lloyd Wright knew about foundations. So does Jesus. He does **not want** his followers out in the world witnessing to something that they had not really experienced themselves, so He gives us the Holy Spirit as an internal witness. Jesus takes away our fears and gives us the foundations

of life. In the Holy Spirit we have additional strength given to us to face the adversaries we meet in this world.

Then there is Thomas who was not with the disciples when Jesus appeared in the locked room on that Easter evening.” One question we may ask is where was Thomas? The Bible doesn’t tell us. But what if Thomas wanted to mourn alone because his love for his Lord was so deep? This is spoken about in (John 11:14-16), when Jesus realizes Lazarus has died, Jesus goes on to say, *“Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”* Then Thomas said to the rest of the disciples, *“Let us go, that we may die with him.”* Does this sound like a “Doubting Thomas?”

In his book, ¹*Twelve Ordinary Men*, John MacArthur, gives us this thought to ponder, *“Thomas was devoted to Christ. He may have been the equal to John in this regard. When we think about someone who loved Jesus and was intimate with Him, we usually think of John, because he was always near Jesus. But it is clear from this account that Thomas did not want to live without Jesus. If Jesus was going to die, Thomas was prepared to die with Him. In essence he says, ‘Guys, suck it up; let’s go and die. Better to die and be with Christ than to left behind.’”* If anything after this incident Thomas gave strength to the rest of the disciples.

So, when Thomas was not in the room when Jesus appeared the first time Thomas was frustrated and upset. In (John 11:25), *“So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ ‘But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.’”* Thomas had doubts and questions. It’s all right to have doubts because Jesus accepts us as we are doubts and all.

We know eight days later Jesus appears again to the disciples, this time with Thomas in the room. When Jesus appears again, he said, *“Peace be with you!”* Thomas is instructed to put his fingers into Jesus’ hands and side. In (John 11:28-29) *“Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and my God.’”* Then Jesus told him, *“Because you have seen, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.”* This refers to us, those who believe but have not seen.

Jesus did not reprimand Thomas; He was gentle with him. He shows us the same gentleness through His love, patience, kindness and understands our weakness. For we are reminded in (Hebrews 4:15), *“For we **do not** have a high priest who is **unable** to empathize with our weakness, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin.”*

When we have doubts, and the door to our minds and hearts are locked, if we listen closely, we may hear, *“have faith.”* Faith is not the absence of doubt; it is the overcoming doubt.

The final verse of (John 20) closes with these words, *“These words are written, so you may believe.”* So, bring your doubts all of them Jesus, the Risen Lord is waiting to show you a new life.
Amen.

¹ John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 161.