

Did y'all realize there's a whole week between Thomas's denial and Jesus comin' back. Weird right? Thomas responds differently to the same situation as his friends. Crazy as their story sounds, they respond reasonably: telling the guy who wasn't there what they saw. And Thomas responds reasonably: doubting it happened. And you know they went back and forth on who had the truth of it for that entire week. Well, it seems our world's stuck in that week. Some attempt to point toward truth, but many don't see it, and what they don't see, they doubt. And they'll keep on doubting until they get to wiggle their fingers around in the truth for themselves, if at all. I don't have a problem with needing to see to believe. But I do have a problem with refusing to look "because it just couldn't be true."

There's a ton of things we could look at in this in-between truth kind of week, but today I want to look at the treatment of some social outcasts, namely trans people. The hottest debates are centered on the safety of women: "Do trans people in public spaces put women in danger?" "Can women compete with trans people in sports?" And "can trans people use a women's bathroom?" For what it's worth the Bible doesn't say anything about trans people, but it does say quite a lot about the truth.

A quick refresher: cisgender (or cis, for short) means you identify with the sex you were assigned at birth. So, are cisgender women, those assigned female at birth, are cis women in danger around trans people? By sheer numbers and in proportional terms, trans people are considerably less likely to commit violent crimes than cis people, especially less than cis men. In fact, trans people are four times more likely to be the victims of violent crimes. Maybe it's not about safety.

Can cis women compete with trans women in sports? (No one ever asks this question about trans men, by the way.) If a cis man entered a women's league disguised as a woman, on average, he could have an advantage. But that's typically not what's happening. Of roughly half a million NCAA athletes, fewer than 10 are trans, and the majority of them don't win anything. This myth really got traction when a cis athlete said she lost a race because a trans woman competed. But that's dishonest. She tied with the trans person for fifth place behind four other cis women, cis women who were faster than both her AND the trans swimmer. She got fifth place, and with her time, even if the trans person hadn't been there, she still would've gotten fifth place. Maybe it's not about an even playing field.

Can trans people use women's restrooms? As of March 31st, Idaho joined Utah, Kansas, and Florida by criminalizing trans people using the "wrong" restroom. In Idaho, a second offense would qualify as a felony and land you in prison for up to five years. Now, the awful things cis men already do in women's restrooms are already illegal. Sexual assault is committed by cis men at a higher rate than by any other gender. That's an issue that needs to be solved, but it has nothing to do with trans people. They just need somewhere to go to the bathroom. You may think you can always spot 'em, but I'm willing to bet you've seen a trans person you didn't know was trans and a cis person you thought was trans. Imagine someone with a beard, deep voice, and big muscles sauntering into the ladies' room. Anti-trans bills require trans men who look like, sound like, and if they're wearing cologne, even smell like men to use the women's restroom. The same would be true the other direction: trans women looking like women required to use the men's room. That's asking for way more trouble, way more assault, way more accusations than how things are now. A cis friend of mine's been accosted in women's restrooms simply because she lifts weights. Her response is to just flash her accuser which seems effective, but how many're willing to do that? And what would it prove? That being a woman distills down to how convincingly feminine your torso is? Maybe it's not about bathrooms.

The thing is, the trans debate does come down to women's safety and then some. But by painting it as the protection of women from trans people, attention's removed from the much greater need to protect women from men. Trans people using either bathroom are now at risk of looking like the "wrong" gender in one space and are legislated out of the other. In such a system, someone's gonna be responsible for checking to determine who passes, and I don't have enough faith in humanity to think that'll go well. Nevermind that a visual inspection wouldn't be conclusive; why should anyone have to expose themselves just to relieve their bladder? If trans women can be forced to prove they're women, cis women can be forced to prove they're not trans. This doesn't just affect trans people. It shouldn't have to affect more for people to care, but it seems like it must 'cause we'd rather stick our finger in their wounds than believe they suffer, or moreso, that their suffering should bother us.

The real problem in all this is the compulsion to regressively define gender. As soon as we say a woman is X (so to speak), we come up against exceptions, and the way things're going, every place we draw a line shrinks what femininity can be. And most of the time, those lines are drawn by a bunch of men that don't know the difference between endometriosis and an eyelash curler. It is a published goal of the Heritage Foundation to force an ever-narrowing definition of womanhood in order to push women out of the workforce and into state-sponsored child-rearing, and they're doing this by eroding what women are allowed not just to do but also to be. And cis men, if trans people's and cis women's shrinking freedoms weren't compelling enough, this will affect you, too. The same restrictive gender roles cascading down on them are cascading down on you. You are strictly the breadwinners in their system, and while the spaces women are societally allowed to exist shrink, so too will men's. Prices soar, wages shrink, and expectations on household providers skyrocket. You'll work to exhaustion, rent for the rest of your days, and face impossible medical decisions you can't afford to pay for or ignore. And that \$7.25 federal minimum wage is gonna hurt even more when half of your household income disappears on the altar of so-called traditional gender roles.

Now, that's not even including the freedom of personal expression. There is so much more we could talk about, so much evidence debunking these smear campaigns against an entire group of people. But that's probably enough for now. I know it sounds pretty bleak. And I know that if I were to post the reams of research illustrating that the erosion of trans rights is the erosion of human rights, some will not look. And some who do look will deny the truth up until the exact moment it approaches them in the bathroom demanding proof.

I guess what I'm saying is, trans people've been recounting their experiences for ages, how terrifying it can be to walk to the mailbox, the gut-shaking fear that comes with getting a crush, the knowledge--not the worry--the knowledge that you're hated simply for existing by violent and angry men, and you can't reliably seek shelter at the aid of cis women who could empathize with similar dangers. Some trans black people've even raised the comparison between a certain kind of cis woman today and a certain kind of white woman during Jim Crow. All it took to lynch a black man was the accusation of a white woman, no proof needed. That's the degree of fear we're talking about. Trans people've told us this is their reality, and rather than believe them, too many take the path of Thomas, probing their pain for answers while neglecting (or worsening) the damage already done. In case you couldn't tell, this isn't really a sermon about trans people, at least not solely. It's about truth and our calling to serve outcasts.

Sometimes it's easier to stay afraid of the truth than it is to let go of a little skepticism and listen. But the beautiful thing is that, if you can make yourself do this, the truth becomes easier to see and easier to embrace. If we can just get to a place where everyone recognizes truth as truth, we could make some real progress. But as long as we're flooded with lies, we can't even tell the difference between something as basic as "Christ has died" and "Christ is risen." Nearly every claim against Jesus that landed him on the cross was a lie. People believed the lies in part because they believed their leaders without question. Even now, we put too much trust

in powerful people and too much skepticism in outcasts calling out in their distress. We'd do much better turning that around.

Thomas makes me wonder about how we go about sussing out the truth. When you can't see everything for yourself, when you know politicians lie, when you know AI exists, you gotta have something to ground yourself in. So maybe some skepticism isn't the worst thing, just be careful where you point it. Afterall, when he finally did see the truth, wonder of wonders, Thomas changed his mind!

I do have hope that truth will overcome, but it's not gonna happen if we're resigned to the passive erosion of truth over the effort of looking. The eradication of truth is a threat, and it's of such a magnitude that I have a hard time imagining how we get out of this without a little divine nudge in the right direction. Good thing our story's chock full of divine nudges! I don't know what that nudge is gonna look like, but if divine nudges're what it takes, I'll gladly get out of the way of my Lord and my God. In the meantime, when outcasts tell us they're hurting, maybe we oughta listen to them.