When I was 14 my parents bought a house that had been built in 1810. My dad and I did lots of work on the house. We replaced the roof. We converted the back porch into a bedroom.

Forty feet behind the house was a small barn, about twenty four feet wide and thirty feet high. The barn must have been almost as old as the house, but no one had used the barn for much of anything for many years. The siding of the barn was wide pine and fir boards, unpainted and weathered gray by 160 New Hampshire winters. A few of the ancient boards had fallen off the walls. Window panes were broken. The side door hung awkwardly off a single hinge. There were gaping holes in the roof. Drifts of snow accumulated inside during the winter.

A few times my brother and I explored the inside of the barn. There wasn’t much inside except a few damp, moldy piles of hay in the hayloft and some rusty tools. Our parents weren’t too happy with us. The barn seemed dangerous to them. The entire structure was leaning to one side.

I wasn’t surprised when my dad told me he was planning to pull down the old barn. A few weeks later we got to work.

We put extension ladders up onto the roof and pulled off the rest of the metal roofing. Then we pried off the boards that covered the upper portion of the gable end of the barn. We tied one end of a heavy rope to the top of the post and beam frame. Then we tied the other end of the rope to our VW Microbus.

Then my dad got in the driver’s seat and revved the engine. The barn seemed so weak and old, already tilting to one side; my dad was sure it was going to come down. But when he released the clutch, nothing happened. The barn didn’t move and the VW Microbus didn’t move and the engine died.

So we tried plan B. I went back up the ladder and untied the rope. Then we moved the ladder to reach the peak of the rafters. I tied the rope to the top of the rafters.

Then my dad got into the VW Microbus again. He revved the engine. He released the clutch. This time it worked. The VW Microbus moved forward and the rope pulled down sixteen pairs of rafters as smooth as a line of dominoes.

We walked around the yard picking up the rafters and stacking them in a pile to one side. They were like small beams. Each rafter was six inches high and four inches wide. There were no nails or screws or bolts in the rafters. They had been attached to one another and to the main part of the barn with wooden pegs.

We began to look more seriously at the frame of the barn. It was made of heavy timbers. Even though the wood was 160 years old and had been exposed to rain and snow for many years it was completely sound. None of the beams were rotten. None of the braces were missing. All of the pegs were still in place.

We examined the corner of the barn which seemed to be falling down and rotten. One of the sills was rotten, but the main reason the barn was leaning was that a portion of the foundation, made of dry laid stones, had collapsed.

The post and beam frame was so strong it was holding the entire barn together in spite of the fact that it was no longer sitting on a level foundation. Though the barn looked ragged and unattractive, it was not in much danger of falling down.

We spent several more days pulling boards off the side of the barn and using a sledge hammer to remove a few of the braces. Then we tied one end of our rope to the post and beam frame and the other end to our VW Microbus and my father got in the driver’s seat one more time. This time the entire frame came down.

A barn built with two by fours and plywood would not be nearly so strong or resistant to the forces of weather and gravity. The old barn was exceptionally strong because the pieces of the frame fit together like the pieces of a puzzle. The frame was constructed of heavy pieces of wood, each piece cut from the trunk of a tree. The people who assembled the barn were master craftsmen; they knew all of the tricks to get the pieces to fit together just right.

At the risk of oversimplifying the story, there are two ways to build a barn: fast and slow. There are many reasons for building a barn the fast way. It’s less expensive. You don’t need the old man who lives a...
hundred miles away to guide the process. You can begin to use the barn quickly. There is one main reason
for building a barn the slow way: given the same amount of care and protection, it will last much longer.

The difference between fast and slow is relevant for the story of Thomas. *The other disciples came
to Thomas and told him, "We have seen the Lord." This was not an easy or casual conversation for Thomas
and the other disciples.

All of the disciples had been going through the most unexpected and stressful time of their lives.
Even though Jesus had given them some hints that things were not going to turn out in the way they
expected, the disciples were shocked and terrified when Jesus was arrested, put on trial and crucified. They
feared for their safety and grieved the loss of their teacher and master. They were probably hiding for fear
of being arrested when they heard the first reports of the resurrection.

This was the situation on that Sunday night when Jesus appeared to the disciples. *Jesus came and
stood among them and said, "Peace be with you."* After he said this, he showed them his hands and his
side. But Thomas was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the
Lord."

It appears Thomas was the only one of the disciples who was not a witness to this Sunday evening
appearance from Jesus. Thomas had a choice about how to respond. At the risk of oversimplifying the
story, there were two ways for Thomas to respond: fast and slow. There were many reasons for Thomas to
respond quickly, with immediate acceptance of the testimony of his friends.

If Thomas had quickly accepted the word of his friends, he could probably stop worrying about his
personal safety. If Thomas simply agreed with his friends, they would probably like him more. If Thomas
didn’t insist on seeing Jesus for himself, they could all have a party together and be happy.

There were many reasons for Thomas to receive this news with relief and gladness. There is only
one important reason for Thomas to insist on seeing the risen Christ himself: he wants more understanding
of who Christ is and what power is at work in the life Christ. Thomas wants stronger, better answers to his
questions, so he refuses to take the quick option.

*A week later Jesus’ disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the
doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to
Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt
but believe."* Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Thomas finally had his answer about who Christ is and the nature of the power that is at work in
Christ. Jesus is not only his Lord. Jesus is God. This is a very different conclusion. 2000 years later many
people who read these passages from the Gospels act like it is an easy, quick, obvious situation. But the
answer did not come quickly or easily. Jesus is God. Thomas was the only disciple to come to this
conclusion. Thomas came to this conclusion because he continued to pursue his questions and his doubts.

The same is true for us today. We can look for quick answers. We can try to explain everything
with the limited information we have. We can come to a judgment and take a side. We can try to use our
power to enforce an answer. Or we can ask the more difficult questions. We can continue searching, even
though it would be much easier to give up the search. We can keep searching because we want to know the
truth.

This is most relevant when it comes to the commandment given to us by Jesus, just a few days, just
a few chapters before this passage in the Gospel of John. Jesus did not give us a commandment to be the
most popular or successful. Jesus did not give us a commandment to be the most powerful. Jesus did not
give us a commandment to be happy 100% of the time. Jesus gave us one commandment: love one
another.

At the risk of oversimplifying the story, there are two ways for us to try to love one another: fast and
slow. There is only one reason for taking the slow way when it comes to love. The slow way is so much more
work. The slow way means listening to other people. The slow way means asking real questions and paying
attention to the answers. The slow way means not giving up when life gets to be difficult.

So we try to follow the example of Thomas. We keep asking our questions. We keep trying to find out
what is true. We listen to each other. We try to understand the meaning of what Christ has done for our lives.
We try to follow Christ’s new commandment: to love one another as he has loved us.