

## Touch

On some Saturday afternoon a while back, I got sucked in to watching this show about people who search for Bigfoot, or Sasquatch. I don't know why, really, it was on the Discovery Channel, which is one of my favorites, and there was this guy named Bobo who sort of reminded me of a crazy dude I knew in college. I remember a time when the Discovery Channel was mostly nature shows about wombats and ringtail lemurs. Lately though it seems that it's mostly about weird humans, or regular humans who do weird jobs, like crab fishermen in the Bering Sea or a families of people who live in the wilds of Alaska, or grown up men named Bobo who run around the woods making "Bigfoot noises." Not exactly Masterpiece Theatre I will admit, but if you've got nothing else to do and it's a rainy day, why not?

The search for Bigfoot turned out to be basically people in the woods at night hearing strange noises and straining to see something that may or may not be out there. They had lots of technology: night vision, infrared thermal imaging, and of course remote cameras, but despite the people claiming that they definitely heard and believed in the imminent presence of Bigfoot, or a "squatch" in their vernacular. The show would tease you along, and get you listening to these people, most of whom (besides Bobo) seem pretty normal scientific type people, who were absolutely convinced that some large primate or proto-humanoid was living out in the wilds of Oregon or Kentucky or wherever. They would go find local people who had had encounters with Bigfoot like creatures and try and piece together the most compelling evidence from their stories. They would inevitably cut to commercial whenever there seemed to be something compelling about to happen, but it was an effective technique to keep the viewer watching all those pretty ads.

This obviously triggered my skepticism, but I found myself actually interested in the way in which these shows attempted to keep you suspended in that place between doubt and belief. Just in case my appetite for Bigfoot related television was not already satisfied, Survivorman got in on the gig. Now to be fair, I'm kind of a sucker for outdoor adventure shows. It started when I was a kid watching Marty Stouffer on Wild America, and I have loved to watch Steve Irwin, Bear Grylls, and Les Stroud do their various things out in the wild places, with wild animals. Les Stroud is the one who does Survivorman, which of the survival sort of shows is probably the most informational and realistic. Les doesn't jump out of airplanes or try to take down a rhino with a survival knife, he actually takes you through the real sorts of things you might want to know if you were lost in the woods, not quite as flashy or sensational as some of the other characters making these sorts of TV shows, pretty, well... Canadian.

Les approached his Bigfoot search as a skeptic. He has outdoor expertise and a lot of experience in the woods, so he is not likely to be fooled by the normal night sounds of the forest. He can get to and live in some remote locations, and he has extensive experience with camera equipment and making films outdoors, so he's sort of the man for the job. In his show he tried to come up with the most plausible, non-sasquatch reasons for the phenomena that were being attributed to Bigfoot by one of the true believer types. If you're interested in this sort of thing, the Survivorman version, with healthy doses of skepticism is much less insulting to your general intelligence, and leaves you really considering possibilities and evidence instead of thinking about what a bunch of hooey the whole thing is.

Les was playing the role that Dana Scully filled on the show the X-files, a show I watched rather religiously back in the 1990s. Scully was the medical doctor FBI agent that was assigned to the X-files, a fictional collection of unexplained cases accumulated by the Bureau over the years. Fox Mulder was the misfit true believer, who had a poster of a UFO in his office with the saying "I want to believe." Scully

was assigned to be the skeptic, because Mulder could not be trusted in the eyes of the proper FBI types, and somehow, even though he was relegated to the basement, chasing wild geese, he still managed to get into trouble.

Over the course of the show, Scully, the skeptic was really the person that kept the story moving, she was the person who people really cared about. Mulder was like Bobo, and he had a certain charm, but you couldn't really do much in terms of a character arc. It was always sort of the same, Mulder banging his head against reality, even when he turned out to be right much of the time.

Thomas' conversion from doubt into belief is powerful because the skeptic is convinced. I think we in the community of faith would do well to remember that. People are increasingly skeptical about the body of Christ these days. The folks out there in the world aren't going to just trust us because we're the good church-going folks, there has been too much bad behavior and bad news coming from our ranks lately for that. There was a time, not too long ago when the truth of Christianity was tacitly accepted by almost everyone, maybe not everyone followed the path with the same zeal, but the Church was a trustworthy institution. If the world was filled with Bobos and Mulders our job would be easy.

Now we are dealing with Scully, Stroud and Thomas, skeptics. So what is the answer? Touch. Demonstrable, observable truth, something you can feel and see and trust for real. If we expect people to believe that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, then we have to live it. If we claim to know a savior, we ought to reflect salvation. What does that look like? Luckily Jesus spent a lot of time explaining that, and showing us what it looks like. Welcome the little ones and the least of these, forgive and be forgiven, love God, love each other, take up your cross and follow. We are the body of Christ in the world. I tell you that a lot, but that is important, now as much as ever. We don't need to convince Bobo that Bigfoot is real, we don't need to prove that UFOs exist to Mulder, we don't need to convince each other that Christ is alive, we need to show his life to those who do not know. The evidence is us, we are the thing that people can see, hear and touch that proves that Christ is risen, and he reigns.