



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

The Reverend Dr. William J. Danaher, Jr.
The Second Sunday of Easter - 4/19/2020

Acts 2:14a,22-32

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

Psalm 16

I speak to you today as a sinner to sinners; as the beloved of God to God's beloved; as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

Last week, at the end of my sermon for Easter, I ended with this kind of play on words that I hoped to capture everybody's attention. I want to begin with where I ended last week and continue that kind of teaching that I started. And I said at that sermon that this pandemic for the life of this church, this pandemic, which has forced us to go back to our deepest resources in the Christian faith. That pandemic that we are now struggling with and trying to contend with as we continue to be a church that gathers and embraces and serves, well, that pandemic was bringing us not only to a place in which we are learning to survive and to experience survival, but we are starting to experience revival. We are starting to be revived by the spirit of God.

That's evident in many ways, but one of the ways that I want to speak to today is that the Scriptures, the Bible has become more powerful to us. It's become larger in our eyes, it's become chief in our hearts. It's become a kind of living word, as it always has been, but even more so now. And every time there's been revival in a church, every time a denomination has been turned inside out and upside down by the kingdom of God, every time that there has been a major fork in the road where God is doing something new, it's always been by reading and seeing that scripture in a more vivid way in the lives that we are living. And today's gospel is no different.

Today's gospel is one of the most powerful images you can find of the risen Christ in the Scriptures, because in today's gospel there is this moment in which Thomas, one of the 12, experiences doubt while Jesus has made himself known to everybody. And at a pivotal moment, Thomas encounters Christ, and after having boasted to the disciples that he wouldn't believe unless he could somehow stick his finger in Jesus's side. Somehow Jesus knows that this post has happened,

comes into their midst and invites Thomas to do just that, to put his fingers in the wounds of His hands and his fingers in His side. And Thomas believes and says, my Lord and my God and Jesus answers that those who see and believe are blessed, but those who somehow believe without seeing are even more blessed.

This is meant to be for us a kind of testimony to the way you and I follow Jesus today, that even though we have not seen a physical appearance of Christ, perhaps we have been somehow brought into contact. We have somehow been visited by a resurrected Christ in our lives. And that risen Christ, that risen Lord makes a claim on us, and we are brought from our own doubts into greater intimacy.

I think there are different ways in which we tend to imagine this encounter and in finding our way into that is one of the ways in which we can prayerfully make this scripture come to life for us. And so what I've done today is I've offered some images from contemporary art and classic art to help us imagine what it would be like for us to encounter a risen Lord even today, and what it means for us to move from doubt to faith, and what does it mean for us to somehow be members, as we read earlier in our prayers today of the body of Christ, a body who stands before the disciples and is both wounded and glorified, both healed and mortally afflicted. This Jesus, this risen Lord comes into our midst, too.

And so by doing a little bit of work through this, I hope that this can somehow magnify not only the image of Christ in your life through the eyes of your faith, but also the scriptures. So I want to begin with this incredible piece by Caravaggio, it was done sometime between 1600 and 1603. Caravaggio was different from Michelangelo, his mentor and sometimes competitor, in that Caravaggio did not want to simply portray idealized bodies. And he wanted to somehow create this sense of immediacy. He wanted people to see real bodies worn by life. And he wanted people to see a kind of theatricality in his paintings. And so he used this technique called chiaroscuro, in which he highlights the canvas and brightness to show the action he wants you to see. And he puts into shade the parts that he wants you not to see so that it's almost as if we're meeting performers on a stage rather than simply a tableau of what happens.

And in this incredible painting, you have Jesus and Jesus is still wearing His grave cloth, despite what we would read in the scriptures, He's still holding onto the sheet in which He was buried. And Thomas is here. And you can see this contrast between Jesus's youthful face and Thomas's older face. And of course, this is St. Peter. His face is even older. And St. John, who looks about the same age as Jesus, but pretty stressed out. And this is this moment in which they are encountering Jesus. You have a tear in Thomas's tunic and that's meant to convince all of us and convey to us the realism of the scene. And at the center of it, you have these four heads that are together and they are kind of creating this

sense of intimacy, just like we read in the scripture that Jesus arrived and came into a closed room.

And into this moment, you have these two hands, which are larger than anything else. And it's Jesus pulling Thomas's finger into His side. And Caravaggio, I think, wants to convey to us a couple of things through this incredibly powerful moment in which we see the depiction of Jesus meeting Thomas. He wants to make a point about what does it mean to experience doubt and how we resolve our doubts.

Doubts are not going to be resolved through arguments or thoughts, but doubts are resolved by being in a relationship. So Thomas's incredulity or his doubting is resolved by going deeper into the body of Christ, and that is a message for us that when we're experiencing doubt or fears or forebodings, when we feel oppressed, when we are uncertain if God is truly there in our lives, the way forward is not to try to generate some kind of thought that helps us keep everything at arm's length but to go deeper into relationship.

The other thing that I see in this powerful moment is the fact that he has created this theatricality, the fact that it looks like it's happening on stage. Well, that's a way of reminding us that the resurrection of Christ is something that we experience in real time in our lives. The resurrection is not a reward waiting for us if we live a good life. The resurrection is not some kind of candy that we get if we complete our journey well. Rather, the resurrection happens now. Now is the time of resurrection. And you and I are called to practice and perform resurrection right where we are.

And finally, there is this incredible emphasis on the wounds of Christ. In classic Renaissance painting, there's always a vanishing point. There's always a point where you see in the distance what lies behind it and where things seem to disappear on the canvas. Here is no different except the vanishing point is right at the wound of Christ. And that is to convey to us the belief and the knowledge in today's scripture that the way that we find our way to Jesus is by recognizing him in all of His wounds. Because the Jesus who comes to Thomas is still wearing his grave cloth, which means unless we find our way through Jesus into that intimate relationship with him through those wounds, there's a sense in which the resurrection will not be real for us, a sense in which Christ might still seem to be dead.

But Thomas's faith comes alive when he meets his Lord. In the scriptures we have for today, there is a moment in which Jesus comes into the room. He says, peace or shalom, and then He shows him His hands and His side. And then we read, the disciples believed when they saw it was the Lord.

There are two other paintings I want to lift up for you today because I think they're so incredibly important. And these are more contemporary takes on this

Caravaggio and they allow us a different lens through which to see the implications of today's scripture. The first is by a Turkish British photographer named Nassif Topcuoglu. And he did this in 2006. And instead of collecting these four men, moving from kind of youngest to advanced middle age, he actually collects a kind of community of young women around a woman in the middle who is as if a Christ figure, and she has a wound as well that has been healed. It's a real scar of heart surgery.

And these young women are all around her, embracing her and exploring the wounded, asking her, is it real? The title of the photograph is *Is it Real?* And you can see right here with the hand and the pointing of the finger that is just like we would see here, except instead of incredulity, instead of doubting instead of suspicion, this is a community that seems to be more empathetic, more curious, more willing to support one another.

Look at the way that the model here has someone next to her holding her up. And this is meant to convey to us a couple of really important things for us to see, which is that when the Western canon did these pictures of Jesus, it tended to valorize or lift up Jesus as he was depicted, and that is as a white male. Topcuoglu's photograph here seems to ask us and invite us to imagine what it might be like to see Christ as appearing to us as a woman who has been wounded as well. And so the sacred body of Christ, which is depicted as white and male here, is seen as female. And this is an invitation for us to see how you and I are connected in different ways by our gender and how people who are women can be just as much a kind of window into Christ, can just as much incarnate in their own way, appropriate to who they are, who Christ is.

And this is to remind us that all of us stand at a distance from the actual risen Christ who is different from us historically, but each of us is meant to somehow be Christ to one another and to be united to one another in Christ. This is why, for example, you have in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25, a moment where Jesus says those of you who care for the least among us, those of you who care for those in prison who give food to those who are hungry, who clothe those who are naked, who visit and help the sick. Those of you who are reaching out to the least of my brothers and sisters, well, you've done it as well to me. And so this community of empathy is another way in which we can see the power of today's gospel from John.

And finally, there is another image I want to give you. This is by an Australian and it's of a young black child and it's called *Youth*. Ron Mueck is the artist. It's actually a statue that has been done in incredible realism and lifelike ways. And this was done in 2009. And here again, you see a kind of wound here, which is similar to the wound here with Christ. And just as Christ is looking down, almost surprised himself at his resurrected state. You see this young man looking down and seeing this wound in his side, this incredibly deep wound.

And here again, there is a kind of extension of the sacred body of Christ that Christ was not simply represented by a white male, but Christ is actually being represented by a black youth. And this is to test all the ways that we tend to see Christ or not see Christ or to create the community around which we will reach out and empathetically engage each other. So this statue is meant to invite us to imagine what it would be like for us to live in relationship and to see Christ, even in people who are unlike us or perhaps to see Christ in people who are like us depending on our point of view. And to minister as well to the wounds that we all experience and to see in that ministry, to woundedness, a kind of lens through which to see what it means to worship and live and follow a risen lord today.

Now, all through what I've said, there's been this kind of subtle interplay that I want to make sure you see so there's no confusion. When the scriptures speak about Jesus Christ, they speak in different ways. They speak not only about the Jesus who is historical, who walked the earth, who sweat, who cried, who wept, who died, who bled. But they also speak about the Jesus who comes to us when He says, this is My body and this is My blood. And that sacramental Jesus is just as real as the Jesus we meet in Galilee or in Palestine or anywhere.

And then there is also the Jesus who is somehow mystically present, who somehow is involved in our lives and so in the gospel of Matthew, towards the end, Jesus tells us, disciple, that what you do for the least of my brothers and sisters, you do for me. And finally, when Paul sees the risen Christ and is knocked off of his horse and scales fall from his eyes, he hears first and foremost from that risen Lord, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? Not why do you persecute my people? Why do you persecute me?

So today's gospel is an invitation for us to enter into an incredible mystery of embodiment. It is to see ourselves as members of Christ's body. It is to find ourselves looking at who Christ is among us. It is to start to care for one another and to extend the beautiful nature of our world, the beautiful nature of our love, the power that Christ has given us to proclaim freedom to captives and to clothe the hungry, to see in all that we do a kind of inclusion into the body of Christ, a kind of adding to our membership, a kind of transformation of who we are and to who God has made us able to become through God's spirit.

It's by tending to this scripture and making it real in our lives of entering into the drama of it, that we begin to see what it means to be revived. May that revival come for you in this time of testing, which as we read in 1 Peter, that we are being tried like gold in a furnace. May that revival be real to you in your life and what you're doing, may your eyes be opened. May you see. May you be drawn into deeper intimacy with the Christ who was wounded and died so that you might be healed and live.

Amen.