

Title: Sharing the Messy Truth of Resurrection

Date: 4/7/2024 (Easter 2, Year B)

Location: St. Alban's Episcopal Church

Service: 10 am Holy Eucharist (Hybrid)

Readings: [Acts 4:32-35](#); [1 John 1:1-2:2](#); [John 20:19-31](#); [Psalm 133](#)

Audio Link: <https://podcasters.spotify.com/pod/show/st-albans-austin/episodes/Sharing-the-Messy-Truth-of-Resurrection-e2i6b5g>

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/emT97WvoPqg?t=476>

From the Collect of the Day

O God, grant that we who have been  
reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body  
may show forth in our lives  
what we profess by our faith.<sup>1</sup>

**Amen.**

The apostle Thomas is most commonly known as Doubting Thomas. There are probably people who don't really know much about Christianity but will still know the term "Doubting Thomas." They might have heard this term used to dismiss someone or reject the concerns they raised. They might be familiar with the images used to depict this story.

Among the images is Caravaggio's painting, *The Incredulity of St. Thomas*.<sup>2</sup> It shows Thomas poking his finger into the open wound. When I look at it, I want to flinch and turn away because it feels like he's really digging into it, as if he digs down far enough, he can finally figure out what he's looking for.

In 2013, an artist named Michael Landy created a kinetic sculpture. It combined found objects and scrap materials (cogs, springs, and pipes) to give form to Christ's torso and Thomas's hand. Not the full figures, just the hand and the torso. This mechanism was linked to a foot pedal. When you pressed the foot pedal, it propelled the hand toward the torso, causing the finger to poke the wound.<sup>3</sup> There is a piece of metal attached to the finger so you can see the marks previous visitors left in the torso, and the torso had to be replaced several times over the course of the exhibition.

This image of Thomas and his finger in the wound has such a strong hold on our imagination, and this is **not** the story we heard today. We hear Jesus offering his side to Thomas, and then we hear Thomas' response, but we don't know for sure what happened in between.

The way we fill in that space probably tells us more about ourselves than it does about Thomas. The way we remember and retell this story says something about our own experience with doubt and faith and certainty. What do we need to see or know before we are ready to declare that something is true?

This is something we can all relate to, so I wonder why some people find Thomas' demand for proof so offensive. Let's take a moment and rewind.

In the resurrection account in the gospel according to John, early on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. Once she saw that the stone had been rolled away, she went straight to Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved to tell them what she saw. They ran to see for themselves, and once they confirmed that the tomb was empty, that the body was no longer there, they returned to their homes.

Instead of going home, Mary stood there weeping. She was probably under the impression that someone stole his body, because when the angels asked her why she was weeping, she said, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid them.”

Then she saw Jesus and mistook him for a gardener. He too asked her why she was weeping, and again she begged to know where the body is (Jn 20:1-18).

Several commentaries point out that this focus on the physical, human body is interesting, given that the gospel according to John starts on a grand, cosmic scale. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And all things came into being through him.” Yet the truth of that grand, cosmic declaration is tied up with the presence of this body and then its absence, and with the appearance of this body when it reappeared in front of the disciples after Jesus died and was buried.

This sounds mystical, far beyond the realm of reason, and yet also true. It’s so out of this world, and yet so intimately tied to this world.

The same can be said of the resurrection. It sounds otherworldly, but it happened in this world. It’s true, not in the way that science is true, but in the way that there is truth in the mystical.

Remember, the week before the crucifixion, the disciples had seen Lazarus raised from the dead. So, it’s well within their realm of experience for the dead to come back to life. But instead of being excited that their teacher, their friend, their Messiah, was alive again, they were scared. Instead of looking for him, they hid themselves. Since they’re hiding behind locked doors, they’re probably talking very quietly. They’re probably sitting in the dark, with only light from the moon and the surrounding buildings filtering through the windows.

All of sudden, Jesus was there. He looked in their eyes and said, “Peace be with you.”

I imagine their breathing sped up, and they clung to each other. So, he showed them his hands and his side, and **then** they rejoiced.

I wonder how seeing these wounds proved his identity to them. A spirit would probably have the same wounds and scars they had in life. Maybe it helped prove he had returned, but did it prove that he was alive? Is this all the proof they needed to believe in the resurrection?

Then Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you,” and he breathed on them.

Maybe they felt the pressure of his breath, as he breathed on them. Maybe they felt the tension in their body relax after they had more time to rest in the warmth of his presence.

Our body knows, as in our physical body. When we train ourselves to be aware of the feelings in our body, it tells us something we're not ready to put to words. When we pay attention to our body, it tells us something our minds can't quite process on a conscious level.

The body knows, as in all of us together as the members of one body. When there are diverse members within this one body, when not all of us are eyes or ankles or lungs, when not all of us are the same race or class or sexuality or neuro-ability, the body is more capable of discerning truth. It can speak truth; it can be truth.

After all, in the account of the last supper in this same gospel, Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (Jn 13:34-35)

By the actions of **this** body, by our words and deeds, by the way we make them feel, people will know that we are Jesus' disciples. One of the ways that people come to know the truth of the resurrection, the truth of who Jesus the Christ was and is and will be, is through the powerful way he continues to transform us and the way we live. On Easter Day, we don't say "Alleluia, Christ rose." We say, "Alleluia, Christ **is** risen."

In the Collect of the Day and at the beginning of this sermon we prayed that we who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in our lives what we profess by our faith. What we believe and how we live go hand in hand. It's a cycle. It's a circle.

We find this circle when we make or renew our baptismal covenant. We say what we believe, then we make a set of promises based on these beliefs. We promise that with God's help, this is how we will live our lives and how we will live with one another and all living beings.

We find this circle in today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

We read that the early followers of Jesus were a group of people who were of one heart and soul. Therefore, no one among them claimed private ownership of any possessions, and everything they owned was held in common. There was not a needy person among them, because the proceeds of what they sold was distributed to each according to their needs (Acts 4:32-35).

Now this might be more aspirational than reality, given what we find out later in the book. But this shows their direction and their commitment. This demonstrates that they are disciples of Jesus, and this says something about the power of his resurrection, that

it continues to transform and reconfigure relationships. His loving, liberating, and life-giving way didn't die with him; it grew and extended throughout more of the world.

We find this circle in the first letter from John.

There's a lot of emphasis on "declaring what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life." It also makes clear that whether we walk in light or shadow, whether we say we have no sin or confess our sin, and whether we have fellowship with one another will be a sign to other people as to whether what we have declared is true and whether the truth is in us (1 John 1:2-2:2).

I don't know how we share the truth of the resurrection of Jesus except in our lives, in the way we listen to one another, and in the way we learn and love and grow deeper into faith and grace.

I don't know how to share the truth of the resurrection of Jesus except in our relationships, with the people we love and the people we have a hard time with, by walking in light so that we can see all the times and all the ways we have turned away from God and one another, and by working to reconfigure our world so that those with power can empty themselves so that the vulnerable may come into their own power.

This is beautiful, and it is messy. After all, one of the symbols of Easter, for the resurrection, is the butterfly.

A few years ago, I learned that when a caterpillar molts into a chrysalis, within that protective casing, it begins to digest itself. It turns into caterpillar soup, with some solid bits, groups of cells called imaginal discs that will become the adult body parts they need, wings, eyes, legs and so on.<sup>4</sup> Once those parts finish developing, it sheds that outer layer and emerges as a butterfly.

This is more messy and gross than I could have imagined as a child. Learning about it as an adult, it makes *perfect* sense.

That kind of transformation takes a lot of work! It melts our brains and our hearts and our soul. Everything we take in, everything we've experienced, becomes fuel for transformation. And all the pieces for what we will become have always been there, and it just takes time for parts to mature and move around on the inside.

I don't know how we share the truth of the resurrection of Jesus except by getting messy and embracing the complications and accepting there will be painful bits.

When we refuse to do that, it takes us farther away from what is true.

When we feel so threatened by the messiness and the complexity and the painstaking effort resurrection requires that we ban books and dictate how teachers teach and act

against diversity and equity and inclusivity, it's as if we'd rather walk in darkness than light, as if we are claiming we have no sin instead of confessing our sins.

So, let us ask and embrace questions as Mary, the disciples, and Thomas did. Let us share what we have and work toward a world where there is not a needy person among us.

**This** is how we experience the otherworldly in this world, to find the Kingdom of Heaven here.

**This** is how we find the truth in the mystical, and experience the mystical in the true, because there is no rational or logical path we can follow to get us there, except in the footsteps of Christ who died, was buried and then rose again, returned to life, on the third day.

Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://lectionarypage.net/YearB\\_RCL/Easter/BEaster2\\_RCL.html](https://lectionarypage.net/YearB_RCL/Easter/BEaster2_RCL.html)

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Incredulity\\_of\\_Saint\\_Thomas\\_\(Caravaggio\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas_(Caravaggio))

<sup>3</sup> <https://thevcs.org/doubting-thomas#thrust-it-my-side>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/caterpillar-butterfly-metamorphosis-explainer/>