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St. James', Mt. Airy  
4/8/18

Easter 2B  
Acts 4:32-35  
Psalm 133  
1 John 1:1-2:2  
John 20:19-31

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

*The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

The story of the apostle Thomas reaching out to touch the wounds of the risen Christ has inspired many gorgeous, haunting, and thoughtful paintings throughout history.

It is such a vivid story, it is no wonder.

But out of all of them, *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas* by Italian Baroque master Caravaggio is my favorite.

Painted c. 1601-1602, the painting focuses on Thomas' face and his surprise as Jesus tenderly holds his hand and guides it into the wound in his side, as two other disciples look on.

What could be gruesome, comes across as loving. The expression on Jesus' face. The way he holds Thomas' hand. This act of meeting his friend where he is in his faith journey.

As I preach every year on the second Sunday of Easter – as this is our Gospel every year on this Sunday – this story of Thomas is **not** one of doubt, no matter how history has pithily dubbed it.

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Our Gospel today picks up right where our Easter Day story left off. Last week's Gospel ended with Mary staying at the tomb and meeting the risen Christ, after Peter and John saw the empty tomb and then returned home to the locked upper room.

Today we are told that all of the disciples were still locked away in fear that evening. All except for Thomas, who was apparently the only one not bound by fear, and who had ventured out from their hiding place.

And so it was, that he missed Jesus appearing to those still behind the locked door. He missed Jesus saying, "*Peace be with you,*" and showing them his hands and his side. He missed that key moment when Jesus' friends transitioned from being disciples – those who follow – to apostles – those who are sent.

He missed the opportunity to know – **to really know** – that his succumbing to fear and abandoning Jesus in the hour of need just a few days prior, was somehow forgiven.

I imagine that if I were in Thomas' shoes, and I was the brave one who left that upper room only to return and hear the tale of Jesus' visits from my friends, I too would be incredulous.

What a wonderful word that is, **incredulous**. It is defined as the state of being unwilling, or unable, to believe something.

Thomas was indeed incredulous when he heard of Jesus' visit, and so he asked for exactly what his friends had already received – the chance to see Jesus and touch his wounds. To know him as the risen Christ and receive his peace.

A week later Jesus met Thomas and his incredulous faith right where he was.

Jesus again appeared in the upper room, and stood among them saying, “*Peace be with you.*” And then he turned to Thomas and said, “*Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.*”

In Caravaggio’s painting we see these words put to action. Jesus takes Thomas’ finger and puts it into his side. Up to the knuckle. This is incarnation at its most primal – there is no choice to stand on the sidelines of faith with the resurrected Christ.

And so there can be no doubt going forward for Thomas – he has been met by the Christ and his response is to let go of his incredulity in favor of holy awe, proclaiming, “*My Lord and my God!*”

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Why do we tell **this** story every year – when our pattern is mostly to cycle through different stories every three years following the lectionary?

I think it’s because it has so much to tell us about living as followers of Christ **after the resurrection**. I have to tell you – I started about five different sermons before deciding to follow the powerful draw of Caravaggio’s painting this year. There is so much to learn from its entirety.

But what Caravaggio’s painting tells us, alongside John’s gospel, is that Jesus – human, divine, resurrected – will always find us and keep offering the promise of God’s abiding love, mercy, grace, and hope.

That when we lock ourselves away in fear, when we feel like we’ve somehow missed the chance to be with God, that God will always come to us.

This is resurrection, thanks be to God.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
*The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

