

Second Sunday of Easter, Year C, Gospel

Where God Shows Up

John 20:19-31

Second Sunday after Easter

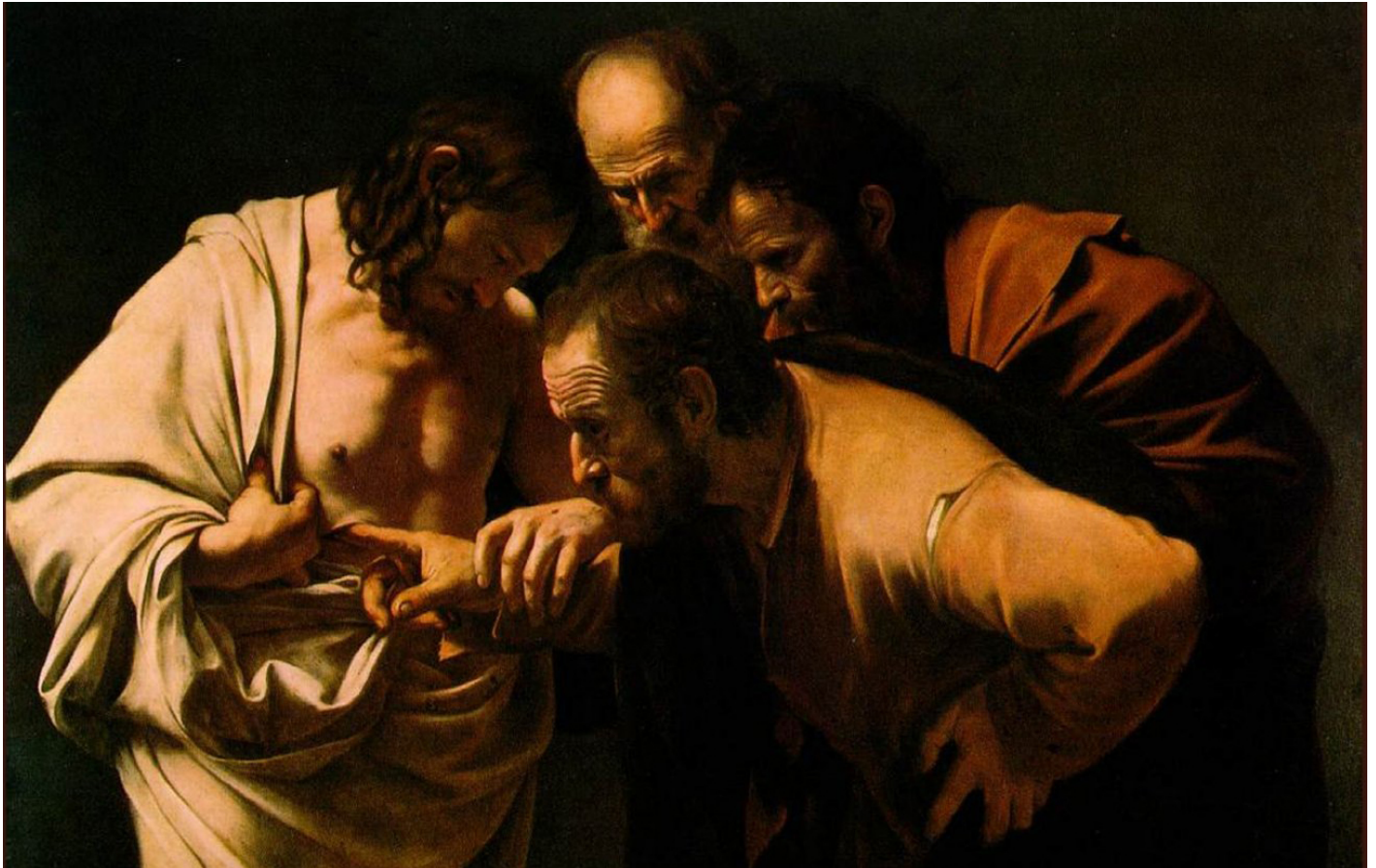
Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

26 A week later his 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." 27 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." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.



DIAGNOSIS: Doubt It!

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Wearing Your Doubt

Who can blame Thomas for being a skeptic? Had the disciples really changed that much since they received the Holy Spirit from the resurrected Jesus? Were they trotting around Jerusalem forgiving one another in the week since they'd seen Jesus alive—before Jesus breathed his peace on Thomas? Were they living their resurrection faith out loud in the city?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Blinded by Doubt



Actually, John tells us that the disciples are holed up again in the same room where they had been hiding in fear the week before. Sure, they had seen Jesus. But other than their brief testimony to Thomas, not much was different. Thomas had heard what was supposed to be good news, and he couldn't imagine any reason to take his friends at their word. Only seeing Jesus in the flesh would change his mind.

But Jesus pans Thomas for his reluctance to trust the disciples' testimony: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe," he says. Thomas is depending on his own vision to change his heart, rather than hanging his heart on Jesus' promises.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Godless

When it comes to faith, God is not willing to indulge our demand for cameo appearances. When God makes promises, God keeps them—Easter being the best case in point. So, our insistence—that we must see in order to believe—leaves us high and dry. Blind. Bereft of the God who comes in mercy and forgiveness, because we can't see him for all the scars that get in the way.

PROGNOSIS: Believe It!

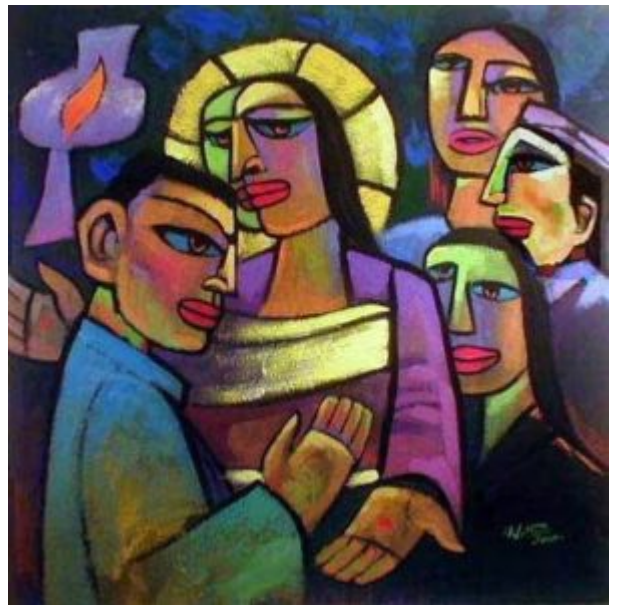
Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Christened

It's fascinating that the very thing Thomas demands, to touch the marks that testify to Jesus' death, ends up being the thing that silences Thomas. Jesus comes to his wounded disciples (then

and now), bearing the marks of his tortured death, and these piercings become proof of his resurrection life. This One who had surrendered his mortal body three days before—rather than high-tailing it to heaven—walks into the lives of his wounded disciples to show them what they cannot otherwise see: A God who shows up where life is disappointing, broken, and hopeless, to silence our doubt and despair.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Blind Faith

When Jesus offers Thomas his hands and side—the very thing Thomas has demanded, it’s enough to send Thomas to his knees. Thomas who, like every one of us, thinks he knows better than Jesus what he needs, finds out that it’s not his eyes (or his fingers in Jesus’ hands and side) that make it possible for him to believe. It is Jesus (the Word), relentlessly and lovingly walking into his darkness and doubt, that allows Thomas (and us) to believe. So, with Thomas, we again find ourselves (on this Second Sunday of Easter) humbly on our knees, declaring, “My Lord and my God!”



Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Wearing Your Faith

Such life-giving encounters with Jesus are bound to propel us out of our safe spaces, into the light of day to say, “We have seen the Lord.” Maybe we won’t convince our co-workers and friends the first time or two that we try those words. Nor will practice make our Easter testimony perfect. And, more than likely, we will need to have Jesus give us a refresher course (through Word and sacrament), to remind us where he can be

found. But in a world rife with scars, suffering, regret, and resentment, his healing word will offer peace to soothe our bitter woes.