



“Touching God”

Second Sunday of Easter
Saturday & Sunday, April 27–28, 2019
All Services
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Acts 5:27-32; John 20:19-31

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

I feel I need to begin with an apology to Penn DOT, the company that designed the 15/581 interchange, and any employees associated thereof, in reference to my sermon of a couple of weeks ago. No direct offense was meant to either of those establishments or their employees. My derision was supposed to be directed at the drivers who *ignore* the **appropriate** signage, and cause risk to life and vehicles by stopping inappropriately, illegally, and **extremely dangerously** in the middle lane. And since I know and trust the representatives from those establishments that went above and beyond to explain to me the reasons why that interchange is the way that it is, I will believe your explanations. I still think it's a dumb interchange.

Christ is Risen! He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia! That's why we're here, isn't it? That's why we're celebrating. Of course, not everybody *believed* it. I mean, come on: a dead guy, a person who had the life beaten out of him, then hung up like a load of wet laundry and left to dry? **That** guy? Alive? Let's be real.

And then, we turn around and belittle Thomas, whose belief was shaken to the core for **not** believing the absurdity of what his fellow believers were telling him: that Jesus was alive.

Have you ever seen something that's not there? Or been mistaken about your circumstances? Many of you here are familiar with my friend, Max Wulfe. For those of you who don't know him, he's a puppet (don't tell him that, though, he doesn't know it). The first time I brought Max home, I had him sitting on the dryer in our mudroom. It was dusk, and our family walked in through the entryway. Our good friend, Cyril the Dog, who was a black & white Dresden Longhair, and who has since gone on to join the Camp Eternal, saw Max sitting on top of the dryer. Cyril stopped; he stared; then he walked over and sniffed . . . Max's butt. Cyril had a case of not quite believing what he was seeing.

Kind of like Thomas, who had been through a horrific weekend. Thomas had experienced his teacher, his master, his friend and mentor, first, wash his feet - that is, his

idol took on the aspects of a servant, a *slave*, even, to show him and the other disciples' true humility.

Then, in the garden, he watched as Jesus was arrested, while the ever-over-eager Simon Peter slices off the ear of one of the guards - and then Jesus *heals* that person on the spot.

We aren't told *specifically* that Thomas runs away, but we do know that Peter is the only one who is recorded as showing up to try to listen in on the sham of a trial arranged by the high priest.

We can only guess as to whether Thomas and or any of the others went to see for themselves Jesus hung up on a cross. Personally, I think they did, but scripture only tells us that John, or as he called in John's gospel, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," was present.

Thomas **knew** that Jesus died, that Jesus was dead, and that Jesus was buried. These were, for Thomas, unequivocal **facts**, not to be denied, or ignored, or claimed to be false or fake. Jesus was dead. Thomas **knew** what he saw. He **understood** what he had heard.

Speaking of knowing and believing, perhaps you heard about this on the news. About two weeks ago, two men, house sitting for a relative in Beaverton, OR. They came back from walking the dog, only to discover when they returned what they believed to be an intruder in the house. They tracked the noise to the bathroom. The door was shut and locked, so they did what probably many of us would do if we encountered that situation: they called the police to report that someone had broken in while they were out, and that person or persons were still in the house. Given the number of news stories I have read over the past couple of weeks about home invasions gone wrong, I think we can hardly blame them for calling the police.

An off-duty police officer in the area heard the call and went to the house. He verified that, indeed, there were noises emanating from the bathroom, and no one was responding. He called for backup, which included a canine unit. Then, once fully prepared, guns drawn, the officers knocked again on the bathroom door. Still receiving no response from whoever was inside, they identified themselves as officers of the law, forced open the bathroom door, and found . . . a Roomba vacuum cleaner, caught between the toilet and the bathtub. The vacuum was freed with only a warning.

Mistaken identity. Seeing, but not believing. I don't think I can really blame Thomas for wanting to actually, physically, touch Jesus.

What about you? Have you ever had that need, that deep-seated desire, that nearly tangible urgency, to know to *experience*, to **feel**, the presence of God? The downside, of course, is, we can't. At least, not the way Thomas was able to with Jesus. The way that **can** we touch God, is when we rest an assuring hand on a grieving friend's shoulder. We touch God when we sit and talk with the fellows down at Bethesda Mission, or serve breakfast at St. Patrick's Cathedral. We Touch God when we listen to

someone in anger or pain. And we, in turn, are touched by God, when others do the same for us.

So, I guess the next question is: will we recognize Christ when we next encounter him? Final story about misidentification: we're going to jump the pond, and go to Devon, England. A concerned citizen called the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), saying there was a fox in the neighborhood, acting lethargic, and it hadn't moved in a couple of days. The caller said the fox had appeared to have collapsed, although it was breathing well and tracking movement with its eyes. So, the RSPCA sent an officer to Devon to hopefully rescue the fox. As it turned out, by the time the officer arrived, the animal was, indeed, dead. As a matter of fact, it had been dead so long that it had been taxidermied as well. Someone had been pranking the village, moving the stuffed fox around the neighborhood."

Perhaps not as humorous as police arresting a Roomba. But the next time you've spent the afternoon working on your lawn and garden, using a garbage can to collect the rubbish, and you've gone into the house at the end of the day to wash up, when you look out your window at dusk, remember that's your garbage can down at the end of your lawn, and not a bear wandering around the tree line.

And remember as well: God comes to us in all different kinds of ways. And in those many different ways, we are touched by God, and we, in turn, can touch God.

Amen.

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