

# The Reverend Carlyle Gill

## Sermon

### Second Sunday of Easter, April 8, 2018

This Sunday is typically called “Doubting Thomas Sunday.” I don’t think doubt is the issue. I think it’s fear of intimacy. We don’t want to be close to Jesus. I often think of a person at St. Alban’s in DC who said, “I have no problem with God. I think the Holy Spirit is lovely. But Jesus, Jesus. I have trouble with Jesus.

I think the real issue with Jesus, the most difficult issue – with Jesus– is not the resurrection but the wide open invitation to intimacy that this man kept and keeps offering. It’s hard for us to bear. We tend to keep to ourselves, keep our troubles to ourselves; we who are trained not to let anyone see our wounds not to mention invite anyone into them. And therefore cannot see the wounds of others.

I have been looking at 17<sup>th</sup> century painter Caravaggio’s painting of this text. It is an extraordinary painting. Jesus bends toward Thomas. Jesus takes Thomas’ hand and guides it into his side, into his open wound. The brightest light in the painting is on Jesus’ breast as he opens his clothes revealing the wound in his side. Again, Jesus takes Thomas’ dirty hand and guides it to his wounded side. It is an amazing sight: so tender, so intimate.

This painting depicts an incredible invitation to intimacy. Actually the earliest name for this Sunday was not “Doubting Thomas Sunday” but “Incredulous Thomas Sunday.” Who wouldn’t be incredulous that someone brutally killed and alive again would guide your hand, my hand into their wound? Yes, Thomas asks to see but Jesus goes way beyond sight. Jesus takes Thomas’ hand and gently guides it into his open side. It’s no wonder many of us have trouble with Jesus. We may not want to be get that close, to **feel** his wounds.

But the author of this gospel warned us in chapter one that this was the Word made **flesh**. And flesh we got. This is a fleshy, intimacy inviting Jesus. We all should be squirming by now.

I think doubt actually protects us from this intimate, fleshy Jesus. We want to push away that inviting hand – not get too close. Because if we give in, if we let that hand guide us to that wound, what will happen to us? What then? Or put another way, if someone loves us that much to say, “Touch me. Hold me,” what will we do?

There is nothing wrong with doubting and there is much to question in our time. Jesus himself asked more questions than he answered and harshly critiqued his own faith tradition. But there may be times when doubt is a way of protecting ourselves from this intimate Jesus, protecting ourselves from love.

If we say “Yes” to the hand that stretches out to us, what will that mean? What will that ask of us? If we allow Jesus’ hand to guide our own hands into the wounds of the world, what difference might that make?

I believe Caravaggio’s painting may be perfect for our time. We live in a very, very wounded time – perhaps no more so than other times. But this is our time. There are wounds abounding.

Each one of us lives with wounds – wounds from childhood, wounds from loss, from dreams deferred, from the inevitable decline of aging and death. For many of us, these wounds are hard to face, hard to touch.

Our society lives with incredible wounds: the wounds of poverty and prejudice. I have been thinking a lot about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as I imagine you have also. He was killed fifty years and four days ago. I believe he was killed because he dared to name the wounds, see the wounds, feel the wounds that racism, poverty, war mongering have inflicted on all of us. He saw and named the hatred that inflicted these wounds and he would not stop talking, preaching about these wounds. But like the hand of Jesus in Caravaggio’s painting, he led our hands into those wounds. He was killed because he was unafraid to name and to feel the wounds of racism, poverty, and injustice.

I believe Dr. King’s faith gave him the courage to name and touch these wounds. The biblical stories of exodus from bondage and victory over death gave him hope – the kind of hope that propelled him to act, to care, to love.

John Paul Sartre defined courage as “living to the point of tears.” I believe this is Jesus’ invitation to us this Easter. To allow his hand to guide us to his side, to his wounds, to feel and know the wounds of the world and to act with the same love that comes to us from that gentle guiding hand.

This invitation to intimacy is extended every Sunday at this altar: “The Body of Christ, the Bread of Heaven;” “The Blood of Christ, the Cup of Salvation.” May we receive this fleshy, intimate Jesus and be emboldened to act, to care, to love.