

TODAY IS KNOWN AS THE EASTER OCTAVE. IT IS THE EIGHTH DAY OF RESURRECTION --- AND EVERYONE ATTENTIVE TO VINTAGE 70s BUMPER STICKER WISDOM KNOWS WHAT HAPPENED ON THE EIGHTH DAY, RIGHT? [ON THE EIGHTH DAY, GOD CREATED THE GRATEFUL DEAD!]

NOW LITURGICALLY SPEAKING, ON THE EIGHTH DAY, JESUS APPEARS **AGAIN** TO THE DISCIPLES. THERE ARE THESE TWO STREAMS OF TRADITION ABOUT THE RISEN JESUS. THE KEY WORDS OF ONE EASTER DAY TRADITION? THE TOMB IS **EMPTY**. THE OTHER STREAM HAS KEY WORDS AS WELL: JESUS CAME NEAR AND WALKED WITH THEM...JESUS CAME AND STOOD AMONG THEM...JESUS MET THEM ON THE ROAD, IN A ROOM, AT THE BEACH.

EASTER IS **EMPTY TOMB** AND EASTER IS **APPEARANCES**. EASTER IS A BOTH...AND. THE TOMB IS EMPTY AND FOR FORTY DAYS AFTER THE RESURRECTION, THE RISEN JESUS KEEPS COMPANY WITH HIS FOLLOWERS, BREAKS BREAD WITH THEM, BREAKS OPEN THE MEANING OF THE EVENTS OF THE DAYS OF SUFFERING AND DEATH, COOKS FOR THEM, OFFERS FOOD AND FISHING TIPS.

THE STORY OF THOMAS IS AN APPEARANCE STORY, SO WILL EVERYONE TAKE OUT THE CARRAVAGIO FROM YOUR BULLETIN. LET'S "READ" THE PAINTING TOGETHER.

WHOSE IN THE PICTURE? [COME ON, DON'T BE SHY...]

NOTICE THERE IS NO HALO OVER JESUS. THIS IS A HUGE DEPARTURE FOR RELIGIOUS ART, BUT CARRAVAGIO WANTS OUR EYES TO SEE AND TO FOCUS ON THE RISEN JESUS AS BEING HUMAN, EARTHLY.

WHAT KINDS OF THINGS ARE HAPPENING?

THOMAS PROBING....GORILY EXPLORATORY

PETER OR JOHN STILLING, ALMOST PULLING THOMAS HAND BACK ANYTHING ELSE?

LIGHT IS FOCUSSED IN CENTER, EDGES ARE DARKER INTENSE COLOR.

CARRAVAGIO PORTRAYS THE FORTHRIGHT THOMAS AS THE DISCIPLE HAS NO DOUBTS ABOUT WHAT HE NEEDS IN ORDER TO BELIEVE THAT JESUS HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD; THOMAS REQUIRES A CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH THE RISEN CHRIST. THOMAS NEEDS HARD EVIDENCE: WOUNDS THAT ARE VISIBLE TO THE EYE HAVE TO BE TOUCHED BY THOMAS' OWN FINGERS.

REMEMBER HOW THOMAS INSISTS, "UNLESS I ...PUT MY FINGER IN THE MARK OF THE NAILS AND MY HAND IN HIS SIDE, I WILL NOT BELIEVE."

THIS WORD "PUT" IS VERY SPECIFIC. THERE IS NO SENSE OF MERELY SKIMMING OR CARRESSING THE WOUNDS OF JESUS---LIKE, I JUST WANT TO RUN MY FINGERS ALONG...NO! CARRAVAGIO VISUALLY CAPTURES THE LITERAL MEANING OF THE GREEK WORD SCRIPTURE USES; IT'S A FORCEFUL, PROPELLING MOTION

THAT MIGHT BEST BE TRANSLATED, "UNLESS I THRUST MY FINGER THROUGH HIS HAND AND PUSH MY HAND INTO THE SLASH IN HIS SIDE, I WILL NOT BELIEVE."

ONLY THE DEEPEST EXPLORATION OF THE WOUNDS OF CHRIST WOULD BE ENOUGH FOR THOMAS. ONLY THEN WILL THOMAS HAVE WHAT HE NEEDS TO BELIEVE.

PERHAPS THOMAS' NEED TO SEE AND TO TOUCH THE WOUNDS OF HIS FRIEND, JESUS, ARISE FROM THOMAS' PERSONAL WOUNDS: FIRST HIS HEART HAS BEEN PIERCED BY THE DEATH OF JESUS. THOMAS' SOUL IS BLEEDING BECAUSE HE HAS BEEN LIVING AND LEARNING AND LAUGHING FOR THREE SOLID YEARS WITH JESUS WHO HAD BEEN ARRESTED AND RIDICULED, BEATEN AND BERATED, TORTURED AND CRUCIFIED...ALIKE A COMMON CRIMINAL JESUS WAS HANGING ON A CROSS TIL HE SUFFOCATED. IT WAS A TERRIBLE WAY TO DIE.

BRUISED AND BATTERED BY THESE EVENTS, THOMAS ARRIVES IN THE COMPANY OF JESUS' OTHER FRIENDS AND DISCIPLES WHO KEEP ON TELLING HIM "WE HAVE SEEN THE LORD!"

THE OTHER DISCIPLES HAVE ALREADY HAD RESURRECTION'S HEALING BALM SPREAD ON THE DEEP CUT OF DEATH. SITTING BEHIND CLOSED DOORS, ON EASTER EVENING EIGHT DAYS BEFORE, SUDDENLY A SALVE PENETRATES THEIR PAIN: STRANGELY AND SOMEHOW, JESUS STANDS AMONG THEM. THOUGH THEY HAD LOCKED THE DOORS OF THE HOUSE AND THEIR HEARTS, JESUS APPEARS AMONG THEM PRONOUNCING, "PEACE BE WITH YOU."

THIS JESUS IS THE SAME ONE WHO PRAYED IN THE GARDEN WHILE THEY FELL ASLEEP. THE ONE ARRESTED IN THE GARDEN WHILE THEY RAN AWAY; THEY DESERTED JESUS. WHILE HE HUNG ON A CROSS, THEY STOOD AT A DISTANCE, LOOKING ON FROM AFAR.

NOW THESE MEN ARE HIDING OUT, COWERING IN FEAR FROM PRIESTS AND TEMPLE POLICE; THEY ARE PRE-OCCUPIED WITH THEIR NEED FOR SAFETY.

JESUS COMES AND STANDS AMONG THEM...NOT DEAD, RISEN. CAN THEY DARE BEGIN BELIEVING SUCH A THING? THEIR EYES SEE HIM AND THEIR EARS HEAR: "SHALOM, PEACE BE WITH YOU." JESUS GREETES HIS ERRANT FOLLOWERS WITH THE TRADITIONAL WORD MEANING HARMONY, WHOLENESS, COMPLETENESS, PROSPERITY, TRANQUILITY ...THE PRESENCE OF EVERYTHING GOOD AND THE ABSENCE OF ALL EVIL.

HOW DO THEY KNOW THE ONE STANDING AMONG THEM IS--- IN FACT---JESUS OF NAZARETH?

JESUS SHOWS THEM HIS WOUNDS!
HE VOLUNTARILY DISPLAYS HIS NAIL-PIERCED HANDS AND REVEALS HIS SWORD-SLASHED SIDE. THE SCARS ARE THE SIGN THAT THE ONE RAISED ON AN OLD RUGGED CROSS IS THE ONE RAISED TO NEW RISEN LIFE.

FEAR FLEES FROM THE ROOM AND FROM THE HEARTS OF THE DISIPLES. THEIR DARK MOOD DISSIPATES IN THE LIGHT OF JESUS' RISEN PRESENCE. HEARTS WITH NO HOPE BEGIN TO BEAT WITH THE SYNCOPATED RHYTHMS OF WHAT GOD MAKES POSSIBLE. THEY FOUND THE TOMB EMPTY AND NOW THE RISEN ONE IS IN THEIR MIDST!

JESUS WOUNDS **HAVE NOT DISAPPEARED** WITH HIS RISING AGAIN. THE DISCIPLES CANNOT DENY THE PRESENCE OF THE SCARS; THEY CANNOT PRETEND PAIN DOES NOT EXIST. IN FACT, THE WOUNDS ARE THE EVIDENCE THAT JESUS OF NAZARETH, BORN IN A MANGER, BAPTIZED BY JOHN IN THE RIVER JORDAN, FEEDER OF 5000, HEALER OF THE BLIND AND DEAF AND LAME, TEACHER OF WISDOM AND GUIDE TO ABUNDANT LIFE---THIS JESUS IS THE CHRIST OF GOD.

STILL, EVEN THE RADIANCE OF RESURRECTION CANNOT ERASE THE SCARS OF SUFFERING .

IN HER BOOK **LIFE IS HELLO, LIFE IS GOOD-BYE**, ALLA BOZARTH CAMPBELL, AN EPISCOPALIAN PRIEST WHOSE HUSBAND DIED SUDDENLY AT THE AGE OF 37, WRITES ABOUT STRUGGLING IN HER VERY BAD SITUATION. THEN A FRIEND TOLD HER, "A SCAR IS REALLY A SCAR, AND IT'S NO GOOD TRYING TO TURN IT INTO A BEAUTY MARK! WHETHER PHYSICAL OR PYSCHOLOGICAL, EMOTIONAL OR SPIRITUAL, SCARS HAVE THEIR OWN VALUE. AND IN TIME, SOME OF THEM MAY BECOME TRANSFORMED INTO BEAUTY MARKS OF THEIR OWN. SOME REMAIN DEFORMITIES AS A REMINDER OF THE HUMAN CONDITION WE ALL SHARE IN PAIN AND IMPERFECTION. SOME MAY MAKE US STRONGER THAN BEFORE BECAUSE SCAR TISSUE IS VERY TOUGH. SOME ADD A MYSTERY OF DISTINCTION TO US WHICH CAN EITHER DISTANCE OTHERS OR DRAW THEM TO US. AND SOME SCARS HAVE NO PARTICULAR VALUE AT ALL."

ARE THERE ANY AMONG US WITHOUT ANY SCARS? RAISE YOUR HAND IS YOU BEAR A SCAR....

CAMPELL CONCLUDES: "WHATEVER WOUNDS WE HAVE RECEIVED, THEY ARE A PART OF WHAT MAKES US UNIQUE. WE CAN LEARN TO BEAR THEM WITH DIGNITY AS SIGNS OF WHAT LIFE HAS TAUGHT US---FOR WE CARRY THEIR MEANING AND LESSONS WITH US THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES."

WHEN THE DISIPLES SEE WOUNDS IN RESURRECTION LIGHT, THOMAS IS NOT WITH THEM! THOMAS WAS LEFT OUT! HE FEELS ROBBED OF THAT EXPERIENCE. BEING LEFT OUT HURTS HUMAN HEARTS. NOTICE HOW CARAVAGGIO SHOWS US THOMAS' GARMENT TORN AT THE SEAM...AS RAGGED AS HIS SPIRIT.

DEFEATED BY JESUS' DEATH, NOT AROUND FOR HIS RISEN APPEARANCE, WOUND ON WOUND, THOMAS BECOMES INDIGNANT, ADAMANT ABOUT WHAT HE NEEDS TO BELIEVE THIS NEWS ABOUT THE RISEN JESUS: PROBING PHYSICAL CONTACT.

DAY AFTER DAY GOES BY. THOMAS' NEED GOES UNFULFILLED. I WONDER HOW OFTEN HE ASKS THE OTHERS TO TELL HIM THE STORY AGAIN. I WONDER HOW

OFTEN HIS HEART BREATHES A PRAYER LIKE, "PLEASE LET ME SEE YOU, JESUS."
"PLEASE APPEAR TO ME." THE SUN RISES AND THE SUN SETS. IT IS EVENING
AND MORNING FOR SEVEN DAYS.

THEN, ON THE EIGHTH DAY, JESUS STANDS AMONG THEM AGAIN. WITH THE
SIGHT OF HIS PRESENCE COMES THE SOUND OF HIS VOICE BREATHING,
"PEACE BE WITH YOU."

CAN YOU IMAGINE JESUS' EYES SEARCHING THE ROOM?

SINGLING THOMAS OUT, JESUS BECKONS HIM TO COME FORWARD AND TO
SATISFY HIS NEED. JESUS INVITES THIS HUMAN BEING TO BRING HIS NEEDS
FORWARD. AND WHILE THOMAS HAD EXPRESSED HIMSELF AS NEEDING TO
PLACE, PROBE, THRUST THE WOUNDS OF THE RISEN ONE, JESUS SUGGESTS
THOMAS SOFTEN THE NEED HE FEELS SO STRONGLY; JESUS USES THE
WORDSUGGESTS, "**REACH** YOUR FINGER HERE AND SEE...**REACH** OUT YOUR
HAND AND THRUST IT IN MY SIDE..." "REACH" IS AN INVITING WORD! IT HAS
NUANCES OF BRINGING FORTH A BURDEN OR OFFERING A GIFT.

JESUS ENCOURAGES THOMAS TO CARRY WHAT IS WITHIN HEART AND SELF,
MIND, SPIRIT ...BEAR YOUR BURDEN...BRING YOUR GIFT OVER TO JESUS;
HAND WHAT IS WITHIN OUTWARD TO THE RISEN ONE.

THIS STORY IS NOT SO MUCH ABOUT THOMAS AS IT IS ABOUT THE RISEN
CHRIST---WHO INVITES US TO ADMIT WHAT WE NEED ...TO USE ALL OF OUR
SENSES AND ALL OF OUR INTELLIGENCE, OUR CURIOSITY, ALL OF OUR EMOTIONS
AND ALL OF OUR EXPERIENCES TO PERCEIVE AND TO BELIEVE IN THE RISEN ONE
CARRYING SCARS.

THE ONE WHO RISKED HUMAN BEING EVEN UNTO DEATH... THIS ONE GOD RAISED
TO LIFE SO THAT WE MIGHT BRING OUR WOUNDS TO BE TOUCHED BY CHRIST'S
WOUNDS---OUR SCARS TO BE TOUCHED BY HIS NAIL-SCARRED HANDS--- SO
JESUS CAN BE PRESENT WITH US NO MATTER HOW WOUNDED WE GET.

THIS STORY IS ABOUT THE RISEN CHRIST WHO TOUCHES EVERY WOUND WE
CARRY WITH THE RADIANCE OF RESURRECTION LIGHT, WHO KNOWS WHERE WE
HURT AND WHY WE HURT...WHAT OR WHO HAS WOUNDED US, HOW WE ARE
SUFFERING, AND WHAT OUR SCARS MEAN.

AND THE RISEN CHRIST KNOWS SOME PEOPLE NEED TO SEE IN ORDER TO
BELIEVE... SOME PEOPLE NEED TO HEAR...SOME PEOPLE NEED TO EXPLORE...SOME
PEOPLE NEED THE TOUCH OF A RESURRECTION COMMUNITY ...TO TASTE
COMPANIONSHIP...SOME PEOPLE NEED A CO-MINGLING OF EXPERIENCES IN
ORDER FOR EVEN AN IMPULSE TOWARD BELIEF.

CATHERINE DOHERTY, PIONEER OF SOCIAL JUSTICE, SPEAKER, AND WRITER
STATES, "THERE IS A MOMENT OF RESURRECTION, AS IF ONE HAS BEEN TAKEN
OFF THE CROSS. THE WOUNDS ARE NOT HEALED, BUT THEY NO LONGER STING."

DID THOMAS TOUCH THE NAIL-SCARRED HANDS OF CHRIST? THE ARTIST PROTRAYS THE PROBING, BUT THE WRITER OF THE GOSPEL **NEVER** LETS US KNOW FOR CERTAIN. HE ONLY RECORDS THAT ONCE JESUS INVITES THOMAS' TOUCH, THE DISCIPLE EXCLAIMS, "MY LORD AND MY GOD!"

MAYBE IN THE PRESENCE OF RISEN ONE, WHAT THOMAS THINKS HE NEEDS BECOMES DIFFERENT FROM WHAT HE REALLY NEEDS. MAYBE SEEING BECOMES ENOUGH.

IN THE RISEN CHRIST, GOD PROVIDES FOR OUR NEEDS ALWAYS AND IN ALL WAYS. WE SEE CHRIST IN THE EYES OF ONE ANOTHER. WE HEAR THE RISEN ONE IN A SONG OF HOPE. WE TASTE CHRIST IN BREAD AND IN THE WINE. WE FEEL THE RISEN ONE WHEN LOVE FLOWS FREELY, COMPANIONS OF CHRIST, PEOPLE OF THE CHURCH WALKING WITH ONE ANOTHER THROUGH SUNSHINE AND STORM.

THE FINAL WORDS OF THE RISEN CHRIST IN THIS GOSPEL BEGIN TO COME TO LIFE IN THE CHURCH; THIS VERY MINUTE, THEY ARE ALIVE IN US." BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN, AND YET BELIEVE."

BLESSED ARE YOU...AND YOU AND YOU AND EVERY ONE OF US AND ALL OF US TOGETHER.

IN FACT, LET'S TAKE A MOMENT TO SAY THE WORDS AS IF JESUS WERE SPEAKING TO US EACH OF US PERSONALLY! IN A MOMENT, WE'LL SPEAK "BLESSED ARE YOU" IN UNISON, THEN WE'LL SAY OUR INDIVIDUAL NAME. [YES, IT MAY SOUND A LITTLE CHAOTIC, BUT LET'S EXPERIMENT, BE CURIOUS ABOUT HOW IT WILL SOUND AND HOW IT FEELS TO HEAR THESE WORDS OF JESUS AS IF THEY ARE SPOKEN TO US.] WE'RE GOING TO SAY, "BLESSED ARE YOU": THEN OUR NAME. READY?

BLESSED ARE YOU, MARY.

FOR WE HAVE NOT SEEN, AND YET BELIEVE.

BLESSED ARE YOU, PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF LEONIA... BLESSED ARE WE WHO HAVE NOT SEEN, AND YET BELIEVE. BLESSED ARE YOU NOW, CHURCH.

PLEASE REPEAT AFTER ME ONE WITH ANOTHER: BLESSED ARE WE, PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF LEONIA! BLESSED ARE WE...BLESSED ARE WE.

SO BE IT. AMEN