

Readings: Acts 5:27-32; Psalm 118:14-29; Revelation 1:4-8; John 20:19-31

Grace and peace to you from the God revealed to us in and through the risen Christ. Amen.

I'd like to start this morning, this Second Sunday of Easter with a confession. It's not the kind of confession we find at the end of our Gospel reading for today where Peter confesses, "My Lord and my God!" No this is the other kind of confession.

So here goes... My name is Kent and I'm addicted to YouTube. If you don't know anything about YouTube it's a website on the internet where you can upload your five-minute home-video of your two-year-old searching for plastic Easter eggs in your living room (a purely hypothetical example) and then anyone who has the internet can watch this video or any of the other billion videos that have been uploaded to YouTube.

Now I should probably clarify my confession/obsession. It's not so much watching other people's videos that I'm addicted to. And I've only "posted" (as they say) a dozen or so videos myself. So, at least as I see it, that's not the problem either. My addiction (my downfall) has to do with a little thing called "views." You see, next to every video on YouTube there's a tiny little counter that (unfortunately for me) tells you exactly how many times your video has been watched.

So I feel the need to admit this morning, if you'll allow me, that I am powerless over my addiction to checking these numbers. You see, it starts just as a tiny little question mark deep in my soul – "I wonder how many times my video 'Elijah Sings "Baby Beluga" in the Bathtub' has been seen?" And before I know it, with the click of a mouse, I've checked for the 27th time in one day. I'll be honest with you, the only way I can live with myself and my addiction is by telling myself, "At least I'm not like those other people, thank God I still haven't joined Facebook."

The point of my confession is that YouTube, like any good addiction does, has started consuming me. And so, if that wasn't bad enough, I have an even worse confession. I can't help but hear the story from John's Gospel for today without having a terrible thought – I hate even to admit it.

My thought is this: “If only I was there in that room with a video camera, not so I could share the good news of God conquering death and reversing the judgment given on the cross... more so I could post it on YouTube and get millions of views!”

In all seriousness, it’s tempting, isn’t it? ...to think that the good news of Easter is something that if you were there, you could capture it with a five-minute video, like catching fish with a net? It’s tempting, isn’t it? ...to wonder if it’s possible to turn the gospel, the good news of Easter into something that can be produced, marketed, canned, and sold?

It might surprise you that none of the “appearance stories” (none of these stories of Jesus showing up “post-resurrection” like our Gospel story for today) is found in more than one of the gospels. Turn to Matthew, Luke or John and you find that each author has a different take on how Jesus shows up after his crucifixion and death. Then again, I would guess that if we took a poll about how each of us has experienced (or not experienced?) the resurrected Christ, we would have as many stories as we have people here. So we might ask why the gospels should be any different.

But in most, if not all of the stories where Jesus appears, we might say two things about this “post-resurrection” Jesus. First, in nearly every story, he seems to go out of his way to point out his flesh and bones. In Luke’s story, for example, Jesus basically says, “Check it out – I’m not a ghost!” In today’s story, from John, after Jesus shows them the mark of the nails in his hands and the wound of the spear in his side he breathes on them.

Isn’t there at least a little bit of Thomas in all of us, that would love to have been there with a video camera and maybe even a breath mint?

But the second thing we might say about the gospel stories that tell of this “post-resurrection” Jesus is that despite how he goes out of his way to point out his flesh and bones, the resurrected Christ is still and always *elusive*. You can’t pin him down. In Luke’s gospel a couple of the disciples have a difficult time recognizing the resurrected Christ and then as soon as they do, he’s gone. “Then their eyes were opened,” Luke writes, “and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.”

In our story for today, Jesus seems to walk mysteriously through locked doors. He shows up when the disciples (especially Thomas) least

expect him. Then he shows up again when they least expect him a week later.

It's like the resurrected Christ is the kind of experience – tangible and real, no doubt – but the kind of experience that leaves you fumbling for a video camera or photo camera, and by the time you press the red button, the moment has already brushed past you into history. Still, you're left with that very thing you couldn't capture. In this case, the smell of his breath in your nostrils, the feel of nail holes on your fingertips, the sound of his voice echoing in the room, "Peace be with you."

The Renaissance artist Caravaggio tried to use one of the main media of his time (instead of YouTube, it was painting) to capture or to tell today's Gospel story.

In Caravaggio's painting the figure of Jesus pulls back his clothing with one hand, almost like a mother getting ready to nurse. While the other hand of Jesus grabs the wrist of Thomas and pushes Thomas' pointer finger clear up to the first knuckle, into the spear wound in Jesus' side. Two other disciples peer over their shoulders and you can't tell what they're more interested in, the wound of Jesus or Thomas' reaction.

And in my version of the gospel story for today, this is the point where the "post-resurrection" Jesus (in all his elusive flesh and bone body) looks right into the heart and mind of Thomas and asks *with the finger still deep in the wound*, "Have you believed because you have seen me?"

And then comes the stinger: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." There is, of course, more than one way to take these words of Jesus. Are the words meant to accuse Thomas? Are they meant to condemn him? Or does Jesus "simply affirm that those who believe without first-hand experience of the risen Jesus are also blessed"?¹

In my video version of this story, I imagine this Caravaggio close-up with Jesus looking directly at Thomas for the first question, "Have you believed because you have seen me?"

But then, as the camera pans out, Jesus turns and looks right at the viewer, directly into the mind of the reader, speaking into the heart of everyone who has tried to follow this elusive Christ since his crucifixion and

¹ Quote is from Marcus J. Borg & John Dominic Crossan in *The Last Week* (Harper Collins, 2006), p.203.

death and gives a subtle wink as he proclaims the stinging gospel to each of us today, “Blessed are [you] who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

The resurrection – the good news that Christ Jesus has conquered death – is about seeing and touching, smelling and hearing, yes! But there is an elusiveness, a deeper truth and meaning that goes beyond anything you or I might capture with a video camera, a Polaroid film or anything we might be able to “view” on YouTube.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus is with us here, today. We might not be able to take a video or a picture of this resurrected body of Christ. But he is revealed today in as much as the wounds of Christ are still present in this world, laid bare and revealed. And make no mistake, there is hope and healing in those wounds, laid bare and revealed, today as much as there was two thousand years ago.

You see, for generations we as the Christian church have called ourselves, “the body of Christ.” It’s not any one person that makes up this body. But together, you add up all the flesh and bones across the borders of nations and the lines of ancestors. And you get a fellowship that has communed together across space and time. And there you have this *resurrected body of Christ*.

And anytime someone is present in this fellowship body who lays bare their own wounds, *the body of Christ is here*. And anytime there is someone who has known death, but knows that death didn’t have the final word, *the body of Christ is here*. And anytime there is someone picking up their cross to challenge the Gospel of consumption with the good news of the cross, *the body of Christ is here*. And anytime there is bread broken and wine poured, *the body of Christ is here*.

“Christ is risen!” we say these days. So thanks be to God that death doesn’t have the final word. Christ is risen. So thanks be to God that Jesus the Christ can walk through any and every door we might lock in fear. Christ is risen. So thanks be to God that Christ Jesus could just show up on any corner of any neighborhood of this world, bringing that familiar greeting, “Peace be with you.”

Christ is risen. Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia! Amen.