

Resurrection Has a Place: The Body

*A sermon preached by Kyle Caudle on John 20:19-31
on April 12, 2026, with First Baptist Church on Fifth, Winston-Salem, NC*

I.

In the early days of the coronavirus pandemic—and by early, I mean the first week or so—a quote from a C.S. Lewis essay kept showing up in my feed. Friends would share this quote to somehow encourage one another to keep on living despite such a great rupture in our way of life. The essay is called “How to Live in an Atomic Age.” Having lived through the bombings of London in WW2, Lewis reflects on this new age of fear—just 3 years after the United States used nuclear bombs on civilian populations in Japan and killing over 150,000 people. Knowing the horrors unleashed by nuclear warfare, Lewis was wondering what it meant to live in this strange new age—where civilizations can be destroyed in an instant.

How do you live? When things are fragile? When you don’t know what’s next? Lewis writes:

This is the first point to be made: and the first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.¹

Fear has a way of dominating our minds, doesn’t it?

Just this past Tuesday, as 8pm rolled around, I couldn’t help but worry—would a civilization really be *destroyed*? I’m checking news updates on my phone to see what might unfold. What else can I do? Though it may not be *totally* dominating my mind, fear is *certainly* trying to claim as much real estate in my brain as possible.

¹ *Present Concerns: Essays by C.S. Lewis (edited by Walter Hooper; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), pages 73–80*

Fear has a way of shutting us down, immobilizing us and definitely keeps us from doing “sensible and human things” as Lewis puts it.

II.

We see this with our disciples in our scripture today...

The disciples are locked inside their houses, huddled together in fear. Resurrection seems nowhere to be found. Fear—that age-old questioner—rages through their minds seeking to rattle hope loose with an endless stream of questions:

Will what happened to Jesus happen to us? Will they mock us?

Will they arrest us? Will they crucify us?

Other fears certainly crept in too: what do we do next? where do we go?

Who will we follow now that our friend Jesus is dead?

Let’s not forget: they had *heard* the message of resurrection proclaimed to them by Mary Magdalene: “I have seen the Lord!” She was the first witness to the Risen Christ and gladly told the disciples her testimony. They *heard* her, sure, but they didn’t *see* it with their own eyes. And for John’s gospel—*seeing is believing*.

Throughout John, Jesus performs many “signs” and “wonders”—when he performs these “signs”—those who *see* come away *believing*. During one of his healing “signs,” Jesus remarks to the group—perhaps a little critically: “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” Seeing is believing—and these disciples have not yet *seen* the Risen Lord.

They had *heard* about the Risen Lord, but what they really needed was to *see* him.

And while they are huddled together in fear, far from living the abundant life Jesus talked about—it is in *that moment—in the midst of their fear*—when Jesus shows up saying: “Peace be with you!”

Jesus doesn’t meet their fear with judgement. He doesn’t chastise them for being afraid. He doesn’t criticize their lack of faith. Rather, he meets them with a word of grace... “peace be with you” on his lips and he shows them his nail-scarred hands, and his spear-pierced side. See me? I’m right here.

Like Mary Magdalene before them, they “rejoiced when they saw the Lord.” A transformation takes place within them—their emotions turn from fear to joy. All that is going on in the world around them, all the real things to be afraid of—but now their eyes are fixed on the One in front of them... and relief sets in.

Jesus, doesn’t simply calm them down though by assuring them that he lives—that is only the first grace he offers. Again, Jesus says “Peace be with you.” This second time is followed by a statement of mission: “As my father sent me, so I send you.” He then breathes on them and gives them Holy Spirit. If the first “Peace be with you” is the assurance of the Christ’s resurrection, then this second “Peace be with you” is the assurance that they too share in his resurrection.

They are now an Easter people.

III.

As amazing as this scene was for the disciples who were there, one was missing. We don’t know why he wasn’t there—but we’ve all been there before. The calendar mix-up, the missed notification, car trouble, bad timing. Something important happens—and for some reason or another you miss out. All your friends are talking about how good that party was or that concert was or that game was and you miss out. *You should have been there!*

Thomas missed out. He missed out on an encounter with the Risen Lord and has to spend a whole week with his fellow disciples recounting the event. “We have seen the Lord,” they say just as Mary Magdalene had said to them. But Thomas wants more than to *hear* about the Risen Lord—Thomas wants to *see* for himself. You can imagine the frustration when he cries out to his friends: “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.”

And from this statement “Doubting Thomas” is born. It’s a label that Thomas can’t seem to shake. Thousands of years pass by and Thomas is still known as the doubter. But is doubt really what’s at stake here?

What Thomas is really wanting—what he really needs—is the same assurance that the disciples were given, the same assurance that Mary Magdalene was given.

Sure I can hear about it—but I want to see it for myself. Far from doubt—this is a cry of true faith, a demand even. For each of us want some kind of encounter with the holy or the sacred or God for ourselves. We don't come to church only to hear about other people's experiences with God—as good as that may be—we also want to experience God for ourselves. This is Thomas' dilemma: Jesus showed up for them, what about me?

But at the end of this week—a week after that first Easter Sunday—Jesus appears again—this time to Thomas. And the same assurance is offered: “Peace be with you.” We don't know if Thomas even needed to touch Jesus—what he really needed was to see him. For to see Jesus—is also *to be seen* by Jesus. Seeing Jesus and being seen *by* Jesus—Thomas offers one of the clearest and most personal confessions of faith in the Gospels: “My Lord and My God!”

IV.

On this side of Easter in 2026 most of us are more like Thomas than we know. We hear the words of Jesus saying “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” and think he must be talking about us—those who hear and share stories of the Resurrected One. But beneath this, I feel most of us really want to *see* Christ for ourselves and *be seen* by Christ.

What would it mean for each of us to say “I have seen the Lord”?

In his book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer references a verse from this very same chapter of John about how Jesus in this encounter with the disciples now empowers his followers to forgive sin in his name—to offer confession to one another. When Jesus did that, Bonhoeffer writes: “Christ made us into the community of faith, and in that community Christ made the other Christian to be grace for us. Now each stands in Christ's place... Christ became our brother in order to help us; *through Christ other Christians have become Christ for us* in the power and authority of Christ's commandment.”²

Through Christ other Christians have become Christ for us.

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 5: Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (general editor Wayne Whitson Ford; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), page 109.

The person to your left, the person to your right—they are Christ for you. The person behind you, the person in front of you—they are Christ for you. And you for them. In a very real sense the Body of Christ is comprised of the bodies of Christians. To see one another is to see the Lord.

Each Sunday when we offer confession and hear the assurance of forgiveness—we participate in this grace. We follow this by the Passing of the Peace. While it may seem like a great time to shake hands and catch up on the latest UNC Basketball coach hiring, the Passing of the Peace is a physical and bodily way of being Christ to one another. With hands and eyes and voices—with our bodies we offer the very words of the Risen Lord of Jesus in John 20: “Peace... be with you.”

Passing of the Peace is a weekly reminder that Christ stands with and among and for us—even in the face of the hurt and harm this world so often inflicts. A Christ that stands with and among and for us—in a world that continues to study war. A Christ that stands with and among and for us—despite all the reasons to be afraid. The Passing of the Peace tells a different story—one of life overcoming death, faith overcoming fear, and Love above all. In a very real way it unlocks the doors of our hearts—opening them to one another—and proclaiming the Risen Christ who offers peace.

So look around: “I have seen the Lord.”

Amen.