

Let us cut poor Thomas some slack.

He is forever dubbed “doubting,” and that’s not entirely fair. That is not how he is treated in the story, for example. If anything, he is our proxy, our stand in—no less, no more.

He, like we, has not been present at Christ’s first appearances. He now gets up close and examines the evidence in our stead.

“Have you believed because you have seen me?” Jesus asks Thomas. Then adding, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come believe,” he turns to the rest of us.

It is true—we have not seen. Nor have we been able to touch. We have only *read* or *heard*.

Yet we know—many of us—what it is to *see*. And we know, all of us, what it is to *touch*.

We know, for example, that to *see* is more than a means of finding our way—it is to register beauty and to recognize pain. To see inspires love—to look at that newborn; to watch someone grow or become frail. And so to see inspires compassion also. To look at a wound can cause revulsion; it can also make us want to reach out and care.

And touch is more than a way to move or to hold on to things—to touch, as in this case, is a way to discover or confirm. It is also to heal, to love, to caress and express intimacy.

Sometimes these things are one and the same.

On an HIV/Aids ward in London’s Middlesex Hospital, at a time when the diagnosis caused considerable fear, Princess Diana—in front of BBC film crews and photojournalists’ cameras—shook the hand of a man suffering with the illness. Skin upon skin.

That touch may not have rid the man’s emaciated body of the virus; it brought a wide reaching healing all the same. If Diana was prepared to touch the hand of such a person, then maybe the disease—then maybe *he*—wasn’t quite so frightening after all.

Jesus who once touched so many to heal them now invited Thomas to touch him. *Seeing*, it seems, was enough for Thomas on this occasion. Even without touching he declared, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus's wounded hands and side confirmed that this was indeed the one who had been crucified. More than that, this confirmed that crucifixion—that *death*—was not the last word.

Not the *last* word, but not a *forgotten* word, either. Even in resurrection Christ bears the marks of his death. Whatever may have happened—and the resurrection is far from easy to describe, let alone fathom—it is no mere reversal. This is no *undoing* of death: notably, neither the events of Christ's life nor the scars of crucifixion have been erased.

No eternal soul here departs a finally sloughed off body. Nowhere is this life treated as a hallway to some great room beyond.

Popular Christianity, particularly its protestant variety, would leave us imagining that the value of all our whole lives can be reduced to the question: Do we accept Christ, or no?

Or have it treated as a board game in which accepting Christ gains us a Get Out Of Jail Free card and a secured outcome.

All that seeing, hearing, touching—and yes indeed, tasting and smelling too—apparently for nothing.

All that beauty, that love, that compassion, that pain.

We may think salvation comes *in spite* of all this. Today's gospel suggests otherwise—the experiences of this life, good or ill, are part and parcel of it. Its form is resurrection; the experiences of this life, good or ill, its identifying marks.

How can it be that those things, which seemed able only to harm us, can be part of—constitutive of—new life? I really don't know. I really don't know even how to articulate it. And I don't say that that which harms us does anything but harm. Harm is to be avoided—whenever possible—not sought. But harm, like death, is not the last word, the Resurrection tells us.

And that overflows into our lives right now.

Our lives—our bodies—now are not unimportant. Not something to escape. They are sacred and will be fully recognized as such in the Resurrection. Here is the very foundation of Christian mission, Christian social justice. We feed, we clothe, and we offer healing to those around us precisely because the lives—the bodies—of others are sacred also.

Insofar as we begin this work we are beginning the work of Resurrection. Or rather, we are recognizing that the work of Resurrection has begun in them as well.

This is precisely why the work of the church has never been simply about saving souls—this is precisely why there’s no saving souls apart from the business of saving bodies.

Since the Resurrection calls upon more senses than simply hearing, I conclude with two works of art that recognize Resurrection as in some way defining our lives here and now.

Luca Signorelli’s *Resurrection of the Flesh* (c. 1500): in the cathedral of Orvieto, Italy. It is the last day and the dead are joyfully taking on their bodies—magnificent specimens, agile and muscular. Notice how obviously in celebrating the Resurrected body, Signorelli is celebrating the bodies we already know. Notice, too, that these bodies are not private possessions but communal things: the Resurrected gather in groups, delighting in community, in the shared experience of new life.

As Stanley Spencer’s *The Resurrection, Cookham* (1927), tells us, the artist recognized the Resurrection occurring in his midst—well, the midst of his village, Cookham, England. Spencer himself is naked in the middle, others—villagers he knew or knows—are donning the clothes they wore in life and heading to Thames steamers taking them either to London or to Heaven. Who’s to know?