

“More than a Show & Tell”

John 20:19-31

Who doesn't like to see something with their own eyes? We are a people of “proof.” Some of us more than others.

We all know that the state of Hawaii released President Obama's official “long form birth certificate” this week. It is a piece of paper that the Administration had hoped would put to rest at least one man's concern.

During his own press conference, after President Obama's press conference on the subject, Donald Trump told reporters: “I'm very proud of myself because I've accomplished something that nobody else has been able to accomplish...I am really honored, frankly, to have played such a big role in hopefully, hopefully, getting rid of this issue. I am really proud, I am really honored.”

Trump said he's played a big role in “hopefully getting rid of the issue,” but he then went on to say that he wants to see the birth certificate himself and make sure “*it's real, it's proper, and that it checks out as valid.*”¹ Even with the President

himself walking out and standing behind the Presidential Seal and taking the time to do a national press conference...Trump still wants to see it for himself.

Last night at the Annual White House Correspondent's Dinner, President Obama gave Trump that chance by flashing the real, “long form birth certificate” on and off during a video montage of iconic American images to Hulk Hogan's theme song, “I am a Real American.” He then went on to say that he would add further proof by showing his official birth video. But rather than footage of a baby Barack being born in Hawaii, the clip was from Disney's “The Lion King,” showing the grand unveiling of the baby lion, Simba, in Africa.²

Of course, both videos were poking fun at Trump and others...but Trump didn't look like he was having fun. Apparently, this is a serious issue for him (politically and perhaps otherwise)...proof of a birth

¹ T-Marie, “Donald Trump's Response To The Birth Certificate: He Is Proud & Honored” *The Buzz in the City.com* (27 April 2011). Accessed on 30 April

2011 at <http://thebuzzinthecity.com/donald-trumps-response-to-the-birth-certificate-he-is-proud-honored/>.

²The CNN Wire Staff, “Obama lampoons Trump, releases ‘birth video’ at annual dinner” *CNN.com* (1 May 2011). Accessed on 1 May 2011 at <http://www.cnn.com/2011/POLITICS/05/01/white.house.correspondents.dinner/index.html?iref=allsearch>.

certificate is something to be had in hand, not had in a bunch of jokes.

When comedian Seth Meyer got up to speak he continued the birth certificate banter: *“In a recent poll 38% Americans believe our President was born in America...in that same poll, only 5% more think Trump was born in America. Has it come to the point where we only believe people were born here if we actually saw them being born ourselves with our own two eyes?”* He then said he was quite certain his *younger* brother was an American, but he wasn’t so sure about his *older* brother... can he trust his parents...can he really take their word for it...because Seth himself wasn’t able to be there in person to witness it...so how can he really know?³

No one was there to witness Jesus’ resurrection...in person. Their witness to this miracle spread through word of mouth. And even as the words came out of their mouths, you get the feeling that they’re not even sure if they fully believed what they were saying. But their experience was so powerful...so revelatory...that they couldn’t *not* share what they had experienced. They missed the main event, but when Jesus started showing up to them in person...that’s when

their witness got its weight. And yet the witness of word alone still seemed to be not enough.

After hearing someone else’s witness, no matter who it was that raced to the tomb to see if Jesus was there – his absence was not enough to prove to them that he was resurrected. They needed his presence - his incarnational presence. We see this time and time again.

The presence of the angels didn’t convince Mary Magdalene. It took Jesus himself, whom she mistook to be a gardener, to give her the proof she needed. And the point of recognition came not when she saw him, but when Jesus called her by name.

So she ran off to tell others. But Mary Magdalene’s testimony didn’t convince the disciples it seems. As we see in our text today, they are locked up in a room – afraid. It took Jesus finding *them*...coming into *their locked room* (it was almost like they were huddling in their own self-inflicted tomb), and it took Jesus showing them the wounds on his hands and on his side for them to know he had risen from the dead. And upon their recognition, Jesus breathed his spirit of peace upon them and gave them the task of going out to be his witness.

³ Paraphrased from the Live Coverage Video “2011 White House Correspondents’ Association Dinner” on *C-SPAN.org* (30 April 2011). Watched on 1 May 2011 at <http://www.c-span.org/WHCD/>.

So they go and find their friend, Thomas, who hadn't been there with them, and they tell him the good news, but Thomas – he doesn't take their word for it either! It takes Jesus coming back to them again when Thomas is there...and before Thomas can even ask...Jesus invites Thomas to physically touch his wounds...and it is in the act of touch that Thomas is assured and speaks, "*My Lord, My God!*"

Next week we'll see two more disciples, Cleopas and his companion, who are struggling to believe the stories they are hearing about the resurrection...and they are talking about this as they walk to Emmaus. And the "stranger" (whom we know to be Jesus) that joins them doesn't convince them with his words about what the prophets had said or what had been foretold about these events. It wasn't until they invited the "stranger" into their home, and to their table, that they recognized him as the risen Lord. And their recognition came not through conversation...but through the action of breaking bread.

Time after time...word of mouth failed to convince people that Jesus really had risen from the dead. There was no "official long form certificate of Resurrection" to go pull out of a file as visible proof. There was only Jesus himself. *But even when Jesus himself* (walking and talking as living

proof!) was in their midst - they still had no idea who he was and still did not believe.

You see...no matter what they were **told** by their friends...and despite the fact that Jesus **showed up** in their midst...they could not grasp what had happened.

It took more than a "Show & Tell" for them to recognize the risen Lord. It wasn't words or even Jesus' standing in their midst that gave them the "proof" they needed. It took something different for each one of them to come to their own point of recognition – of knowing who was in their midst – the risen Lord. For one, it took a personal word...a look in his eyes and hearing the familiar inflection in the sound of his voice as he said, "Mary." For others, it took the physical action of Jesus coming into a locked room and lifting up his garments and exposing his wounds and breathing out peace. For another, it took an act of touch – of feeling a raw wound. And for two more, it took the act of breaking bread...of tasting and remembering what Jesus had said...

This past Wednesday, it took more than hearing a message or seeing a photo for Corey Soper to realize that his life had been turned upside down, literally:

As [his] flight to Birmingham began its descent, Corey peered out the window at the disfigured sprawl of Tuscaloosa below. There, he said, pointing: that light brown scar marks the tornado's path.

After studying it in silence, he snapped a few photographs with a cell phone that had in its memory another photograph, sent to him just hours earlier, of a one-story brick house that had been all but destroyed by that same tornado.

His house.

The 33-year-old husband and father lives just outside Tuscaloosa, but works as a welder on a pipeline in Nevada, because that is where the work is. Now, after a heart-pounding day of worrying from a distance for the safety of his wife and two young children, he was coming home to a broken house, clutching a blue luggage ticket that represented the only clothes he had left.

And yet he considered himself lucky, so very lucky. His family is safe, he said, his voice tight. "And now we can build new memories."

[When] Corey showed up Thursday evening, as the sun was setting he [drove] through his devastated neighborhood, past the smashed cars and the downed power lines and the piece of metal wrapped in a bow in the trees, and [arrived at what had been his] home.

Corey looked around. It was not as it had appeared in that cell phone photograph. It was real.⁴

⁴ Dan Barry, "Losing Everything, Except What Really Matters" *The New York Times* (30 April 2011). Accessed on 30 April 2011 at http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/us/01land.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=losing%20everything&st=cse.

It took more than hearing a message on his phone or seeing a scene from a plane. It took Corey physically being there for it to sink in. For him to know it was real.

After the Resurrection, it took more than just Jesus showing up for folks to know it was real. For his disciples, it took first-hand experiences with him: it took hearing and feeling and touching and eating and tasting... for it to sink in... for the light bulb of recognition to go off... for the celebration of Easter to truly begin.

The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ was an incarnational witness then... and it remains an incarnational witness today. As the Body of Christ today, we must be an incarnational witness because ours is an incarnational faith. And if our faith is incarnational – that means it's multidimensional... it's sensory and experiential. It takes knowing people and calling them by name. It takes breaking bread together with strangers in your home. It takes wanting to get close enough to someone to touch their wounds... to see their pain. It takes exhaling peace into places where uncertainty and anxiety and sadness and fear reside.

There is nothing two-dimensional about our faith – it is a multi-faceted and multi-sensory embodied faith. There is nothing two-dimensional about our faith because there is

nothing two-dimensional about Christ. Especially the risen Christ...as Easter Christians, we have no excuse not to be the full incarnational presence of Jesus to one another. Why? Because we have been given new life and life everlasting because Jesus was raised to life and conquered death – for himself...and for all of us.

In this passage, Jesus' act of breathing on the disciples also recalls the creative breath of God bringing life into being in Genesis and re-energizing and raising new life in the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel. So Jesus' act of "breathing on them" in this passage simultaneously represents the continuing presence of the risen Christ with his disciples and the creative power of God always at work to enliven creation itself.⁵

This second Sunday after Easter we are reminded that it is still Easter! The celebration continues. For we are being re-created always...we are being given new chances at new life and new opportunities and ways of living...of living incarnationally as the presence of Christ to one another. You are being re-created anew right now even...in this very moment.

⁵ From Gail O'Day and Susan Hysten's book *John, Westminster Bible Companion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), pg 195 as referenced in D. Cameron Murchison, "Theological Perspective: John 20:19-31" *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary Year A, Vol. 2 Lent through Eastertide*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 2010, pg 396.

And if we learn anything from how Jesus interacts with Thomas, or if we learn anything from Jesus' interactions with his friends Mary Magdalene and Cleopas, it is that to be a new creation...to rise up as a resurrection people...well, that means each one of us is to be someone that doesn't just tell of our faith to friends or show up to worship or Bible study...those things are part of the equation, yes...but they are not the whole equation. Walking alongside another, person-to-person contact and fellowship – those things take time and patience and vulnerability. But those things are crucial because as we've seen, **true recognition of the living Christ comes through an incarnational encounter**. That is...through touching and tasting and breaking bread...through being, literally, the hands and feet of Christ.

We are not following Christ's example if we merely show up here at church. Like Christ, we have to go out from this place and meet people where they are and see what each one needs as an individual. And as we meet needs in this way, one by one, people come to know themselves as uniquely important and loved and their eyes can begin to be opened to how Jesus Christ is alive and present and working in their lives – personally. They begin to recognize the incarnational Christ because we are incarnating Christ's love to them.

I was in Florida on Friday, and people were abuzz about NASA's *Endeavor* Launch that afternoon. We know now of course, that the launch didn't happen. But one thing that did happen was that President Obama had a chance to speak with Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords (who is still recovering from the gunshot wounds in her head from January) and her husband, Kelly (who is a crew member on the shuttle itself). As Obama went to meet the NASA crew after the announcement that the launch would be delayed, Kelly greeted the President in the corridor: *"I bet you were hoping to see a rocket launch today,"* he said. Obama replied: *"We were hoping to see you."*⁶

I love that response. Our personal encounters with one another...are so much more important than any grand event or show we could ever put on to be a witness of Christ's love for the world. How we are with each other one-on-one is the living testimony of Christ that has the strongest impact. The one who was Love Incarnate himself calls us to incarnate (in the flesh) that love to others. When you say to someone, *"I was hoping to see you,"* you are giving them the gift that

⁶ Alice Park, "The Shuttle Didn't Fly, but Giffords' Trip Was Still a Victory" *TIME Magazine* (29 April 2011). Accessed on 30 April 2011 at <http://healthland.time.com/2011/04/29/the-shuttle-didnt-launch-but-giffords-trip-to-cape-canaveral-was-still-a-victory/>.

Jesus gave his followers right after the resurrection – a “no strings attached” welcome. Jesus is never too disappointed at what we do or what happens in our life to not say to us time and time again – *"I was hoping to see you."* Why else would he go, time and time again, to meet his friends and reveal himself to them in whatever way they needed? He didn't just show up and tell them it was him. He spoke a name, he breathed out peace, he exposed his wounds, and he walked along beside and went into a home and broke bread. He was physically present with them in every way possible.

Jesus is walking in our midst. We can point to him and say nice words about him and show people our church where we worship him...but unless we are revealing his love through our actions – we are not living as a post-Resurrection people who have been given new life and who now get to live and love with the Spirit of that new life.

The risen Christ is hoping to see you.

But even more importantly, the world is needing to see the risen Christ in and through you.

Amen.