

Easter II Year A 2026

My friend Creighton Allen died during Easter some nine years ago... Creighton, as some of you may know, was an unhoused man who hung out around All Saints from time to time, over several years... I'd told him, officially, that he couldn't live here... but sometimes after a rainy night I'd find him here asleep early in the morning, or, on a hot day, late in the afternoon, sitting on the church steps. He had a knack for staying out of the way, how to live unobtrusively in the shadows.... He grew up in Pearl River Louisiana... and according to Creighton he got into drugs in his hometown and left to get away from friends who were a bad influence on him... he was very bright and resourceful... one has to be when one lives on the streets.... I've often wondered why he, and the many like him, don't live like the rest of us... but like many of the homeless, it was a lifestyle that he knew.... Statistics say that the vast majority of our homeless population suffer from mental illness and more often than not, addiction.... To say the least they live in a parallel world apart from most of us; and yet they all have stories... of Love and loss, of joy and sorrow. Creighton played basketball in high school; played the guitar... his mother teaches still at a Bible college in Slidell. He has a sister and some cousins, a brother who died at a young age.... His mother taught him how to cook; and she taught him to mind his manners.

On Fridays he often asked me what my sermon was about... and I often tried out on him what I was thinking about saying... "Don't go too long," he'd say... On Easter morning we found him exhausted and disoriented... we called 911 and he was taken to the Infirmary. He was

admitted and placed in the ICU. He was severely dehydrated, and had a dangerous infection on his foot, about which we in the office had tried to persuade him to get seen by a doctor, but he would have none of that.... after a few days in the ICU, he developed an infection in his spine, most probably from his foot, and began experiencing paralysis.... He had emergency surgery... but soon we knew that death was coming. I went to see him the Friday afternoon before he died on Saturday... I laid my hands on his shoulders.... so very thin; his arms and his legs... I wondered how long it had been since he had actually laid in a proper bed.... The intensive care nurse was carefully and silently going about his business tending with deliberate care and skill to this broken soul... no wasted motions, gentle and kind... his knowing hands. Creighton was nobody in our world, but I realized in that intimate, sacred space that he was my friend.... And a friend of the world... In that moment, watching the ministrations of the nurse, I realized that this was all there was... loving care, being present to each other. Sacred proximity.

Today's reading from John's gospel is the famous story of doubting Thomas... at least so-called by the tradition... Most preachers that I have heard have used this story to assuage our guilt over having moments of doubt in our lives of faith... You know, if one of the disciples doubted then it must be O.K. for us.... But this gospel writer knows well, just as Paul Tillich articulated some sixty years ago, that doubt is a necessary dynamic of faith... that doubt leads us to questions, and into discovery... doubt is the catalyst of critical thinking... doubt bears

witness to the truth that all theology is speculative, evolving.... Indeed it is Thomas, not the other disciples, who has the mystical experience upon encountering the risen Christ.

So let's look at the story again: Jesus comes to the locked room and appears to the disciples... on that same day, according to John... that same day being the day of resurrection..... And the first thing he tells his friends is shalom.... Peace... peace be with you... not just peace, the absence of conflict; shalom is a rich word. It means, among other things peace of mind and spirit, completeness, and a profound sense of well-being... and Jesus reminds them of what the writer John has been saying throughout his narrative: that as the father has sent me so I send you... and then Jesus bids them, receive the Holy Spirit.... That's odd... The writer Luke in Acts has the disciples receiving the Spirit at Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection... here the Spirit is given on the very day of Jesus' rising from the grave... Again, theology, not history... and yet more differing points of view by the gospel writers.

And then, a week later, Thomas is with the fellowship in the same room, and Jesus appears again, and Thomas demands to place his hands in the wounds... the week-old wounds in Jesus' hands and side... and Thomas proclaims "my Lord and my God." ...This is not a story about doubt, but a story about recognition.... It is not in seeing the risen Christ that he has his epiphany... It is in the placing his hand into the wound that he knows the truth of the resurrection.... As to what is real, the eye may fool us... but our hands never will... And that is the moral of the story... that to know the risen Christ, we must place our hands into the wounds of our world.... We must have intimate contact with the world's wounded, the sick,

the abused and shamed, the untouchable, the broken; the nobodies... what the liberation theologians called the non-persons....

We can't know Jesus as a philosophy or a principle, or a theological icon... we can only know Christ among the broken and cast out, so very near to us, yet worlds apart... I have said before that Jesus for John is our view onto what God is like; and the same is true for us. John's Gospel is as much about our true identity as it is about that of Jesus... so here the author makes a stunning, unlikely claim that our God is like us, wounded... that resurrection doesn't exist apart from the wounds we incur along life's journey; a rose among thorns... that God is in radical solidarity with our suffering... that God does not sit in judgement, but is drawn by compassion and empathy into radical solidarity with God's beloved.... If we want to know God.... If we want to experience God, we must place our hands in the wounds of the poor and the sick in intimate proximity.... We must embrace the prisoner... we must empathize with the addict...we must help with steady hands the disabled; we must provide welcome and safety for the immigrant; we must love those whom the world deems unlovable.... Because it is there among the lost and the least and the scapegoated that the Spirit shows up... it is from the wounds of the broken that resurrection life is set loose.... Not just for them, nor for us... there is no us and them... resurrection life is for the whole of us... there is no shalom until all are cared for and treated like somebody... treated like somebody made in God's image.... A wounded and broken image like us.

This passage flies in the face of conventional wisdom: We have been taught that God is all knowing, all powerful, unchanging, unknowable perfection... but here God is broken like us... wounded like us... knowable, present.... So in our careful tending to the broken of our world, being sent as Jesus was sent... we are tending to the very wounds of God... so that one day, one day all manner of thing will be well.... Healed and whole and at last, unbroken.... And at peace.