

SERMON AT BRUSWICK: 7/4/2002: GEOFF CHADWICK: EASTER 2: JN

20:19-31: “SPIRITUAL/MATERIAL”

It is well recognised by those schooled in Spiritual Direction that different people have different approaches to their spirituality. In particular, it is known that some people feel closest to God in silent meditation whereas others need to pour out words of prayer. Some find God through reading “spiritual books” whereas others find God in the “book of nature.” Some find God in the absence of others whilst others need company around them.

These differences also change throughout life. Perhaps you can note how your ways of finding God have changed. Perhaps over the years you’ve become more contemplative, or perhaps you’ve become more extroverted. It would be interesting to note how God has come to us in different ways as we have changed through the years.

There is something of this in the story of Jesus’ appearance to Thomas.

Thomas is a material type guy. Perhaps we could imagine him singing Madonna’s song; “I am just a material boy and I’m living in a material world.” (Or perhaps it’s best not to try and imagine this!) Thomas is a here and now type of guy: “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.” (Jn 20:25, NRSV). This is not such an unreasonable request. I can imagine myself making it. I’m a material sort of guy – I find God through the exploration of objects and space and beauty. Reality for me is something to take hold of. God for me is to be grasped. I’m reminded by what one of my theological student friends once said: “Sure I love God but at least I can hug my wife!” Material guys and material girls somehow need to touch the untouchable.

Well in the Gospel story as it is presented to us, Thomas seems to be a bit of a loner. All the other disciples seem to have developed a non-physical approach to

spirituality. The appearance of the Lord to them without touching was enough to convince them of the reality of God. They are included in the group: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” (Jn 20:29, NRSV).

This, of course, is a literary device used by John to encourage the early believers, and even us. We are not part of that group who saw the risen Lord directly. We are ones “who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” (Jn 20:29, NRSV).

So what about us material guys and gals? Are we to find faith more difficult than those believe intuitively? Are we put out to pasture with poor old “doubting Thomas?” Well no, because there is a curious thing when it comes to the resurrection. The risen Jesus appears in both body-like and non-body-like ways. He comes through locked doors, yet simultaneously with wound marks. He is sometimes recognisable and at other times mysteriously unrecognisable. He is both body and spirit and spirit and body. The new Jesus is both spiritual and physical. This new Jesus thus inspires both the material and non-material guys and gals of this world. All spiritual paths are captivated by the risen Christ. All become stunned at his appearance and all of us simply proclaim: “My Lord and My God!”