



Anthony D’Ambrosio, age 29, of Wall, New Jersey, wrote a column appearing in *USA Today* this week titled “5 reasons marriage doesn’t work anymore.”¹ He was married and is now divorced. Among the reasons he cites for why marriages just don’t work for his generation is that for too many their desire for attention outweighs their desire for love and they are more connected than ever before while being totally disconnected from each other.

You have undoubtedly seen it, too: you are having dinner at a restaurant and the couple or the family in the booth across from you doesn’t talk to each other. They are too busy texting each other or friends or taking pictures of what they are about to eat. The art of conversation, of connection, doesn’t exist.

This week’s Gospel lesson is always the Gospel lesson for the Second Sunday in Easter. The story of what we often call “Doubting Thomas.” Thomas wants what Mary Magdalene had at the tomb: real time, real person encounter with the risen Christ in the garden. Thomas wants what the other disciples had: a real time, real person encounter with the risen Christ in the upper room. Can you blame Thomas for wanting what his friends and companions had experienced? I can’t.

And so Jesus appears once again to the disciples, this time including Thomas, who now sees the holes of the nails in the hands and feet and the sword pierce in the side. This Jesus who was crucified and still bears the scars. This Jesus who has surmounted all that the world could throw at him and has risen to take his place at the right hand of God, just as Jesus told the disciples.

Jesus says to Thomas: Do not doubt but believe. Seeing Jesus moves Thomas to proclaim: My Lord and my God. Not just temporal Lord but God. Not just human but divine. Transition. Acknowledgment. Relationship transformed by the cross into new life and new ways of being. Not sitting across the table from each other not speaking but texting. Jesus requires that we engage in conversation and be in relationship with each other. Face-to-face and that’s part of what Sunday mornings ought to be about.

A bookstore owner was asked what types of religious books were selling the most. To the surprise of the questioner, the answer was Buddhist. Why is that, the questioner asked the store owner? “I would have thought books on Christianity would be your biggest sellers.” “Well,” the bookstore owner responded, “Christianity is mostly about doctrines and dogmas while Buddhism is about a way of life.” Sad commentary on how Christianity can be perceived. A dead religion and not one lived out day-to-day by ordinary people.

¹ <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2015/04/07/sex-columnist-5-reasons-marriage-doesnt-work-anymore/25398635/> (April 11, 2015)

Acts 4: 32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20: 19-31

Thomas wants- and Jesus offers- relationship. And relationships are not always easy. They are often messy. Belief in Jesus as Son of God, belief in the resurrection, offers us a chance to be who we really are. To acknowledge that we do not always get everything right but that is ok because we are humans forgiven by God and offered new life through Jesus the Christ. We don't have to worry about selfies that get posted to the cloud because we forgot to change the privacy settings or how many friends we have on Facebook or whether we are first in line for the Apple watch.

We talked a bit about the word "believe" when Adult Formation looked at the Creeds earlier this year. For many, the phrases beginning with "I believe" or "We believe" are difficult as we are asked to take a proposition on faith – that is, we don't have the ability today to see Jesus with the nail holes still evident. We give our heart to something that we can't prove scientifically. We create the framework for our life around something that we trust in – while we know that we could be wrong. I don't think we're wrong but I can't run an experiment in the lab to convince you I'm right, either. Our perceptions are our reality.

A few years ago a story circulated that may or may not be true. If not factually true, it still has some truth we can learn from it. Derek Nelson, Professor of Religion at Wabash, was kind enough to share it in his Tuesday Morning Chapel homily.² The story goes as follows:

A young woman noticed that in the car parked next to her, a woman was in the driver's seat, her arms draped over her head, her head resting against the steering wheel, with her eyes tightly closed. She was not moving a muscle.

Linda, the observer, thought to herself, "That's off. I wonder if she's OK..." She thought about saying something but decided to do her shopping, then check back later. Twenty minutes later Linda came back and that the woman was still totally motionless.

Linda then became very concerned. She knocked on the window. No response. She opened the door and said to the woman, "Are you all right?" The woman replied weakly, "I've been shot! I've been shot in the neck."

This is going to turn out ok- but at that moment Linda was confused. There were no signs of foul play, no blood, no bullet holes. Linda examined the woman's throat- nothing. She got into the passenger's seat and looked at the right side of the woman's neck- nothing there either.

Then she leaned back over the seat and examined the woman's neck and there she saw it. She discovered an uncooked Pillsbury biscuit stuck to the back of the woman's neck.

She saw a sack of groceries and on top was a can of Pillsbury biscuit dough that had exploded from the heat, shooting the uncooked biscuit forward, smacking the back of the woman's neck. The poor woman was trying not to move, as she thought she was holding her brains in.

² January 27, 2015.

Acts 4: 32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20: 19-31

Her perception was her reality. And our reality today is often frightening and nearly unbearable. Our reality today often discourages us from getting close to people because we never know when we might be on camera and our privacy invaded or our very life threatened. It is a heck of a way to live being afraid and mistrusting others.

While accepting that our media doesn't always tell the whole story or tell all the various points of view, you only have to watch or listen to the news this last week to wonder if perhaps we might have been like the woman in the car – perceiving an exploding biscuit as the sound and then a feeling of being hit by something that might have been a gunshot.

Belief in Jesus as the Christ won't keep us from all harm. It does give us a center to hold to when life around us is experienced as frightening and disconnected or dangerous. When we hold to the truth that Jesus is the one who can show us the best that relationship can be we can sit at table, as he did, and converse with those around us. Retreating to our own disconnected worlds of text or snapping pictures of the food we are about to eat is less appealing than having real time, real life, conversations with the ones we are seated next to.

The beginning of the church as relayed in our reading from the Acts of the Apostles gives us a model once Jesus had ascended of what life can be like. They shared so that none had need. Unspoken but important in this passage is that all contributed as they were able. There was no lazing about. No entitlements. All worked for the good of all and all prospered because of a common vision and willingness to engage. No desire for attention superseding the desire for love. The psalmist long before the passage in Acts was written says it this way in Psalm 133: "Oh, how good and pleasant it is, when brethren live together in unity... For there the Lord has ordained the blessing: life for evermore."

The blessing of the resurrection is that life for evermore is promised to us if we will enter into relationship with Jesus. Sin is forgiven so that we may be reunited with God once more and live without want and without a desire for attention that snuffs out the blessings of the love of God. Amen.