



The Incredulity of Saint Thomas, Caravaggio, 1601-1602.

Greetings!

Please read [John 20:19-29](#)

Throughout his career, the Baroque artist Caravaggio painted stories with scriptural connection. Caravaggio was not a spiritual superstar, at least at first glance. Known for his wild ways in his personal life, Caravaggio was promiscuous and was prone to start bar fights for the purpose of determining if he was the strongest person in the room. After killing a man and running away, he found a new life, while still struggling with the old one.¹ One of his subjects was the Disciple Thomas, also known as the Twin.

Thomas gets to ask all the good questions in the Gospel of John. You can find these questions in the Farewell Discourse.² I believe that Thomas' questions were wrapped in his desire to understand what Jesus was asking him and the others to do with their lives. In the discourse it is clear that Jesus was preparing them to take over the ministry after his death. Jesus died by execution, and it was shocking. The disciples were traumatized. Reread the original ending of the Gospel of Mark and you will see the band of disciples running back to Galilee in fear of their lives! When the other disciples reported that they saw Jesus after his crucifixion, Thomas questioned. Thomas even said he wouldn't believe unless he personally saw and touched Jesus. His need to touch has some commonality with Caravaggio.

What are the commonalities between the two? If you look at a list of Caravaggio's paintings you will find that the religious depictions from scripture have a quality of conversion or at least a great spiritual awakening.³ I wonder as do others, if this period in Caravaggio's life was a season of awakening. As he touched the canvas, the paint, the brush and he saw what he created on the canvas, he was changed. Like other artists he painted portraits of himself even in the scriptural paintings like in last week's painting *Ecce Homo*. Painting yourself on the canvas is an invitation to the

notion of imagination and identity in the text in a deeper way than just a casual perusal or read of the scriptures. I believe that in the act of painting, Caravaggio's "outer nature was wasting away but day by day his inner nature was being restored."⁴

Like Caravaggio, Thomas imagined himself in the ministry by asking questions of Jesus. In the discourse, they move from followers of an itinerant Rabbi to the inheritors of a faith. Not only that, they begin a new religion and become the leaders. In the Farewell Discourse, Thomas paints himself in the text if you will, and not only enters into the imagination of the artform (the Biblical Narrative) but indeed with the Savior himself in a most intimate way. How often do you or I receive the invitation to touch wounded hands and the side of another? The Farewell Discourse is not a sermon that the listener can casually cast away. It is a transformational moment for Thomas and the other disciples. Caravaggio must have felt that pathos to paint this painting. He caught the intimacy of trauma on canvas! Both Thomas and Caravaggio touched, and they saw. They were forever changed.

It has been said that trauma that is not transformed is trauma that is transferred. Please take a look at the cited Ted Talk in the footnote.⁵ Trauma is real and a major part of our everyday lives. In our world where passions are raised around race, ethnicity, trauma, pandemics, life whether spiritual or secular, and all in between, I am so grateful for the scriptures and faithful artists who get it. By finding their transformation on the canvas, in the song, and on the page they inspire and transform us because it happened to them first. For artists like Caravaggio the canvas is like a skilled counselor, priest or preacher that helps one work out their faith.

For Thomas and the Disciples, transformation came in the post resurrection experiences. It was at that moment they became Apostles. As my friend and mentor Rev. Rebekah Simon-Peter reminds me, the Apostles were anointed ambassadors, appointed, authorized, and accountable.⁶ They never would have gotten there without the faithful questions of Thomas, and if not for Caravaggio, we would have missed a depth I just can't imagine living without.

Conversation

- What image(s) grab your attention in the painting?
- Where is your canvas located?
- What might you be painting?
- What needs to be released?
- What do you need to take on?
- What transformation do you need to make?

¹ www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/may/27/caravaggio-lust-talent-power-jonathan-jones

² John Chapters 14-17

³ www.caravaggiogallery.com

⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:16

⁵ www.ted.com/talks/tabitha_mpamira_kaguri_trauma_not_transformed_is_trauma_transferred_what_baton_are_you_passing_on

⁶ Simon-Peter, Rebekah, [Creating a Culture of Renewal](#), copyright 2020.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Todd".

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