

"The Disabled God" - Rev. Daniel Hayward

Wall Street United Church, April 12, 2026

John 20:1-18 from the New International Version

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

I preached on the Sunday after Christmas, and this year I have been asked to preach on the Sundays after Easter and Christmas. So I have become a specialist in the Sundays *after* big festivals of the church!!

I'm the closer. I'm like Jeff Hoffman... that's a Toronto Blue Jays reference. I know that some people don't get into baseball until hockey ends, which now seems to be around Canada Day. I do not recall the NHL season being so long when I was a boy. Did you know that when the Maple Leafs last won the Stanley Cup, it was on May 2nd? Of course, to find that out I had to do some translation, as that was so long ago the Roman Empire was still around and they used the old calendar in Latin! (You did not expect an Ottawa Senators fan to get up here and mention the Leafs and not make a joke about it!! Ottawa! We're very full of ourselves with our 11 Stanley Cups, none of which are within the last 99 years 😊 !)

So, where were we? Back to the first Easter.

If you played word association based on people's names, and if you said "**Thomas**," many parents would reply "**Tank Engine**." I think this is now more commonly '*Thomas and Friends*' because no one knows that a tank engine is a steam locomotive in England, and who remembers steam trains anymore?

But in days gone by if you said "*Thomas*" the word associated with the name would be "Doubting." **Doubting Thomas**. That's what we call him, based on this week's Gospel story. This seems a little unfair to me. After all, in the Easter stories in the Bible the women tell the male disciples that Jesus is risen, and they don't believe it until Jesus shows up in their midst. They're not called the doubting disciples! Thomas comes off better in other stories in John's Gospel, even braver than the other followers of Jesus. In Christian tradition Thomas carries the good news of the resurrection of Jesus further than any of the other apostles, as far as India, where there are still churches traced back as far as his ministry. But he's still stuck with being the doubter!

I have preached before about Thomas and doubt. But I want to pick up on something else. This is the Second Sunday of Easter, which way back, in the old days of the church, was called **Quasimodo Sunday** after the words at the Latin Mass — "*Quasi modo geniti infantes*" (there is your Latin for today!) "*as newborn babies*," very appropriate for a service with baptism. But if we do word association with Quasimodo, most people will say '*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*', and I'm a hunchback. So let's see where I am going with this.

So much of this Easter story deals with Jesus appearing after his resurrection that I want to talk about his body. Now, we talk about the body of Christ in two ways. One is not literal. It comes from scripture where the church is called "*the body of Christ.*" The church is the continuation of the risen body of Jesus. The church is born when the Holy Spirit is sent upon the followers of Jesus, as Jesus promised. Here, in John's Gospel, it is on the first Easter evening, as Jesus breathes on his disciples, an act of creating ... just as when the world was formed, God breathed life into the first human. And Jesus says, "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*" He gives them the authority to forgive sins. The church has begun! And, when we baptize, one of the meanings of baptism is that it is joining this body, initiation into the church, entering into a way of life together following Jesus.

But this story is much more about his literal body. The Gospel is making the point that the risen Christ is the same as Jesus of Nazareth who had been crucified. His body isn't in the tomb. He speaks! He can be touched! In other stories he holds things, he cooks, he eats. He isn't a ghost, or a reanimated corpse like a zombie. (These were common in stories told at that time, and the Gospel writers wanted to rule this out.) He is the same person as before.

But he is also mysteriously different. He can appear and disappear, he can go through or around locked doors, he isn't always easily recognizable. So Jesus is alive, but changed somehow.

In our story today, Jesus shows his friends his hands and side, still bearing the wounds of his crucifixion. This means more than just proving that he is indeed the same man who was crucified. The body of Jesus is important. It's vital, in Christian thought, because we believe that, as we just said in A New Creed, "*Jesus is the Word made flesh.*" The divine became human, in the body of Jesus — the body that is raised from death by God's power.

And that resurrected body continues to carry the wounds of the nails and the spear, suffered for us. But, back to Quasimodo Sunday, and disability. I know you were wondering, when do we get to Quasimodo? That the body of the risen Christ still has the wounds is a powerful image for all of us, but it is tremendously meaningful for disabled people. The Word made flesh, the divine incarnated as human, has physical impairments. Jesus Christ is disabled. His resurrected body remains broken. For disabled people, who bear the marks of disability in their own bodies, this is truly liberating! We can see in the Thomas story that even Jesus can experience disability. By embodying disability in his resurrected body, when he could have

chosen not to do so, Jesus is showing us that ***disability does not indicate a flawed humanity, but a full humanity***. By inviting his friends to see and touch his impairments, he throws out the taboo of disabled bodies, he casts aside society's wrong-headed idea that only perfect bodies truly have worth.

The Word made flesh is God in human form. So, if Jesus is God, and Jesus maintains his broken body after his resurrection, then *God is a disabled God*. Think about that! What a powerful idea this is! We have a disabled God at the centre of our faith, represented by Christ with his wounds. The central figure of Christianity is disabled. This is transformative, radical! This requires rethinking our symbols, our rituals, our doctrines in the church.

If God can be disabled, then God is present with disabled people. And it means that some of our commonly held ideas about disability are wrong. Just one example. *Many people still believe that a physical or mental disability is somehow a punishment from God or the result of something you did wrong*. But Jesus doesn't accept this connection between sin and disability. He breaks this link, in what he says in his ministry, and in appearing with his physical disabilities after the resurrection. *Jesus didn't sin, yet he became disabled*. So these ideas about how disability is somehow a punishment, the result of something a person has done wrong, are nonsense.

If God can be disabled, then anything society and individuals do that denies the full personhood of disabled people is an offence against God. If God can be disabled, the bodies and minds of disabled people — with all kinds of disabilities, physical and visible like me and Quasimodo, invisible, mental, developmental, emotional — disabled people are made in God's image. If God can be disabled, the church which strives to live God's mission in the world must allow for the full participation of disabled people, not just through removing or modifying physical barriers to accessibility, but by removing attitudes and prejudices that block that participation.

God in Jesus Christ being disabled makes Easter hope real for disabled people and those who care for them. There is hope for justice, for the removal of these barriers that exclude and humiliate disabled people. There is hope for lives of dignity and integrity. There is hope that disabled bodies have worth. And this hope is not just for disabled people. This is good news for all of us! Jesus Christ, risen from death, makes good on the promise to us all that God is with us, in life, in death, in life after death, embodied as we are. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, in his disabled body. Alleluia!