

“Spittin’ Image”
Easter 2a
John 20:19-31

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Grace Lutheran Church
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In Jesus’ Name.

I have noticed that when we are young we grow impatient with those who point out how much we look like one parent or another. At a high school open house the mother of a friend met my father for the first time and said to me, “Isn’t it nice for you to know what you will look like when you are older?” As I looked at my father I remember thinking, “No,” while politely saying, “Yes.” Now I have noticed the opposite at work. As we grow older we are delighted when people see us in our children. We say, “She’s the spittin’ image of her mother.”

The origin of that term is a bit murky. The first recorded connection between spit and image is in a play from the late 1600s. The line is, “Poor child! He’s as like his own dada as if he were spit out of his mouth.” Other languages have similar sayings. *C’est le portrait crache de son pere*, is the French for “He is the spitting portrait of his father.” And in Norwegian, ‘*som snytt ut av nesen paa*,’ meaning “as blown out of the nose of.” *Snytt* means just what you think it means. Leave it to the Norwegians. I can say that because I am one. I’ll choose spit over snytt any day.

It seems the term spittin’ image is a shortened form of spit and image, meaning we are made out of the stuff of our parents and look like them too.

Jesus is the spittin’ image of his Father. We don’t recognize this Son from his Father. It is the Son who makes the Father known. The identifying traits are the ones Thomas looked for: his ruined hands, his wounded feet and side in one newly raised from the dead. This is how we recognize Jesus and what Jesus reveals to us about God.

How will the Thomases of this world recognize us? Will Campbell was a Baptist minister. He was chaplain at Old Miss and chaired the committee of Southern Churchmen during

the Civil Rights Era. He had an irascible friend named P.D. East who had long since departed from the Methodist church of his youth. He liked to argue with Will about religion. He referred to the Church as “the Easter chicken.” Campbell writes, “Each time I saw him he would ask, ‘And what’s the state of the Easter chicken, Preacher Will?’ I knew he was trying to goad me into some kind of an argument and decided to wait him out. One day he explained. ‘You know Preacher Will, that Church of yours and Mr. Jesus is like an Easter chicken my little Karen got one time. Man, it was a pretty thing. Dyed a deep purple. Bought it at the grocery store.... And it served a real useful purpose. Karen loved it. It made her happy. And that made me and her Mamma happy.... But pretty soon that baby chicken started feathering out. You know, sprouting little pin feathers. Wings and tail and all that. And you know what? Them new feathers weren’t purple. No sirree bob, that chicken wasn’t really purple at all. That chicken was a Rhode Island Red. And when all them little red feathers started growing out from under that purple it was one heck of a sight. All of a sudden Karen couldn’t stand that chicken anymore....

“Well, we took that half-purple and half-red thing out to her grandma’s house and threw it in the chicken yard with all the other chickens. It was still different, you understand. And the other chickens knew it was different. And they resisted it like heck. Pecked it, chased it all over the yard. Wouldn’t have anything to do with it. Wouldn’t even let it get on the roost with them. And that little chicken knew it was different too. It didn’t bother any of the others. Wouldn’t fight back or anything. Just stayed by itself. Really suffered too. But little by little, day by day, that chicken came around. Pretty soon, even before all the purple grew off it, while it was still just a little bit different, that darn thing was behaving just about like the rest of them chickens. Man, it would fight back, peck the heck out of the ones littler than it was, knock them down to catch a bug if it got to it in time. Yes sirree bob, the chicken world turned that Easter chicken around.

And now you can't tell one chicken from another. They're all just alike. The Easter chicken is just one more chicken. There ain't a darn thing different about it.'

"I knew he wanted to argue and I didn't want to disappoint him. 'Well, P.D., the Easter chicken is still useful. It lays eggs, doesn't it.?' It was what he wanted me to say. 'Yea, Preacher Will. It lays eggs. But they all lay eggs. Who needs an Easter chicken for that? And the Rotary Club serves coffee. And the 4-H Club says prayers. The Red Cross takes up offerings for hurricane victims. Mental Health does counseling and the Boy Scouts have youth programs.

"I told him I agreed... but that didn't have anything to do with the Christian faith. He looked a little hurt and that was when he asked me to define the Christian Faith.... 'Keep it simple. In ten words or less, what's the Christian message?'

Up until now I've been censoring the language, especially that of P.D. East. But I'm going to tell you what definition Campbell gave him for the Christian message. He said, "We're all bastards but God loves us anyway" (*Brother to a Dragonfly*, pp. 217ff). I can do it in nine words, quoting Scripture, "Christ died for us while we yet were sinners."

So Easter chickens, has the chicken world turned us around so that we are like all the rest. Or how shall the Thomases of the world recognize us once the purple feathers grow out. The answer is right there in the promises the confirmands will make this morning: to live among God's faithful people, to hear God's word and share in the Lord's Supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of our Lord Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

Those are the traits by which we show Thomas the wounds of Christ. Those are the traits by which the world will recognize us as spittin' images of God.