

[Image of [Nicholas](#)] June 13, 1994. San Antonio, TX. 13-year old Nicholas Barclay spent the hot summer afternoon playing basketball with his friends. Nicholas never made it home. For the next three years, his family agonized over their missing blond-haired, blue-eyed son.

But three years later, in 1997, they received some amazing news - Nicholas had been found in Spain. He claimed to have escaped from a child prostitution ring and found shelter with the police. Transportation was arranged and Nicholas was soon reunited with his overjoyed family.

They were confused that Nicholas seemed not to remember so much of his life in TX, but they attributed that to the trauma of his ordeal. They didn't quite understand why he had a French accent after only three years, but Nicholas told them he had been abused, forced to speak French. And they didn't understand how their precious boy's bright blue eyes had turned brown, but it didn't matter. He was home.

[Side-by-side] It was nearly five months before a private investigator finally proved that Nicholas Barclay was not in fact 16-year old Nicholas Barclay but 23-year old Frederic Bourdin, a French-born serial impersonator. Bourdin was arrested, convicted and imprisoned and the Barclay family had to grieve the loss of their son all over again, this time wondering how their grief and hope could have blinded them to obvious clues that this was not their son.

The Barclays' mistake is tragic, horrible but understandable. Both grief and hope can blind us. The Barclays wanted so badly to believe their boy was still alive that they ignored reality. Even when Bourdin didn't know anything about the family, when his eyes were the wrong color, they embraced him anyway.

Mistaken identity can be awful. It's not unreasonable to demand proof of identity, especially in extraordinary circumstances. This is the first Sunday after Easter, which is the day the Church makes the most extraordinary claim - that God raised Jesus from the dead. That Jesus - who was crushed by the powers of his day, caught in the gears of the Empire and destroyed - this Jesus who was crucified was raised from the dead and his resurrection is proof of God's victory.

These extraordinary claims imply even more extraordinary claims about God, humanity and the nature of reality. If God raised Jesus from the dead, then Death is not the final word in human existence. If God raised Jesus from the dead, then love, not hate, Sin or Empire, is the defining word that shapes reality. If God raised Jesus from the dead then we actually have hope that all the evil we see in the world will not win the day.

As we saw last week at Easter, if God raised Jesus from the dead, then we are freed from the powers of Sin and Death to live in the freedom of God's new life.

If God raised Jesus from the dead. If. Resurrection is an extraordinary claim.

So we might be forgiven for guarding our hopes, for learning from the Barclays and demanding a bit more proof before we embrace this resurrected Jesus. For the next several weeks, we'll be

2 | Identity Crisis Week 1 – Impostor Syndrome

in a series called Identity Crisis. We will explore how the Church is torn between identities, between the patterns of the world and the freedom of God. We'll see again and again that we hold back because the Good News of Jesus' resurrection seems too good to be true.

We'll see that Jesus doesn't offer us mere historical facts (though we have those). Rather, Jesus invites us into his broken body to experience the truth of the resurrection by our very transformed lives.

This series is about who Jesus is. This series is about what it means to be the Church. So we're going to read from both John's story of Jesus and the book of Revelation. The central question of both books is "Who is this Jesus, and what does that mean for us?"

[Scripture Slide] If you have a Bible, turn with me to John 20. This is Jesus' second appearance after he was raised from the dead. He has already appeared to Mary the Magdalene and appointed her as the first apostle. The rest of his disciples are still in hiding, afraid the same Roman fury that crushed Jesus on the cross will fall on them. Let's read together what happens when Jesus appears to them:

That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. They told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side."

Jesus has appeared to his disciples, but one of them was gone - this is where Thomas gets a bad rap. We call him "doubting Thomas" because he didn't believe the other disciples. But let's lay off Thomas a bit. The other disciples didn't believe Mary the Magdalene, and *they* saw Jesus in the flesh. So they're not any better than Thomas.

Plus, remember - this is an extraordinary claim. Imagine if you heard someone came back from the dead. You'd want proof too. Is this really Jesus, or an impostor? Is it a ghost? Thomas wants proof of death - he wants to see the crucifixion wounds to prove it's really Jesus. And he wants to touch them to prove Jesus is real, not a specter of some kind. Thomas' demand isn't unusual. It's pretty responsible. Let's read on:

Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with

Commented [1]: +tbasselin@gmail.com something more like this, yeah?

you,” he said. Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!”

“My Lord and my God!” Thomas exclaimed.

Then Jesus told him, “You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.”

The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe* that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name. -- John 20:19-31

[Image: [let's use Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*](#)] Jesus comes to Thomas and offers Thomas his crucifixion wounds. When Thomas sees Jesus' wounds, all his doubts and questions melt away and he is left only with a sense of awe. He falls to his knees and becomes the first disciple to understand who Jesus is - not just their Lord, but the very God of creation. My Lord *and* my God.

This is the moment for Thomas: standing before a crucified-yet-living Jesus, marks of death on full display. For Thomas, Proof of Death is Proof of Life.

In John's story of Jesus, titles are a big deal. At the beginning of the story, John tells us that Jesus is God, but no one in the story understands that. Throughout the story, people have called Jesus a number of names - Teacher, Lord, "sent from God" and more. But this is the first time someone has specifically said, "Jesus = God". For Thomas, Jesus' invitation into his broken body demonstrates his divinity. The moment Thomas sees the scars, can touch them with his hands, is the moment he realizes who Jesus is.

[Scripture Slide 2] Turn over to Revelation 1. The Book of Revelation was written by a peer of the person who wrote John's story of Jesus. The two books share vocabulary, worldview and more. They talk about Jesus in many of the same ways.

Revelation is probably the scariest book in the Bible - even people outside the church are familiar with the Four Horsemen and Armageddon. It's unfortunate that the book has been so hijacked by wacky theology because for the first people who received this letter (and yes, it's a letter), the Revelation was a powerful message of hope for a church in the midst of an identity crisis.

The churches who originally received this letter were torn between the Roman culture around them and the way of Jesus. They all struggled differently - some were faithful to Jesus and suffered, others followed Rome, compromising their faith in God. But for all of them, the answer was a Revelation - an unveiling, a showing - of Jesus. The whole book of Revelation is a series

of images of Jesus meant to help the Church understand who they are and how they can live faithfully in a faithless world.

This letter was written around the year 90, so a couple of generations after Jesus appeared to Thomas. The Church has had some time to work out what it means that Jesus was raised from the dead. This morning, I want to read a few verses with you from the first chapter. As we read together, pay attention to how John describes Jesus - this is what clicked for Thomas:

This letter is from John to the seven churches in the province of Asia.

Grace and peace to you from the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come; from the sevenfold Spirit before his throne; and from Jesus Christ. He is the faithful witness to these things, the first to rise from the dead, and the ruler of all the kings of the world. All glory to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by shedding his blood for us. He has made us a Kingdom of priests for God his Father. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.

Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven. And everyone will see him— even those who pierced him. And all the nations of the world will mourn for him.

Yes! Amen!

"I am the Alpha and the Omega—the beginning and the end,"* says the Lord God. "I am the one who is, who always was, and who is still to come—the Almighty One." -- Revelation 1:4-8

[Illustrate] In this short passage, John grabs several distinct threads and weaves them into one amazing statement about who Jesus is.

First, Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, with the Father and the Spirit. Jesus is cosmic, the creator of the universe. Second, he is the first to rise from the dead and the ruler of the world. He has conquered the world by dying and his very death makes him worthy to rule (that's what we saw last week on Easter!) Next, he loves us, has freed us by dying for us. Fourth, he has made us a Kingdom of priest - this is language from Israel's history. God called them to be a Kingdom of Priests. By including this, John reminds us that Jesus is not some abstract cosmic deity, but the God of Israel who has been involved in human history since the beginning. And finally, John tells us Jesus "comes with the clouds." This too is from Israel's story. The prophet Daniel promised a figure called the "Son of Man" would come on the clouds to judge the enemies of God and enact God's rule. It's a promise of how God will resolve history, finally step in to enact justice. This is John's way of reminding us that God has not abandoned the world, that in Jesus' death God is working to bring the world to a place of good, hope and healing.

And finally, the nations will mourn for him. Even those who crucified Jesus will recognize - just like Thomas - that his crucifixion reveals his divinity.

In the end, everyone will be folded into the great mystery at the heart of God's life: the self-sacrificial love that is the very essence of the Holy Trinity.

[Bring back Caravaggio] These cosmic implications of Jesus' resurrection are what clicked for Thomas, standing in front of Jesus. When he saw Jesus' wounds, when he saw a God who had been dead but now stood before him in the flesh, Thomas knew this was no mere human. He knew Jesus' resurrection was no isolated incident, a happy accident.

Standing before a resurrected Jesus, invited into Jesus' wounds, Thomas knew he was looking at Israel's true king, the long-awaited Messiah come to rule the nations and establish Justice.

Standing before a resurrected Jesus, invited into Jesus' wounds, Thomas knew he was looking at the incarnation of Love who gave up his life so that we could all have life.

Standing before a resurrected Jesus, invited into Jesus' wounds, Thomas knew he was looking at the very God of the universe, who spoke creation into existence and who sustains every star, every world, every life, every breath from moment to moment.

Standing before a resurrected Jesus, invited into Jesus' wounds, Thomas knew that if the creator of the universe has been raised from the dead, then resurrection is the rule of the day. Life wins. Love wins. Hope does not disappoint.

Standing before him. Arms outstretched, wounds open as an invitation. No wonder in that moment, Thomas falls to his knees and exclaims, "My lord and my God!"

In the face of the great mystery of a God who died and yet lives, Thomas' demands for proof fall away. He is instead enfolded into the mystery and all he can do is worship.

A God who would die for the godless is worthy of worship. A God who would die for his enemies is worthy of worship. A God who forgives his executioners is worthy of worship. A God who invites the very men who abandoned him into his body is worthy of worship.

You want proof God is love? God invites you into his broken body to discover love.

You want proof God is good? God invites you into his broken body to experience goodness.

You want proof God isn't done with you, that God welcomes your doubts and all, that God doesn't insist on perfection? God invites you into his broken body to find welcome, understanding, grace.

Welcome into the divine mystery of God transformed Thomas. We know because we see what happens to the disciples in the following days, months and years. They are transformed from a ragtag group of followers into a powerful new institution - the Church - that is empowered by the

very same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. And empowered by this Spirit, they begin to turn the world upside down.

They embrace those who've been excluded. They heal what has been broken. They challenge what is wrong. They speak for those who've been silenced. Again and again, the Church follows Jesus' example. What Jesus did, they do. In fact, one early writer called the Church the "body of Jesus". It's a beautiful metaphor.

Because the proof that Jesus' body was really his body (not a ghost and not an impostor) was that he bore the marks of crucifixion. Only Jesus would die for us.

[Play off the Caravaggio somehow?] What does it mean to call the Church the body of Christ when Jesus' body is broken open by the wounds of crucifixion? How do we stand before a world full of questions and invite them into the divine mystery of self-giving love that is the heart of God?

It's not by strength, by seeking power or influence in our culture. Not with carefully crafted arguments. Not by having the best show in town or the most attractive people or the hippest.

Friends you know as well as I do that there's a lot of confusion these days about who God really is, about whether the Church is really good. No wonder the world is confused. For too long, the Church has been a haven for abusers, one more place the powerful prey on the weak. We've acted like God loves us more, like we're somehow better than the world around us.

We've been impostors, pretending to be the Body of Christ but offering the world no evidence that we bear the marks of crucifixion. No wonder they doubt our God.

We need to stand with Thomas before our crucified Jesus, see again the wounds of his crucifixion. We need to be invited again into the mystery of Jesus' death, to follow him to the cross and into the resurrected life beyond.

The Church invites the world into the mystery of God when we care for the vulnerable. When we speak truth to power. When we repeatedly choose to act for the good of the Others, the Outsiders, those on the margins. When we live sacrificial lives.

What would it look like if you led out of weakness in your home this week? Among your family and friends?

What would it look like if you led out of weakness among your coworkers? How might your relationships change this week if you quit trying to get the upper hand and instead worked for the good of the other person (whether that's your spouse, partner, friend, boss or kid)?
What would it look like if you led out of weakness this week?

7 | Identity Crisis Week 1 – Impostor Syndrome

Friends, we are Catalyst. We are the body of Christ here in Rowlett. Let's be a church that is known for our weakness, a church that demonstrates the power of God because we are *not* perfect, we *don't* have it all together. We *don't* have all the answers. Let our lives be an invitation into the brokenness of the God who died for us.

What we have is the same spirit living in us who raised Jesus from the dead. And it is our very weakness that proves the power of God to bring life from death.

Catalyst never has been for perfect people, and we never will be. Catalyst is for people who know the stench of death and want desperately to drink from the waters of life.

Let all who thirst come!

Communion Set Up

As Thomas recognized your divinity in your scars, may we recognize your divinity in this bread broken for us. As Thomas touched the evidence of your crucifixion, may we partake of your sacrifice for us in drinking from this cup.