

Reflection for April 12, 2026 – The Rightful Verdict

Inspired by John 20:19-31

Among my favourite TV programs are the detective stories. Not so much the ones with a lot of violence, but those that have the intricate plots which make it difficult for the viewer to figure out whodunnit. I enjoy following along with the agents, discovering clues, gleaning some important snippet through an interview, coming upon some important secret.

The courtroom scenes are entertaining. Some are captivating as evidence is presented and a cloud of doubt enters the jury's mind. Guilty or innocent? What do the facts say in this case? Has the defense attorney done enough for an acquittal? Has the prosecution presented enough damning evidence against the accused? Conclusions are generally drawn on facts, but in many cases, interpretations and assumptions are made.

Sometimes I figure things out before they are revealed. More often than not, I'm wrong. You understand the scenarios, I'm sure. At the end of the show we often exclaim, "well I didn't see that coming."

In his commentary on today's gospel reading, Clayton Schmit says "**The Gospel of John is the story of Jesus written for the courtroom.**"¹ That piqued my interest.

Jesus was presented to Pilot in his "court." Pilot would throw the case out right off the bat but is pressured by the Jews to deal with Jesus. Pilot; Solicitor, Judge, Jury and Executioner all wrapped into one, can find no fault with Jesus. We recall the infamous words, "**I find no case against him.**" (John 18:38). Regardless of the facts, a cruel, dishonest and incomprehensible miscarriage of justice prevails, Jesus is convicted of non-existent crimes. Facts are ignored in this "Kangaroo Court." A guilty verdict and court is adjourned, as Pilot's own fear has led him to corruption.

Court resumes again a few days later. A resurrected Jesus appears to his disciples behind locked doors. They are amazed to see him and rejoice in his presence. Jesus shows them his wounded hands and side so that they might believe. The disciple Thomas is absent. He is told of the account. The testimony from the eyewitnesses is clear, we saw Jesus.

But eye witness testimony is apparently not enough for Thomas, "**Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.**" Thomas, who in this case acts the part of the jury, ignores the testimony. He only believes when he sees Jesus himself and is invited to touch Jesus' wounds.

In our day eye-witness accounts are pretty valuable. "I saw the man in the white BMW turn left up the one-way street. He ran head long into that red van." "I clearly saw the defendant running out of the pharmacy carrying a gun. He ran down the alley at the back of the store." Lawyers I expect would say that is exactly what they need, a good eyewitness. And kudos if that individual is virtuous, honest and believable.

In John's account today the witnesses are beyond reproach. They are the very same disciples Thomas has been associated with. Why would they lie to him?

The conundrum is that the story itself is so far fetched that it is beyond Thomas' comprehension. And I imagine it is beyond ours as well. When I think of an account like this one, I can't help but think of an eye-witness account of an alien landing. "I saw the spaceship. It was saucer shaped and glowing in gold light. It landed in the field right over there. It stayed for only 3 or 4 minutes

¹ Clayton J. Schmidt, Feasting on The Word, Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year A. Volume 2, Lent Through Eastertide, David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, Editors, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 2010, p. 395

then it took off again and vanished from sight.” “Sure, sure,” we all say. Better send that individual for a mental health wellness check. The police investigation file is discarded in the round bin. This case is thrown out of court.

Jesus said to Thomas after their personal encounter, ***“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”***

One of my “go-to” Christmas movies is “The Santa Claus.” You’ll know it by the main actor Tim Allen. Tim is divorced and his son is having a discussion with his step dad about the existence of Santa. The step dad says, “it’s just not possible Santa could fly all around the world in one night.” The step son replies, “Have you ever seen a million dollars?” The response is No. Well says the young lad, “just because you have never seen it doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist.”

Just because you are unaware of Jesus’ presence doesn’t mean he is not alive and walking with us in our daily lives. Further, I would venture to say that you have seen and witnessed Jesus, you might just have not recognized him. But we have all seen the evidence.

Respectfully your honour, we could say to the convened court, we cannot possibly put before you the physical robe clad man Jesus. We cannot produce a body that you and the jury can examine for healed wounds. But we have irrefutable evidence of his presence.

In fact, your honour, we have over 2,000 years of evidence. The healing stories of Jesus have been written down and the miracles they tell have been proven. Haven’t men previously blinded by greed been reformed? Has not the bandit confessed and sought forgiveness? Can you not say that swindlers and embezzlers have seen and admitted the evil of their ways, and committed to restitution for their transgressions? How many of the addicted have come before you and prayed for rehabilitation? Your honour and members of the jury, that is the transforming love of Jesus at work. The Rightful Verdict is that Jesus lives.

We all know that I expect. An accompanying, encouraging and transforming Jesus leaps from the tomb and dances joy into our hearts. The risen Christ is palpable in respect, generosity and kindness shared. We know it to be true. Our call is to live it every day.

Contributor Clayton Schmit, mentioned earlier in my reflection today, concludes his remarks on today’s gospel reading by saying, **“When preachers proclaim the good news, the persuasive power of the Spirit sweeps through the jury box and wins a verdict that evidence cannot prove. He is risen indeed!”**²

As I have been known to do from time to time, I’d like to offer a paraphrase. **“When we, as a Community of Faith, live in the spirit of the carpenter from Galilee, the world cannot deny that Jesus lives, and his love continues to do miracles. That is the rightful verdict.**

Thanks for listening this morning, Amen

² Ibid., p. 399