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Caravaggio depicts the risen Christ with the marks of his earthly disability—those wounds that so terribly defaced Jesus' body during life and contributed to his death.

Lasting Wounds

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Caravaggio's *The Incredulity of Thomas* depicts the risen Christ with the marks of his earthly disability. Touching those wounds, which so terribly defaced Jesus' body and contributed to his death, are imperative for Thomas to believe in the resurrected, bodily Christ. Granting Thomas's demand, Jesus says to his disciples, "Blessed are those who have not seen, yet have come to believe" (John 20:29b).

This episode challenges what Amos Yong identifies as "the normate perspective [that] ignores or even goes so far as to eliminate disability in the biblical message." Among other things, this perspective assumes "that disabilities will be erased in the end – rooted in a belief that the resurrection body will be free from earthly disabilities." It reduces the biblical view of disability to an "impetus both to prevent the onset of disability and to cure or alleviate it if possible in the present life."¹

Caravaggio, an Italian Baroque painter known for his meticulous attention to nature and detail during the period of the Catholic Reformation, emphasizes the corporeality of the risen Christ. The painter conveys the sensation of touch as we watch Christ guide the finger of Thomas into the gaping wound.² Psychological tension is evidenced in the wrinkled brows of Thomas, yet neither of the other two apostles turns away in disgust. Instead, they are transfixed on bodily proof being exhibited by Jesus to them – and to us as viewers of Caravaggio's image.

The painting belonged to Vincenzo Giustiniani (1564-1637), an aristocratic Italian banker and art collector, before entering the Prussian royal collection. Today it is located at the Sanssouci Palace (former summer home of Frederick the Great) in Potsdam, near Berlin, Germany. There are many theories as to why this is one of the most frequently copied of Caravaggio's paintings. Perhaps artists have recognized that, as John Swinton states, "It is not insignificant that the heart of the Christian faith revolves around a damaged body."³

NOTES

1 Amos Yong, "Zacchaeus: Short, Saved, and Un-Seen," *Disability, Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics*, 45 (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2012), 11-17, here citing 11.

2 For more on Caravaggio, see John Gash, "Caravaggio, Michelangelo Merisi da," in *Grove Art Online (Oxford Art Online, accessed September 6, 2012), www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T013950*.

3 John Swinton, "Many Bodies, Many Worlds," *Disability, Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics*, 45 (Waco, TX: The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University, 2012), 18-24, here citing 20.