

Believing survivors without physical evidence

## **I wish the risen Christ hadn't shown Thomas proof. Women had already testified to the resurrection.**

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Caravaggio, *The Incredulity of St. Thomas*, oil in canvas, 1601-1602.

Men certainly have a thing about marks, that something visible ought be shown to offer proof, assurance of validity, especially in the case of an assertion regarding a wrong perpetrated upon a person. [Thomas boldly claimed that he would not believe unless he saw](#) and touched the mark of the nails himself. And, Christ obliged.

I wish he hadn't.

As we have recently experienced in the Kavanaugh Supreme Court nomination process, and as we've witnessed in the past, violations against women—sexual

harassment and assault—often don't leave visible marks, nor do they involve witnesses for whom the event is as searing as it is for the victim. There is no place to put one's finger upon a mark, no way to offer evidence—at least in terms of a scar upon the flesh. But, we do bear marks, marks inside, in our memories, in our spirits, in how we live our lives. Those marks may be different than visible, bodily marks, but they are powerful and substantial.

I was assaulted in the fall of my senior year in college. The attack occurred in my dorm room in the middle of the night. I had been asleep when I awoke to find a man standing next to my bed. That incident happened in the fall of 1985. Though I don't often think of it anymore, I remember it still with vivid detail. No visible mark was made upon my flesh, and I never learned the identity of that man, but I remember exactly what happened to me. I don't remember what I had done the day before or the following day, but I remember those few moments in the middle of the night when that unknown man loomed over me and shoved his tongue into my mouth and down my throat.

I can't imagine what it would be like to talk about that incident today in a public setting, where I would likely be grilled on my credibility, where I might be ridiculed for leaving my dorm room unlocked (a common practice at my small, rural college) or accused of having had only a particularly vivid dream.

The marks that so many women bear are internal marks. Yet, time and time again, we learn that these internal marks are not the marks that really count. Somehow, we need to be able to show scars upon our flesh in order to prove what happened to us really happened to us.

I wish that the risen Christ had not shown Thomas what he wanted to see, that believing and understanding consist of something more than scars. Christ didn't need to show the remnants of the physical wounds, nor the physical proof of his resurrection. The women had reported on the empty tomb and Mary Magdalene had seen and spoken to the risen Christ. But, yet again, that wasn't enough for the men.

Although Christ goes on in the Thomas story to suggest praise for those who believe without seeing, I wish such a concept started before Thomas declared his doubt, rather than after. While the story is surely more about the believing of later followers (John was written decades after the crucifixion and resurrection), I still wish that we didn't have this moment of what seems to me to be an unfortunate offering of a

physical sign of proof to a man who shouldn't have needed one.

Invisible marks ought not be so easily discounted or dismissed or doubted. And the stories of women ought not be so plainly greeted with disbelief and derision, nor should they be cast as simple errors of memory.

The marks we bear are powerful and substantial, despite their lack of physical presence on our flesh. The witness of those who bravely share the stories of their internal marks of violence and terror should be respected. Physical scars are not the only marks that should matter.

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