

Sermon: The Scars We Carry

Scripture: John 20:19-31

Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans

Date: April 16, 2020

Thank you Margaret from over there at The Ledges! It's the Second Sunday of Easter and during this season of the church year leading up to Pentecost, we'll be reading and reflecting on the stories scattered around the New Testament about the resurrection for they are many and fascinating and capture different aspects and qualities of what is ultimately an indefinable great mystery.

This morning as you just heard Margaret read, after Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden at the empty tomb, that same night he appeared to his disciples... all except Thomas who must have been bummed that he had chosen that night – of all nights - to have something else to do! When the other disciples told him what had happened he was like “No way! You all messin’ with me, right? I’ll believe it if and when I see it.” And then he sees it, sees him, Jesus back from the dead, risen, just as his friends had said.

But one of the remarkable details of this particular resurrection story in the Gospel of John is how Jesus wounds play into his appearances. Jesus first says to the disciples when he appears to them, coming through the locked doors of the room where they were staying, locked because they were afraid they would be the next ones executed, Jesus first says to them “Peace be with you.” Knowing that peacefulness was not going to be their first reaction to seeing him returned from the dead and walking through walls... “PEACE, be with you,” he says. And then after he said that, what did he do? He showed the disciples his pierced and wounded feet and his hands. Then, and only then, did the disciples rejoice, it says, when they saw the Lord.

It wasn't Jesus restored to the person he was before his death, teaching them from their homes and traveling around the countryside with them, the one who was their fellow companion and spiritual master, it was Jesus returned from the dead with the scars of his execution evident in his body. This was the Jesus that they recognized as their Lord.

Then when Thomas misses the first resurrection appearance, he insists that he won't believe "unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the mark of the nails and my hand into his side (where the sword had pierced him). If I can do that, then I will believe." For some reason it was the graphic and -physical details of his wounds that would be the determining factor for Doubting Thomas. And as the story goes, a week later Jesus came among them with the same opening words "peace be with you" and then he said to Thomas "put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side" Thomas did and said "my Lord and my God."

There was something about the wounds, those scars, that were revelatory about who this was; not a ghost, not an apparition, not a trick that someone else had been executed in his stead, but that it was really him and the really Him was a Him with a capital "H" now, really Jesus, their Lord and spiritual master and actually so much more than just Him, also God. It wasn't his restored and fully healed body, but his body scarred, the evidence of his ordeal, that was somehow the revelatory sign of who he was. The scars told the story and revealed the truth. Without them he was a great teacher, a storyteller, a wise conveyor of truth. With them he was the embodiment of a love so profound that it died for us.

I have a scar right here on my hand that came from a big ole happy sheep dog who playfully jumped on me when I worked at a dude ranch in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado one summer during my college years. When I see the scar and stop to think about it, I'm reminded of those mountains and a thunder storm that I got caught in one afternoon and Scott who repaired endless fence line with me and Erin who was a real cowgirl from Texas with the horse skills and southern accent and attitude to accompany it! This little scar contains all that. And I have a much larger scar on my leg which I won't show you but that contains my soccer days in high school and a playful water-spitting romp in the locker room with my friend John Paul that ended in my slicing open my leg on the edge of a water fountain and missing that night's important game. And there are three other instances of scars with stitches associated with other moments and stories in my life that I won't bore you with, but they do

all mark particular stories and particular times and speak of my life, where I've been, what I've done, who I am,.

I would be tempted to say that the scars tell our stories and have made us stronger and made us who we are but my scars are marks of someone growing up in easy times in a privileged neighborhood, with a relatively happy childhood. The scars on my body do not come from violent parents, or from being a soldier in a war in Vietnam or Iraq or Afghanistan, or from an asylum journey out of a war-torn country or from a drunken spouse or from self-inflicted wounds because of some darker interior pain. I know also there are many with those kinds of scars as well and I do not know how they experience them. Are they possibly evidence for them that awful things can happen but that they are resilient enough to make it through? Are they marks of shame on their bodies that they simply can't translate into an acceptable story of their lives? Are they reminders of a time in their lives that they work to forget? Or are they points of trauma that they've integrated into their lives and they understand them to have made them into the person they are today? What about you and your scars? What stories do they tell? What pain do they still hold? And as with the body so too with the psyche, maybe not physically imprinted but impactful nonetheless.

And what about the scars that will be left from this coronavirus, literal internal scars, or losses and griefs, or changes to lives that are lived into a new normal and unable to return to the way things used to be? Will there be wounds in our hearts, in our families, in our economy, in the most vulnerable of populations around us, that will be carried for generations to come from the global pandemic of the year 2020?

Possibly. It's likely. It is simply what it means to be human, that we are wounded by the world around us and we carry those scars through our lives and those scars make an impact upon who we are and the unfolding stories of our lives.

It is not just a passing detail, that the one we call Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is resurrected with the scars of his traumatic and violent end still imprinted upon his body. At Easter Jesus is healed and made whole again and actually beyond whole he is glorified and

become divine and yet the scars of his human life remain. It is even said that in paradise we will recognize him, “the slain lamb” as Revelation puts it, by his scars.

So may the wounds and scars in your life; on your body, in your heart, on your psyche, those that are there and those still to come, marks that came from a time of pain in your life, pain that none of us are free of, may those places of woundedness be healed but may the scars in your life remain as a point of strength, as a reminder of your truth, as an emblem of God’s love for you who will see you through to the world without end, Amen.