

Easter 2, 2020
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John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. [21] Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." [22] When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. [23] If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

[24] But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. [25] So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "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."

[26] A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." [27] Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." [28] Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" [29] Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

[30] Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. [31] But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Grace to you and peace, from the God who has conquered death, fear, and isolation forever; amen.

I'm grateful for this opportunity to share the Good News with you this morning, or this evening, or whenever you happen to be listening to or reading this sermon. As we find our way through these strange and unsettling times, I'm grateful for the creativity, and compassion, and resilience that I'm witnessing among our congregations and pastors and deacons and leaders. Even though we're not quite sure what this means in these days, we are still church together for the sake of the world.

Though to be honest, I don't really think I'm doing this pandemic thing right. Maybe none of us are. There is so much we don't know, so much we have never encountered before, so much that seems to change with every passing day, I don't know that any of us are getting the hang of what to do, how to think, how to plan, how to grieve, how to ... be in these days of "safer at home" and "social distancing."

This is true even for those of us who can count ourselves among the privileged ones, those of us who have a home to be safer in, those of us who have the technology to be able to work from home and communicate with others and entertain ourselves, those of us who can afford to make frequent trips to the grocery store to restock our refrigerators and pantries, those

of us for whom the biggest challenge may well be boredom, not survival. In the midst of these strange and disorienting times, I don't think I've seen anyone who can claim to be rocking this pandemic thing.

Maybe that's what it felt like in the upper room on that first Easter Sunday, so many years ago: the disciples were disoriented, confused, hurt, afraid. We don't know why Thomas stepped out, whether it was to get some fresh air, to scout out the enemy, or to get some supplies, but when he returns, and the others tell him he missed out on seeing the resurrected savior, his pain and his fear feed into his doubt, and he cannot believe. And then, in what has always been the most beautiful part of this story, Jesus comes again, though he made him wait a week, and he shows Thomas his scars. This resurrected Christ, whom the gospels often explain looked so different that he could not be recognized, even by those who knew him best, still had the scars. Jesus knew that the story of salvation had to include the pain, betrayal, and crucifixion; Jesus knew that only a suffering savior could heal us.

Take a look at your own hands. If you're anything like me, you've got a few scars. To be honest, I can't remember the details behind most of the marks on my hands, as they are simply the signs of everyday nicks and scratches, nothing too unusual or out of the ordinary. I do have a couple of really big scars elsewhere on my body, a few the result of a car accident when I was three or four years old, and others from some minor surgeries over the years.

I would guess that most of us have some scars like this as well, scars that remind us of a story, an accident or a surgery, or some other traumatic event. There are also, of course the invisible scars we carry, remnants of emotional trauma, like a divorce, or the death of a loved one, or some other heart-breaking incident, and though we have hopefully healed and moved on from them, they have still left a mark on our hearts and our souls. Sometimes we want to hide our scars and keep them covered, as the story they tell is too fresh or too painful, while other times we may wear them proudly, grateful for the resilience and the healing in our lives.

So, I wonder: what kind of story will the scars of these times tell? The wounds being inflicted on our institutions, our economies, our families, and our relationships, are deep, and they may well take a long time to heal. Of course, there are other wounds that are not being caused by this pandemic, but they are being revealed under the stress and trauma of it all. The inequities and injustices of our world and our city that have long been festering are being exacerbated, and it's too soon to tell if they will be healed when we begin to come out of this current crisis, or if they will simply be covered back up and allowed to remain.

We have some choices to make. Yes, much of what is happening these days is happening to us, and much of our energy is spent in simply waiting for someone out there somewhere to discover a vaccine or somehow create the conditions for us to begin to return to some sense of normalcy. However, much of what gets healed, in this time of crisis and beyond it, is up to us. How we invest our resources, what we choose to pay attention to and what we choose to ignore, how we engage in collaborative efforts to tend to the deep healing that our world and our relationships are crying out for, all of this will shape the stories we tell, the scars that we carry, and the hope that we share.

The resurrection that broke into that closed upper room breaks into our lives, as well, and the scars that we carry, as Christ's broken and healed body, can tell a story of redemption, resilience, and renewal, for us and for all of creation. Thanks be to God; amen.