

2nd Sunday of Easter
"Jesus' Scars of Love"
John 20:19-31

When we hear a familiar Bible passage usually one of two things happens. One, the passage sounds so familiar that the words, just go right by us, and don't catch our attention. Or, two, sometimes we hear a familiar passage, but as we're listening, we catch something new, a detail we had never picked up on before.

Today's Gospel reading, where Jesus appears to his disciples, and then a week later to "doubting Thomas" is certainly one of those familiar passages. But as I was reading it again to prepare for this sermon there was a detail that stuck out that I hadn't seen before.

As we just heard, today's Gospel begins with the disciples huddled behind locked doors. They were hiding for fear, that the people who had put Jesus to death, might come and take them away too. And all of the sudden Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you."

Then what caught me by surprise was what I found in verse 20. You'll notice when Jesus said, 'Peace be with You' nothing happened at first. Doesn't that surprise you? Here is Jesus, appearing right before them, and the disciples didn't immediately jump up and start rejoicing that their Lord was back.

In verse 20, we find out the disciples aren't that different from Thomas. Only after, Jesus showed them the scars on his hands and feet did they recognize out who he was and begin rejoicing. Somehow here, a connection is being made between belief in the risen Christ and the scars of Christ. The risen Christ has scars.

Or another way to say it, is that rising from the dead did not erase his scars. The Christ of Easter still bears the scars made on Good Friday. And just like Thomas, the disciples recognized him as risen Lord only by touching his scars.

There's a story about a woman who became a Christian as an adult. This woman was falsely told, that, "If you are a Christian, a **real** Christian, you will always feel joy and peace in your heart."

But even after becoming a Christian she continued to carry a great weight and sadness. The people in her church who promised she would feel joy and peace were wondering, "Is something wrong with her?" "Is her faith not strong enough yet?"

But what they didn't know is that she suffered for years in an abusive marriage. Her Christian faith had brought her much joy, true, but still had scars. So did Jesus.

The risen Christ has just moved from death to life,
He had come out of the tomb triumphant.
In his radiant glory the disciples did not recognize him at first.
It was only when he showed them his scars that they knew him.

I think one thing this teaches us, is to not be too hard on Thomas.
When he says, "I won't believe that it's Jesus unless I can put my fingers into the nail prints in his hands," Thomas is not simply being stubborn, or skeptical.

Thomas may have been saying, "I won't believe that it's Jesus unless I touch his scars, because Jesus has real wounds."

What I think Thomas might've meant, is that the Jesus he knew was not above the hurts and heartaches of this world; rather, he embraced them.
The Jesus that Thomas knew and loved embraced the cares and the sorrows of this world, he lived where we live, and died as we must die.

Early on, in Christian history, there was a false teaching that developed.
It was a heresy called Docetism. And docetists taught that Christ, the Son of God, did not really suffer on the cross, did not really live as we must live on this earth.
He only appeared to suffer, only appeared to be human.

But the church said, no. That's not faithful to Scripture. That's not the truth.
Jesus was true God, and he was fully human. The divinely risen Christ bore human scars.
The depth of God's love was demonstrated on a real cross, with real suffering.

First Peter goes so far as to say, "by his wounds you have been healed."¹
In fact, to be human is to have scar tissue inside and out.

Sometimes our scars are small, hardly noticeable to others.
They're like the scar I have on my forearm from when I was about 10 years old.
At the time it was a pretty big deal going to the emergency room for stitches.
But, now, years later, it's almost completely faded away.

Other times, our scars are deeper, more profound, and more noticeable.
We often carry emotional scars, that don't go away so quickly.

And the risen Christ, the Christ after Easter, still has scars.

But there are people who think that Easter has overcome all of that.
They think that, just because Jesus was raised from the dead on Easter,
the cross has been taken care of, overcome, forgotten.

¹ 1 Peter 2:24

But the Bible tells us that the risen Christ bore nail prints in his hands.

That's how the disciples knew that the mysterious man who stood before them was none other than Jesus.

Thomas touched his scars, possibly to demonstrate that Christian faith does not deny the pain and the reality of Jesus' suffering.

Instead, our faith enables us to go on, in the name of Christ, even with our wounds. And some days, Jesus blesses us, and enables us to go on, in the same way he blessed Thomas.

When our faith needs something beyond words, something real and tangible, something we can see and taste, that's okay too. Because Jesus will give you what you need.

That's why Jesus gave his disciples bread and wine, saying:
"Here taste this bread, drink this wine,
this is my body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this in remembrance of me."

Every time we gather to celebrate this meal,
Jesus comes to us, and gives us his peace.

The one who is risen from the dead, with his scars of love to show for it, graciously continues to call you:

"that you might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,
and that believing you may have life in his name." Amen.