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John 20:19-31

THE SCARS WE BEAR

What a beautiful Easter we had last Sunday, with the flowers filling our sanctuary, and the sun streaming in the windows, and the joyous music from both our choir and the brass ensemble. It was the kind of Easter we imagine Easters *should* be—filled with beauty and joy.

But Easter is not always a pretty picture. Today's Easter revelation is in fact rather gruesome, because the resurrected Jesus shows up in the room where the disciples have gathered, all locked inside out of fear for their lives--the resurrected Jesus shows up and the first thing he does is show them his wounds. He does this *twice* in fact—first on Easter evening and then again a week later so Thomas can also see his wounds.

Wounds are never pleasant things to see. All red and swollen and angry looking, sometimes oozing fluids. We really don't like seeing wounds.

I remember when I once made a visit to a woman in the hospital shortly after her surgery. Standing at her bedside, I inquired how the surgery had gone and she began to describe how the surgeons had made an incision in her chest, when she said, "Well, here, do you want to see?" And without any inhibition, she pulled up her hospital gown to reveal the wound. Now, in truth, I did *not* want to see her wound or anything else that lay beneath her hospital gown. But there it was, for me to see, to witness: her wound.

Jesus shows his wounds to the disciples. In fact, he even instructs Thomas to *touch* his wounds so he might really believe. The scriptures do not tell us whether Thomas actually followed Jesus' instructions, but the great painters of history have used their imaginations when depicting this biblical scene—giving us a visual image of Thomas inserting his finger into the

gaping wound in Jesus' side. It's such an uncomfortable image that it makes a lot of us want to look away.

Wounds are quite intimate parts of our lives. They may be on parts of our bodies which only a few close people in our lives may see. But our wounds also reside in the intimate parts of our hearts and souls which we don't readily share. There is something intimate about letting others witness our places of pain. And so usually, usually we keep our wounded places hidden and out of sight. Just as we might hide an ugly scar on our body, we hide our family struggles, our destructive habits, our grief, our loneliness, our depression, our despair. Our wounds embarrass us, and make us feel vulnerable, and so we usually keep them private from all but our most intimate of relationships. And sometimes we keep our wounds private even from them.

But here comes Jesus, the Resurrected Jesus, appearing to his disciples and freely showing his wounds to them. Yes, Jesus is alive, but he is not all fixed up. He is alive, but he comes bearing his scars. The Resurrected Jesus is a wounded Jesus.

In American Sign Language, the sign used to identify Jesus is this: the middle finger of one hand touches the palm of the other hand, and then the middle finger of the second hand, touches the palm of the first hand. That is the sign used for Jesus--a sign that identifies him with his wounds.

The Resurrected Jesus does not show up all healed and pretty. He comes wounded. He comes with scars, because none of us, not even Jesus, can make it through this world without being wounded. *Everyone* is wounded. Some of us bear scars on our bodies from traumatic injuries or surgeries in our lives. Some of us bear scars on our souls from emotional traumas we've endured. Some of us bear wounds of shame or guilt for things we have done. Some of us bear the wounds of loneliness or sorrow. Others bear wounds of the mind: the pain of depression or some other mental illness. Here's the simple truth: people come with scars—on their bodies,

on their hearts, on their souls, and spirits, and minds. The walking wounded are everywhere. Right here. Beside us. And within us.

After a life of touching and healing and ministering to people's wounds, in body and in spirit, the Resurrected Jesus comes and shows us his own. And in doing so, he gives us permission to name our own. Jesus does not cringe from seeing your scars and wounded places. Jesus does not wait until we are all fixed up to come to us or to love us. Instead, the scarred Jesus, the wounded Jesus comes to us while we are yet wounded. He comes with love and with forgiveness to heal us.

That's what's going on when Jesus shows up and says, "Peace be with you" to his disciples. He is offering them his healing love and forgiveness. As we will recall, the Resurrected Jesus found his disciples hiding in a locked room. These disciples were terrified from the ordeal they had just witnessed. They were probably all struggling with PTSD. They had seen their friend and teacher brutally nailed to a cross and watched him die in agony. They felt the terror of thinking that this same horror could also happen to them. And in addition, the disciples endured the wounds of shame and guilt that came from knowing how badly they had failed their friend--how they had betrayed him, denied knowing him, abandoned him in his time of need. The disciples in that locked room were wounded men.

And Jesus comes to them in their wounded condition and he says to them, "Peace be with you." He doesn't offer judgment. He doesn't blame them. He doesn't lecture them. Instead, he gives them a peace grounded in his love and forgiveness—which becomes a healing salve to their woundedness.

Like the disciples, we all bear the scars of life: wounds that were inflicted upon us, and the wounds that are self-inflicted. The Resurrection is God's response to our wounds and our scars. The Gospel message is about a God who loves wounded people.

But our culture does not always love wounded people. Our culture is not always kind or patient with wounded people.

I've been noticing various postings on social media sites, these little quotes—memes, they are called--which are intended to offer wisdom for self-care by ridding ourselves of difficult people in our lives. At first, when you read them these quotes seem like good advice. Like the quote: "The only people who deserve to be in your life are the ones who treat you with love, kindness, and respect." Yeah. You think to yourself. That seems right. Until, until you read these quotes with the gospel of Jesus Christ in mind. And that throws a new light on these sayings, sayings like, "Surround yourself with good people." Ok. So who exactly might the "good" people be? Do we get rid of those we decide are the "bad" people, anyone who gives us problems, who disappoints us, who is difficult? Because some of the time, we're those people. And do we really want people to cut us out of their lives? And I seem to recall that Jesus showed mercy toward those people who weren't always "good."

Or the quote, "Being selective about who gets your energy is self-care." But did you happen to notice who gets Jesus' energy? *He* wasn't terribly selective when dining with tax collectors and sinners.

Or the quote, "There are a lot of good people out there. Make sure your tribe is full of the good people." But the gospels all tell us that Jesus' tribe was full of all the wrong kinds of people—the flawed, the imperfect, the ones who failed him and betrayed him. In fact, that tribe Jesus collected around him which we know now as the Christian Church is filled with very wounded and imperfect people.

Or this quote, "Don't walk away from negative people—run!" But Jesus always ran toward wounded people.

In no way should people endure relationships that are abusive or demeaning. But this notion that we deserve to only be around people who please us, people who are easy to be with, people who are problem-free, negates the gospel message of love and grace, mercy and forgiveness, and ignores the reality that often it is we ourselves who are not the “good” people. Like the first disciples, sometimes we are the ones *doing* the wounding!

But we don’t like to face *that* truth. We don’t like to face the truth that sometimes we are part of the wounding of others. That’s what’s behind this resistance we’ve seen emerge in our school systems about teaching the history of racism and slavery. That’s what lies behind the banning of books in some schools, books like Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, books which tell the story of people wounded by racism and white supremacy. Some people in our country don’t want this truth to be taught. Why? Because, it might make white kids feel bad about themselves. I guess, according to this kind of thinking, the wounded realities of black children just don’t count.

Let’s face up to our wounds! Jesus shows us the scars he bears from his earthly journey. He has them. We have them. He shows them to us so the healing can begin. So resurrection can take place in our lives and in our society. We cannot be healed if we hide our wounds from ourselves and from others. We cannot heal the wounds we have inflicted on others if we pretend such wounds don’t exist.

The Resurrection is God’s response to our wounds and our scars. It is the story of God running toward us, wounded people, with healing love.