

“Every Scar Tells a Story”

John 20:19-31

*A Sermon by Rev. Judy Walker
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¹⁹ 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." ²⁰ 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.

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Friends across the connection,

I am grateful to share with you in this time of worship. I, too, bring greetings from the Bishop and Cabinet, and I want to thank Rev. Victoria Rebeck, our Susquehanna Conference Director of Connectional Ministries, for collaborating on this time of worship and providing the liturgy for today's worship. I also give thanks for those who are participating; and for those of you joining us and offering this time of Sabbath rest to your pastors.

Let us pray:

Lord, we thank you for the gift of Your Word. We pray our hearts and minds will be open this day to hear what it is that will move us and draw closer to you and closer to one another. Amen.

So, I have an apology and a confession to make right from the get-go. First, an apology to my own doctor and to all of those in the medical profession for whom I have the highest regard and respect; particularly all of those who have been working the front lines tirelessly and sacrificially over this past year.

Second a confession. If I'm not feeling well, or I have an ache somewhere, before I call you, my beloved doctor, I check out Web MD. Yes, if I have a pain in the side of my knee, I Google

“Pain in the side of the knee” to see what Web MD or another google medical source tells me could possibly be the cause. Now, I know this isn’t good practice, so I don’t recommend it—you know, it comes with that warning, “don’t try this at home.”

But . . . but, I had to return to Web MD searches today as I explored today’s Scripture.

In the past, I’ve preached this Scripture focusing on Thomas—on doubt and belief and the fine line that separates the two; I’ve preached on the peace Jesus brings in the midst of fear; I’ve preached on the Jesus breathing out the Holy Spirit upon the disciples!

But today, I’m drawn to Jesus and the wounds inflicted upon him by the crucifixion, the scarring still freshly evident from those wounds. And the intimate invitation to Thomas to touch.

So, turning to Web MD, I wanted to find out more about wounds and scars.

Wounds are injuries to living tissue. They can include cuts, scrapes, scratches, and punctured skin.¹ When we, or someone else, touch a wound, there is a natural hurt, an involuntary reaction to pull back. Wounds without proper treatment can begin to fester and spread and if not treated properly can become deadly.

Scars are a natural part of the body’s healing process. A scar results from the biologic process of wound repair in the skin

and other tissues. Most wounds, except for very minor ones, result in some degree of scarring.²

So, again, my apologies to those who can offer much better medial explanations, but from what I understand, wounds are injuries that are still unhealed. Scars develop from wounds that are in the process of healing or have healed.

We know that not all wounds are physical – it’s the physical wounds that are often easy to see; but wounds in our souls are often raw and unhealed, too. Something has happened that cut deep in our mind or emotions or spirit. These wounds, if untreated, can also fester and spread and become deadly. These deep wounds can be healed, too, and even though not seen, still leave scars.

Scars remind us of the wounds in our lives.

I believe every scar tells a story.

Jesus had scars – the marks of nails in his hands a spear in his side. As we heard in the Gospel, on the very evening of Christ’s resurrection, the risen Lord appeared to the disciples, and after greeting them with peace, showed them his scars.

Notice that before his appearance, the disciples were hunkered down in fear together, behind locked doors. Yet once they saw his hands and side a transformation occurred, and they began to rejoice. Likewise, Thomas upon touching the marks, the scars replied with what many theologians describe as the central truth of this Gospel, as he declared, “My Lord and my God” —God fully revealed in Christ.

How ironic that seeing and touching scars, which were produced by pain, provided such joy and hope.

Just three days before those scars were deep wounds that were on full display inflicted by the ravages of what religion and Empire can do to the body.

His forehead lacerated from the thorns; his back shredded from scourging; his hands and feet impaled by the nails; his abdomen carved open by the spear.

It is these very wounds that remind us we cannot just skip from Palm Sunday to Easter morning. The wounds Jesus suffered remind us of the dark days in between and the suffering Jesus went through, out of God's love for the world, to offer redemption from the sin that wounds.

Jesus felt deep pain, and through his resulting resurrection and scars, we are able to feel deep redemption. We are able to feel hope and renewal and yes, we are called to rejoice!

Richard Hays, New Testament scholar and professor emeritus of the New Testament at Duke Divinity, commented on this Scripture from today. He said in his article "Fingering the Evidence," "Isn't it curious that God could raise Jesus from the dead but didn't heal the nail wounds in his hands? Was this an oversight? Surely not. The power of death is conquered, but the [scars] remain."³

My friends, think about this: The risen Christ—the RISEN, LIVING Christ identifies himself to the disciples by his scars.

It is because Christ overcame the agonizing wounds and death of crucifixion by his resurrection that the disciples were able to see and touch his scars and why we, today, are able to triumphantly proclaim that we are Easter people!

Jesus knew there were other wounds in the room that night, invisible to the human eye – wounds that were suppressing faith, stifling hope, paralyzing the very people who were supposed to be the ones to carry his message of hope beyond those locked doors. The shock and fear and grief that had held them in captivity had left wounds on their souls. How to deal with those wounds?

Show them his own. Show them the wounds were left in place forming healing scars. They were scars of hope, signifying God's power to transform wounds into new life.

The story of Easter and of the resurrection of Christ, has the power to turn our wounds into scars of hope.

Every scar tells a story.

If you've read any of the Harry Potter books, you know that Harry has a visible scar on his forehead that bears testimony to the loss of his parents at a tender age. It's part of his identity. It also gives him occasional insight, an insight into the mind and suffering of others, including the mind of The-One-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.

Somehow, I've gotten through almost 65 years of life without any physical scars, other than from a few scratches from beloved pets. My scars are invisible; scars that remind me of

past woundedness but also have served to ease the pain of others in similar situations as I share the redemptive work of Christ's healing in my own life.

Photographer Peter Scoular created a story for CBS News, "Stronger for their scars," through portrait sessions that brought to light the journey of five people and stories of their scars. He hoped that by understanding others' stories, it would unite, invite compassion, and bring healing to others.

One of the sessions was with Tyler.

Tyler's scars started appearing when he around 24 years old and continued into his early thirties. He received them all through self-infliction or self-harm.

He was going through a very rough patch in life, had been undiagnosed for bipolar 1 disorder, and just felt very lost and not in control.

He finally began a path to understanding the "whys" behind his actions through the assistance of clinical psychologists; and in his early 30s gained more knowledge about himself and who he was than he had ever known in the first 30 years of his life. He has not inflicted self-harm since.

For several years, Tyler was shy and reluctant to have anyone see the scars. I didn't want to have to explain where they came from because he was still trying to fully understand the "why". He eventually became more comfortable with my body and with having people see the results of my actions.

Tyler said he was surprised at the response: because his friends started to open up to him about their struggles. It empowered him to want to learn even more so that he would be better equipped to help others.⁴

Sisters and brothers, what scars do you bear?

You can probably name your own scars in some kind of chronological fashion. Some scars bear witness to those ways that we have given life to others.

Some scars tell of how we have been wounded, both the physical scars and then those deeper, invisible scars that remind us of our survival, history, and even belonging.

Every scar tells a story.

Jesus got his scars because he embodied the reign of God when he brought good news to the poor, gave sight to the blind, freedom to the captives, and challenged economic, political and religious oppression and servitude.⁵

But the scars of Jesus were not simply private but shared. If we look closely at the Scripture, we'll see that it was Jesus who initially offered to reveal his scars to the disciples and to invite Thomas to touch the physical consequence of injustice, of violence, of the silence and desertion of friends.

Our own personal scars can have a positive effect both on our family and our community.

We need to talk about our scars, talk about how we overcame

the wounds they represented. It can mean the world to those who are in the grip of doubt and fear and perceived helplessness.

We spend an enormous amount of time in our culture protecting ourselves from suffering and loss. We don't want to have to learn from our wounds and subsequent scars, we want suffering to go away.

But, to not know suffering and loss negates the truth of the Gospel. Jesus' vision of a just world was met with rejection and violence. We cannot avoid suffering. We have wounds. We will inflict wounds.

There are deep wounds in our society—the scourge of racism; the blight of COVID; the destruction of creation; the inequities of greed; suffering in all forms—that need to see the scars of our Wounded Healer. There are deep wounds in the lives of people all around us that need to hear the stories of our woundedness, to know the hope that comes with scars.

The resurrection doesn't allow us to sit with wounds festering, hearts broken, lives despairing. The resurrection pulls us forward out of our woundedness and into the light and new life that God wants for us, scars and all.

Rev. Brian Coombs of Haywood Street, a United Methodist mission congregation in Asheville, N.C., said, "The power of the resurrection isn't that our scars disappear, but rather that we all, finally, have the courage to show them."⁶

Each one of us will show our scars in different ways and

different places, but our best moments will most likely come from those places where we have been scarred the most, where we have suffered or have caused suffering.

By our scars we become to one another what God is to us: the embodiment of justice, mercy, peace, hope and joy.⁷

The subtitle to Henri Nouwen's book *The Wounded Healer* is this: "In our own woundedness, we can become a source of life for others."

You've got scars. Perhaps you're covered with wounds and some scars are still forming.

It's not that we should be proud of our scars—but we shouldn't be embarrassed by them, either. More than anything, we should be willing to tell their stories.

I've always believed in the power of stories, and I certainly believe in the power of the resurrection of Christ that has the power to turn our scars into stories of hope and new life.

Let us pray:

Resurrected Jesus, from the view we have, our pain and struggles often seem without meaning. Lord, be our courage and strength. Bring us to a place where the pain eases and rejoicing begins. To a place where we can share our story. Remind us of Your hope in the wounds that heal and leave a scar. A scar that will give us a story to bring to the nations and tell of your great redeeming love. Amen.

References

¹ <https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/health-topics/wounds-and-injuries#>

² <https://www.webmd.com/skin-problems-and-treatments/scars>

³ *The Christian Century*, April 1, 1992

⁴ <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/scar-stories>

⁵ <https://womenintheology.org/2017/04/23/by-our-scars-we-heal-a-sermon-for-the-2nd-week-of-easter/>

⁶ <http://haywoodstreet.org/showing-your-scars/>

⁷ <https://womenintheology.org/2017/04/23/by-our-scars-we-heal-a-sermon-for-the-2nd-week-of-easter/>