

**April 28, 2019 Second Sunday of Easter
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Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas**

GOSPEL

John 20:19-31

The holy gospel according to Saint John, the twentieth chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

¹⁹When 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." ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So 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."

²⁶A 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." ²⁷Then 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." ²⁸Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But 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.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Holy Week and the weeks after it can be so raw. So much has been pared away...all we're left with is pure suffering...and pure joy...and our truest selves...and not much in between.

It can be hard to face those things. Today, Jesus appears to his friends, who are locked away from the world – afraid because of everything they have just lived through. But then Jesus appears in the midst of their room full of fear...and they rejoice...well...they rejoice

after they see from looking at his hands and side, his crucified body, that it really is him...the one who suffered and died...and who Mary had told them was alive again...but who they've now seen with their own eyes.

I have a lot of thoughts about the marks of suffering...about scars...partly because I have a lot of scars. (I'm clumsy.)

When I look down at my hands, I can see two thin white lines...one below my second finger on the back of my left hand, the other a jagged "V" on the back of my right thumb. They are marks from brief moments in time, the mementos of hasty gestures that started out red and pulsing and now are faded white and numb.

The scars on my hands are not the dramatic kind that make a good story. They just make me shake my head at my own clumsiness when I remember the shattering of a glass in the sink...or other mishaps.

Other scars mean more than that to us, though. Some scars make us feel stronger, and we wear them like medals for bravery. Some are made on purpose to get underneath the surface to fix something more deeply damaged. These scars are reminders etched into our skin of how our bodies have failed or betrayed us...or that we are growing older. Some scars make us ashamed. Some we try to hide.

As we stand and see Jesus' scars today...I wonder how you wear *your* scars and what they mean to you...

My most painful scar is one that I hide in plain sight.

On some days it is a badge of pride in my uniqueness and my ability to thrive. But on others, it feels like the brand of an outcast or a freak.

I wear this scar on my face for the whole world to see, even when it is partially hidden by cosmetics, by humor, by my hair, by clever prosthetics (which even I sometimes forget are a particular luxury of wealth and privilege).

I am blind in my left eye. In fact, I have no left eye. As gruesome as it is to imagine, the scarred tissue that remained of my eye at one and a half years old was cut out of my body. Thrown away like the useless thing it had become. It is among the parts of me already decaying somewhere...returned to dust prematurely...

Sometimes days go by when I hardly think about how differently I see the world, and how differently the world might see me. On others, a chance encounter as brief as bumping into someone who I couldn't see coming in the hallway leaves me feeling embarrassed and diminished.

When people ask about my eye, or notice that the difference between the prosthetic and my good eye, I don't mind talking about it...usually. I know that people ask out of concern, and out of curiosity about a life experience beyond their own. But it can be alienating and exhausting to feel like an object of curiosity. Maybe you've felt that way, too.

I suspect we all have scars like these, whether perceptible to others or not. In thinking about this, I find that there is something profoundly comforting to me about the scars of Christ. After he so amazingly returned to them, his disciples poked and prodded his wounds. He had to endure questions and curiosity. He had to remember and relive the experience that marked him that way, even though his death was no longer the last word for him.

We get so caught up in the disciples' fear...or Thomas's doubt...that I think we forget to wonder what it was like for Jesus to let his friends reach out and touch his wounds....We don't often wonder how Jesus might have felt when they didn't believe it was him until they did. He is Jesus...so I know he understands. But, I still wonder what it was like for him in that moment.

Lately, I have been thinking about how sometimes we expect of each other what the disciples expected of Jesus. We want from each other what Christ offers to us...which might be too tall an order. I think sometimes we expect people to show us their scars before we believe they are who they say they are...or have experienced what they say they have experienced. We expect each other to remove what we've have learned to use to carefully cover up parts of ourselves...We expect each other to all of a sudden abandon the slight of hand that protects our vulnerabilities.

I understand why the disciples needed to see...It was too unbelievable. And I know why Jesus shows them...The stakes were too high. He needed them to trust...to go out and do the work. So he gives us more than we have the right to ask for...just like he's been doing forever.

But I wonder if part of the kin-dom he is hoping to build is one where people say who they are...and no one responds, "prove it." If only our trust in one another and God could be so deep...that we could feel safe to tell our truth...and believe each other when we speak. What if we didn't have to show our scars...and we didn't have to hide them either?

Because, I think when we are forced to hide...it is so hard to help one another heal. And I know that Jesus' work isn't the same as ours. That's why we need him. Because we can't do it.

But...once Jesus defeats death...he *does* return to us and ask us to join him in the work of healing this new-born, fresh-redeemed world.

Jesus work and wounds are different than ours...and yet, Jesus claims us in our wounded-ness to be a part of his work.

He carries wounds into resurrected life, though...so maybe we will too? I don't know.

I don't know what resurrection scars look like. And don't get me wrong, I don't really want to carry everything broken about my body (or the rest of me) into the resurrection. I don't want to be partially blind in the resurrected life, whatever it may be. I don't want to feel incomplete anymore. But the wounds of the resurrected Christ make me wonder if my lack of physical sight is really where my sense of incompleteness comes from.

Christ shows us his scars so we know that we aren't too wounded to be allowed...and neither is anyone else. And maybe that is the beginning of never needing to be poked or prodded...or needing to poke or prod each other anymore. Maybe Christ shows us his scars so we can take our first steps out of our fear and into the trusting, faithful kin-dom where we have nothing to prove and nothing to hide...Maybe Christ sends us out in peace, so we can even begin to trust in the day that is coming when the wounding will end...and the healing will be complete.

Christ's scarred hands are reaching out to each of us so we can truly, finally trust that we are whole...scars and all...and we don't have to hide anymore. Because we have touched the resurrection, and it is for us...and for all.

So...Peace be with you. Even with the parts you hide.

Amen.