

Glorious Day John 20:19-29

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Back in February, I participated in a leadership event for about 40 pastors in my hometown of Tucson. It was wonderful. We learned and laughed and grew together. But I want to tell you about one particular exercise that we did. We were blindfolded and randomly paired up with one other participant. Then we were given 60 seconds to get to know our partner's hands. That's right, their hands. For 60 seconds we basically held hands...which is weird in general, but when the only hands you've held for over 35 years are your wife's hands, it was really weird.

After those awkward 60 seconds, the facilitators mixed us all up around the room and then told us to find our partner without making a sound. Still blindfolded! In other words, we had to identify our partner by the feel of their hands. In those earlier 60 seconds, I had noticed that my partner had warm and dry hands that were a bit larger than my own. They were a bit rough, as if he worked with his hands. He had a wedding ring, which was just a thin, smooth band. But I noticed that the pinky on his left hand was bent at an odd angle, and the knuckle of that finger had a bump on it. I later learned that he had broken that finger in high school playing football, and it was that old wound that eventually helped me to identify my partner among all the other participants.

As I reflected on that experience, I couldn't help but think of our Scripture text for today – John 20:19-29.

¹⁹ That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said. ²⁰ As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! ²¹ Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." ²² Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

²⁴ One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. ²⁵ They told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side." ²⁶ Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said. ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!" ²⁸ "My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed. ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

According to the Gospels, Jesus had been bodily resurrected, but he must not have looked exactly as he had before because his friends didn't immediately recognize him. Mary thought he was the graveyard gardener until he called her by name. The disciples on the Emmaus Road thought him a perfect stranger until they broke bread together. And in today's Scripture reading, they recognize him by his hands. And not just his hands, but the wounds from his crucifixion.

Think for a moment how strange it is that when God raised Jesus from the dead he didn't give him a perfect body. Jesus was resurrected with his wounds, his scars visible for all to see. I've already told God that when I'm resurrected, I want to be 6'2", blond and buff. But Jesus? Jesus is raised with the wounds of crucifixion in his hands, feet and side, and when the disciples struggle to recognize Jesus, to dare to believe that it is him, Jesus points them to his wounds.

Which raises the question... What's the significance of those scars? I suppose one reason could be that it was sure and certain proof that Jesus was...Jesus. The disciples had seen him crucified, and no one expected to see him alive again. Seeing those scars would have helped convinced them that this man before them was indeed Jesus. But I can't help but think that there is more.

In the Book of Revelation, we get glimpses of heaven, filled with symbolism – and Jesus is portrayed as a "Lamb who was slain." "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain." Revelation 5:6 – "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne." Even in heaven, it seems, Jesus bears the scars

of his crucifixion. And those scars tell a story.”

Scars do that, don't they? They tell stories from our lives. I have a scar on my forehead from a time when I was a little boy, and though my mother told me not to run in the house, I did anyway. And I tripped and fell headlong into the leg of our dining room table, splitting my head open and requiring stitches. I have a scar on my abdomen from 2013 when I donated a kidney, and a scar on my left hip from a hip replacement, reminding me that I'm old and falling apart. Scars tell our stories.

I remember years ago watching an interview with Evil Knievel, the daredevil that used to do crazy jumps on his motorcycle. During this one interview, he showed the television host a number of his scars and told the story behind each one. “This was from the time I jumped over 21 city busses on my motorcycle. Unfortunately, there were 23 buses lined up and I didn't make it over the last two.” Every scar had a story.

And Jesus' scars tell a story. It's a story of a love that is stronger than death, strong enough to breathe new life into the deadness of our guilt and shame. It's a story of standing strong against abusive power that benefits a few and marginalizes the many, and invites us to do the same. It's a story of grace that sets people free to be more fully alive. It's a story that proclaims the promise that we are never alone, never forsaken, never without hope. And it's a story that reminds us that God meets us in the wounded places of our own lives, a reminder that our brokenness doesn't separate us from God, but merely opens us to God's healing love and grace.

I'm guessing that every one of us here today has a scar or two on their bodies, and each one tells a story. And for many of us, the deepest scars we bear are the ones that can't be seen. The scars we bear on our minds from our failures or the trauma we've endured. The scars we bear on our hearts from the losses we've suffered. Today I want to proclaim to you that it is in the scarred places of our lives that Jesus meets us with love and grace and healing. Jesus knows exactly what it feels like to be wounded and betrayed. And Jesus isn't just present in those scarred places of our lives; he also brings the healing power of love and grace to those places.

So let me invite you to close your eyes for just a moment. Now put your hand on the place that embodies your deepest wounds and darkest scars.

Perhaps it's your heart, or memories in your mind. Wherever it is for you, just place your hand there. And now let me pray that the One who bears the scars of love will bring healing to the scars in your life.