

Sermon for April 19, 2020  
 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter (Year A)  
 Sermon Texts: 1 Peter 1: 3-9 and John 20:19-31  
 Sermon Title: *Wounded Healers*

**PRAYER OF INVOCATION:** Lord, help us awaken to the joy and the hope that Easter brings. We have inherited eternal life through the living Christ. Help us see the promise of Easter in the stirrings of our abundant earth and in the life flowing through our bodies. Help us find the faith to believe what we have not seen, that others may see in the way we live our lives, the glory of the Risen Christ. Amen.

**PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION:** Holy Spirit, come to us this morning. Open our hearts and our minds and write God's Word indelibly there. Keep changing us, and your world, until it and we are what you intend us to be. Amen.

When my sister Jackie was a little girl, she was in an automobile accident and was thrown through the front windshield of a car. She ended up with a terrible scar on her right cheekbone – red, angry, and thick. It was something she was self-conscious about as a teenager, although for me, her younger sister, the scar was just part of her face. I loved her, so the scar didn't matter to me. As an adult she had plastic surgery to remove the scar tissue. When I first saw her healed and flawless porcelain face, I was strangely disappointed because she no longer looked like my sister.

When I come to today's Gospel lesson, I am drawn to the fact that the resurrected Christ still has scars. When Jesus appears to the disciples who were behind locked doors he *"showed them his hands and his side."* When Thomas, who was not present, tells the others, *"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,"* Jesus accommodates Thomas by showing up and telling him *"Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe."* I'm intrigued by the fact that Jesus invites Thomas to touch the ugly marks of human suffering on his body. Isn't the resurrected body supposed to be perfect and flawless?

I think we all have images of a savior whose divinity overrules his humanity – a spiritual being who is not wounded the way that I am. We want a divine Superman as the risen Christ *"faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings in a single bound."* We want a Christ who has powers and abilities far beyond those of humans. That's what I want, but what I get is the Christ who is recognized by his scars.

I am intrigued by the possibilities that the nail-scarred Christ meets us when we touch the scars of the wounded places of our own lives. Eugene Peterson, the author of *Subversive Spirituality*, writes: *“the wound is meant to be a listening post, a chance to exit the small confines of a self-defined world and enter the spaciousness of a God-defied world.”*

Before Christ shows the disciples or Thomas his hands and his side, he says *“Peace be with you.”* He repeats that blessing to the disciples, and he says it a third time to the disciples and to Thomas when he appears to them a week later. *“Peace be with you.”* When Jesus uses this phrase, he uses it with the Hebrew concept of *shalom* where peace means fullness of life. *Peace be with you* is a rich blessing of health, prosperity, wholeness, social harmony, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Forgiveness. The Gospel writer says this strange phrase *“If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”* Forgiveness is one of the most important characteristics of the Christian life. But it doesn't come easily to us. The minister Tom Long tells the story of meeting the seminary student coming from the library who was loaded down with books. *“What's your topic,?”* Dr. Long asked. *“Forgiveness,”* the student replied. *“I want to see if there's any evidence of it or whether it's even possible, because I don't see much of it in the world.”*

Yet the church, the body of Christ, is where we have the opportunity to practice forgiveness and ask God to help us. There was once a bitter husband whose wife had left him with their two children after twenty years of marriage. The bitter ex-husband could see that his anger was affecting, not only his life, but also the life of his children. Fortunately, he belonged to a faith community, so he began praying. He asked his pastor and the faith community to pray for him. He conjured up the image of his ex in his mind and then he told her all the things that she had done wrong, how she had disappointed him and hurt him. Then, he was quiet and let his ex-wife speak, telling him how he had disappointed and hurt her. The ex-husband sought grief counseling, and he prayed. He asked God for the gift of forgiveness. It didn't happen overnight. He had to repeat this prayer exercise for months, and stayed in therapy, but eventually his heart opened and released all that rage. He forgave her and was finally able to move forward in his own life.

Which brings us back to scars. Like Jesus, we carry our scars with us. I don't know about into the next life, but I know that we are all products of our experiences, not all of them good ones.

Scars, whether they are physical or emotional, shape who we are. But it doesn't mean that we need to be perpetually disabled by them. Jesus breathes on us, as he breathed on those first disciples, and says "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*" This breath is reminiscent of the Spirit that moves over the waters at creation, bringing life out of chaos. We will always carry our scars with us, but we can receive the breath of life and the blessing of shalom. Our wounds are not erased, but they are transformed. And we are transformed into "wounded healers" – those who have compassion for others, and offer others forgiveness. We are empowered to exit the small confines of a self-defined world and enter the spaciousness of a God-defined world.

Jean Vanier, who founded a community for people with developmental disabilities, came down with an infection that left him weak and dependent as the people he served. He learned that he should not hide the wounded places of our lives. He writes: *There we will touch a lot of pain. We will possibly touch a lot of anger. We will possible touch a lot of loneliness and anguish. Then we will hear something deeper. We will hear the voice of Jesus say, 'I love you. You are precious to my eyes.'*"

For some of us, touching those wounded places will require a lot of work- perhaps services of healing and wholeness, perhaps the prayers of this faith community, perhaps therapy, exercise, and medication. And lots of forgiveness. Christ's invitation to Thomas to touch the scars on his body is perhaps an invitation to each of us to touch the scars of our own lives and to be transformed. Christ's scars are another piece of evidence for me that Christ has gone before me in all things, that he has shared fully, as Hebrews tells us, in the fullness of human experience. The scars are proof, not only that Christ is indeed risen, but that he has compassion for my doubt, my lapses in judgment, and my fears. He says to each one of us: *Peace be with you. Shalom. Amen.*