

Sunday, April 18, 2021
The Third Sunday of Easter
“Showing Scars”
Rev. Dr. Chris Keating
Scripture reading: Luke 24:36b-48

The resurrected Lord appears before the disciples, shows them his scars and offers the gift of peace.

“Children show scars like medals,” wrote singer Leonard Cohen, adding “Lovers use them as a secret to reveal. A scar is what happens when the word is made flesh.”

Among the kids in the neighborhood where I grew up, the real measure of your status was not whether your parents were wealthy or even what kind of car your family owned. You were judged primarily by the sort of bike you rode, and the amount of injuries you had endured. I rode a yellow Schwinn Stingray, which sat high on the list of desirable bikes, though not as high as the more expensive ones that had gears and hand brakes. As far as injuries are concerned, I had the normal amount of mosquito bites and scrapes and scratches. Some kids had more, some had less. Those who had endured broken bones and had the casts to prove it were near royalty status.

But it was stitches that elevated you to the place of legends. It was scars – not just wounds and scrapes, but honest to goodness scars that earned you the unwavering esteem of your friends.

By age six, I had the usual assortment of scrapes and scratches, but I was entirely scarless. Well, I had my tonsils taken out but those didn’t count.

But then I turned seven.

That summer, a surprising lump made its appearance on my abdomen. It turned out to be a harmless lipoma, but it still counted as surgery and as stitches. I earned my scar.

The average person gets a little less than 10,000 minor injuries in a lifetime, according to a study conducted in Britain. Whether the British are more clumsy than Americans is hard to say, but they may be more honest. The same study

found out that 1 in 20 persons had truly slipped on a banana peel, and that about a quarter of Britons had missed their chairs when trying to sit down.¹

The point is: real life produces real scars. Children may show them like medals, but for most people the most painful scars remain invisible and concealed. The pit that opens in our stomach each time a certain person's name is mentioned; the empty void of grief; the lingering hurt of an irretrievably broken relationship; anxiety related to hurt that happened years ago, the words that once spoken can never be unsaid or unheard. These scars are deep and lasting more painful and dense than normal scar tissue.

But scars also reveal the embodied nature of our faith. Whatever theology Leonard Cohen was aiming for, he is in this sense correct: we believe that Jesus' scars of crucifixion are indeed the promise of the Resurrection.

I have been wondering about how the church tells stories of resurrection. Stories of resurrection point out where Jesus is alive today, where he is prompting us to move into the world, where he is offering us gifts of peace. The world is crammed full of stories of death: the deaths we face in our own lives, the deaths of children shot in their neighborhoods, the deaths of lives taken unjustly, and so many more. Our ears hear stories of death every day.

What we need are stories of resurrection. Brian Blount puts it this way: "We know death. We are death, what we do not get, what strikes us as unfathomable, as foolishly beyond our reach is life...We certainly do not get what it means, having envisioned that future to bring it to life in the here and now...Resurrection stands out in this world because resurrection is not normal, it makes no true sense in this world."

What Dr. Blount is hinting at is the message Luke unravels bit by bit: the incredulous story that Jesus, scarred by crucifixion, is now alive.

Yet resurrection scares us because it cannot be tamed. It cannot be explained, and so it remains beyond belief. These stories cannot be brushed off or explained

¹ See <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2012/05/infographic-the-average-person-gets-9-672-minor-injuries-in-a-lifetime/257777/>

by science—as Bruce Epperly observes they defy “any attempt to fully understand or control by believer and skeptic alike.”²

Even the disciples were filled with fear and doubts, until they saw the scars.

Scars are the connections between pain and healing. They are the embodiment of the struggles we have experienced. They tell the stories of our lives, which is perhaps why the Risen Jesus insists on showing the disciples the marks on his hands and feet.

He comes and stands among them, Luke tells us, saying “peace be with you.” He surprises them, catches them off guard, maybe like the way I used to hide behind doors to surprise my kids. (I gave up when Dean became better at scaring me!). Preacher John Claypool used to say that another name for God is surprise – which is exactly what Jesus does in this appearance.

They thought he was a ghost.

But it was not a ghost—ghosts do not have scars; ghosts do not have physical form; ghosts do not ask for a piece of fish. It was Jesus.

His presence fills them with terror and doubt. I believe that is a reminder that doubt and Easter faith sit in the same pew on Sunday mornings. Let’s be honest: One preacher has said that if you do not have serious doubts about Easter than you are not paying attention to the way Luke has told the story.

Luke’s Easter message begins with an empty tomb and terrified women. Luke’s story reveals a journey of faith that begins in a graveyard and ends with the church engaged in mission. The story includes two dejected disciples walking and processing their grief together on the road to Emmaus. Then, as they are reviewing all of the details of the past week, a stranger accompanies them. It is Jesus, but the disciples do not recognize him. But as he talks, their hearts burn within them. They are filled with peace and joy – but do not recognize him until he breaks the bread.

² <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/livingaholyadventure/2018/04/the-adventurous-lectionary-the-third-sunday-of-easter-april-15-2018/>

The journey continues as these two disciples race back to Jerusalem to tell the others. But even their story does not erase doubts, because even when Jesus comes and stands among them, they remain afraid.

Until they see his scars.

Doubt leads us to faith. Let's be honest about doubt and remember that there is no genuine faith without genuine doubt. I cannot provide adequate answers to all the questions about the resurrection. But I know this to be true: it is the testimony of his broken body that puts their fears to rest. Luke offers us an embodied faith—a Jesus who heals by touch, a Savior who is born to a confused and frightened young mother, a Messiah whose body bears the marks of the world's pain.

And I also know this: the church is where we discover the gift of peace. Our faith is embodied in the hope of Jesus Christ, and that is what brings us peace. And we find that peace just as the disciples did—by knowing that this Christ has stood with us, and it is this Christ who is both transcendent and close at hand. It is this Jesus who calls us to discover what the promise of resurrection faith.

I believe with all my heart that the church is called to proclaim this resurrection. I listened to a friend who is a firefighter/paramedic in this area tell story upon story of the patients he had carried into the emergency room with Covid 19. Some were near death. He did this—does this—at considerable personal risk. The pain of the pandemic has left its mark on us—we cannot deny it. His life is a story of resurrection.

With all my heart, I believe that we are called to tell that story, especially in a time when there is little peace in our world. Today is 108th day of the year, and already we there have been more than 140 mass shootings in the United States.³ Our country bears the scars of that violence.

Our lives bear those scars, but as we show them to each other, we hear the words of Jesus, "Peace be with you." Amen.

³ <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/mass-shooting>