

Resurrection Wounds

This year we are exploring what it means to be on a journey with Jesus. So far this year we have traveled through the waters of baptism, through various forms of wilderness, and during Holy Week, through the valley of the shadow of death. Now we turn a corner and travel into the joy and possibility of Easter. In our tradition Easter is not limited to a single Sunday; it stretches across a whole season of Eastertide, giving us time to adjust to what Easter means for us, what it makes possible for us and for the world.

Our tradition seems to understand that Easter is difficult to comprehend, for every year we read the same gospel text on the first Sunday after Easter: the story in which Thomas struggles to receive the news of the resurrection from his friends. He needs proof. Curiously, at least to me, Thomas doesn't ask to look Jesus in the eyes – that most intimate and recognizable feature of another person. Nor does he ask to see a miracle, or to experience a healing. He doesn't look for acts of power or convincing words. He doesn't need to see Jesus walk through walls.

Thomas knows that if the person they are talking about is Jesus, he will have wounds – nail marks at his hands and a hole from a spear thrust into his side. For Thomas it is the wounds that matter. If Jesus has returned from the dead, he will have wounds, and that is where the proof will be. Surrounded by rejoicing friends and fellow disciples, Thomas cannot shake the fact that the journey of Jesus ended in brutal death.

How many of us, longing for a savior, go looking for a wounded Christ? Our culture reinforces a narrative that to be wounded is to be weak. Many of us, if we

even admit to our own deep wounds, seek to escape the reality of them as quickly as possible. But if we deny the ways in which we have been wounded, or if we blame ourselves, we become subtly complicit with a culture that sometimes strikes out with fear when it encounters someone who is speaking from a place of radical truth and love.

When I was in the second grade there was a bully named Barry who sat in the back of the classroom. He was repeating second grade and he was bitter. I understand that now. As a seven-year old, however, I was just afraid of Barry. One day, when I was giving a presentation, Barry said something horribly mean to me and I froze with embarrassment as others laughed. Strangely, I can't remember what he said, but I do remember the urgency with which I rushed home after school that day. I raced through the door of our pink brick house in suburban Dallas, and headed for the bathroom. There, I leaned my little body over the bathroom counter to stare at myself in the mirror. I went searching for what it was about me that gave Barry permission to say such a thing. Scanning my face, I finally sighed a deep sigh – my eyebrows didn't match my hair color. My hair was brown but my eyebrows were blonde. That's what made me a freak.

What strikes me is the relief I felt in finding the flaw in myself that could explain the harm I had received. On the whole, this was a relatively minor wounding, but it set in motion a pattern that I would take with me well into my adult life – believing that there was something deeply wrong in me that needed to be rooted out if I were to receive the kind of love and care that I most craved.

Jesus' death reveals that lie. Jesus shows us that cruelty exists, and suffering is encountered independent of any fatal flaw we may think resides

within our soul. God invites us to recognize that although we live in the kingdom of heaven, we are constantly navigating a world that struggles to embrace that kingdom. The cross points to the reality that sometimes when we speak truth and walk in love and invite people into greater wholeness, we will be wounded. That wounding, as we see in Jesus, is not about some dark part of who you are. It is not because of some fatal flaw. It is part of moving through this world and colliding with others who are in flight from their own wounds. Because when we fail to constructively grieve how we have been harmed, we become people who harm others – or further harm ourselves.

Thomas sought to place his hand in the holes of Christ's body in order to believe. But Jesus met him in that place of insistence and allowed Thomas to do what we are also invited to do: to take our own wounded hand and to place it at the wounded side of Jesus. When we join our wounded places to those of Christ we are freed from the nagging dread that our wounds somehow mark us as unworthy, and we can receive the love we yearn to know. **If Thomas were to go looking for your wounds, where would he place his hand?**

If we ignore our wounded places, we actually miss our wholeness and then we get caught up projecting some false and actually smaller version of our self. By owning our wounds, we become more whole and discover that some injuries can be healed. Others may not, and then we may find that the remaining scars draw us deeper toward one another and into a strange and sacred peace. This is what Easter promises us.

Thomas knows to look for the wounds. But Jesus also calls Thomas to embrace the resurrection. Richard Rohr wrote this about the nature of the resurrection:

The only trustworthy pattern of spiritual transformation is death and resurrection...Death and life are two sides of the same coin; you cannot have one without the other. Each time you surrender, each time you trust the dying, your faith is led to a deeper level and you discover a Larger Self underneath.

Often the church speaks of resurrection as the victory over death and that might seem to suggest that death is banished, removed from the life we are called to live. However, true spiritual maturity requires us to make space at the holy table for death as well. It is why we keep referencing the body and the blood of Jesus this side of Easter. It is why at the second half of our life we are inevitably invited to welcome what feels like death – the death of our False Self.

I used to think this meant that I would weed out all those unlovely parts of myself and work toward perfection. No. Resurrection involves embracing the reality that I embody divine light and beauty, as well as deep shadows, **and will -- throughout --the --rest--of--my--life.** It involves letting old habits die – particularly the habits that I thought made me more likeable, spiritual, and safe. It involves deeper grieving so that I become capable of deeper rejoicing. It is not that death is removed, but that the sting of death diminishes over time and I can come to find some sweetness in my wounds and the life that has sprung from them. **Aren't there wounds in your life that are like cracks in the sidewalk where flowers spring up and insist on being alive?**

A few years ago I found myself at a spiritual crossroads that required more bravery than any other time of my life. I was being asked to let go of what was false and to honor a resurrection that my own wounds would give witness to. I was being called to be brave enough to grieve and rejoice, to die and to be reborn.

Brené Brown has written:

Midlife is not about the fear of death. Midlife *is* death. Tearing down the walls that we spent our entire life building is death. Like it or not, at some point during midlife, you're going down, and after that there are only two choices: staying down or enduring rebirth.

Think about some of the people you are most drawn to – was it their perfection that drew you, or was it some sacred tenderness, some boldness born from their acquaintance with suffering and rebirth? We are all invited to recognize death's place at the table as a necessary guest in this unfolding resurrection feast.

Where there is death, promises Jesus, there will also be resurrection, if we choose to embrace it. It does require us to exercise our freedom by making a choice and moving toward what is true. We have to honor our wounds and release our lies.

Where would Thomas place his hand if seeking your place of wounding? If you were, sometime this week, to allow Jesus to rest his wounded hand upon that wounded place in you, what might happen? What false thing might die and what new life might insist upon springing up from that wounded place?