

THE SCARS OF LIFE
JOHN 20:19-31
APRIL 19, 2020 (written, no service due to COVID-19 PANDEMIC)
Rev. C. Dan Brand

Even as we are unable to meet together in view of this COVID-19 Pandemic, it does not change the fact that Christ has been crucified. He has been buried. He has risen from the dead. It's hard to believe, and as we read in the book of John, not all of Christ's followers blindly accept the news that he has risen from the dead.

Some folks even today are not accepting the fact that we are very vulnerable to this virus. Well, you and I know many friends/relatives that have been severely affected.

A friend of mine says that when he went into the Army, he was given a physical medical examination. The recruit in front of my friend was asked if he had any scars or identifying marks. He answered, "No." The medic at the table said, "Boy, everybody has some scars or other identifying marks. You better tell me yours or I'll have to take you outside and give you some!" Suddenly the guy ahead of my friend remembered a scar or two.

The medic was right, of course. It seems that everyone has at least one scar and a story to tell about it. Do you have a few scares?

I won't bore you with the details of my 3 physical scars; nose, lip and knee. But, I can tell you that they are there present with me. We all will remember the scars of our lives caused by this viral Pandemic. It will be written down in history for all the world to read.

In the movie, Jaws, three men are out at sea searching for the man eating Great White Shark. During a lull in their search, they find themselves sharing coffee and sharing horror stories. Each one has scars and each one tries to one up each other. One of the characters has scars from the war; another has scars from a previous shark attack. The character played by Richard Dreyfus rips open his shirt and points to his chest without speaking a word. Another man asks, "What? Bypass surgery?"

"No," answers Dreyfus, "Mary Ellen, she broke my heart."

All of us have scars. You can't live life without being hurt in some fashion; physical or otherwise.

In Shakespeare's "Henry V", the King makes a stirring speech to his soldiers before they are to fight the French in the battle of Agincourt. The English army is terribly outnumbered and morale is low. The speech, made by the King is magnificent and the English go out and win the battle and the war. The battle was fought on Saint Crispin's Day. Henry tells his troops that after this, whenever Saint Crispin is celebrated;

**He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
Will stand a tip-toe when this day is named,
And rouse him at the name of Crispin:
He that shall live this day, and see old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbors,
And say 'Tomorrow is Saint Crispin:'
Then he will strip his sleeve and show his scars,
And say 'These wounds I had on Crispin's day.'**

In the New Testament Lesson for today, Thomas demands to see the scars upon the hands of Jesus. He is full of doubt and when he is told by one of the other disciples, "We have seen the Lord," Thomas responds with some honest and sincere doubt. He has a "got to see it to believe it" attitude.

Thomas looks at the other disciples and says, "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."

What do these scars mean?

For Thomas, it serves as proof of the Resurrection.

Thomas has a nickname. It is "Doubting Thomas." He earns that nickname because in our New Testament lesson, he expresses doubts. "Unless I see the scars...I won't believe," says Thomas.

But this is like referring to the patience of Job. Job is a long book in the Old Testament and the man named Job lost his patience very early in the book. He spends most of the time in the book of Job, very impatient.

So it is with Thomas. Throughout most of the written record we have about this man, Thomas was a man of

great faith and belief. It is Thomas who is the first to say to Jesus after the Resurrection, "My Lord and my God."

Actually, it would have been unacceptable for Thomas to have done anything else but express doubts. There is a difference between trust and gullibility. There is a difference between being a person of faith, and a sucker.

After the Resurrection, God made sure that people served as witnesses. Actual witnesses who saw with their own eyes and felt with their own hands. It was important that there would be people like Thomas who could express doubt and demand evidence, but once confronted with that evidence, believe.

We think of Easter as a one day event, but it actually is a season of several days. In the Book of Acts, we read that there was a 40 day period between the time Christ rose from the grave and the day he ascended into Heaven (Acts 1:3).

That's a lot longer than simply one Easter Sunday.

It's enough time for Christ to see and to visit over 500 people.

Paul wrote in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:3-8):

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time; most of whom are still living, (at the time Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians) though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles".

These scars became part of the evidence that the Resurrection was not a rumor or a figment of imagination brought about by grief and denial. The Resurrection was real!

To Thomas, that is what the scars of Jesus meant -- the Resurrection is real.

What do these scars mean to us?

For us, it serves as a reminder of the humanity of Christ.

There is something about scars that seems to make a person "more human".

We are sometimes suspicious about people who seem to be "too perfect": about children who don't have some signs of scraped knees, about teenagers who don't show any signs of acne, about models whose hair is perfect the moment they step out of the surf, about people who are in their "twilight years" but have no signs of graying hair or wrinkling faces.

There is something about our scars that makes us real, believable, trustworthy.

Maybe it is because we know that life hands out its damaging blows to all people of all ages, of all backgrounds. Contrary to some reports, this virus attacks people of all ages.

It is sometimes easy for us to accept the divinity of Christ and to forget the humanity of Christ. But Christ was both divine and human.

In Philippians, Paul said (2:6-7), Jesus, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."

Those scars remind us that Jesus remains human, just as he remains divine.

Those scars remind us that Jesus felt pain, just as we feel pain.

Those scars remind us that Jesus suffers, just as we suffer.

To Thomas, the scars meant evidence of the Resurrection.

To us, the scars remind us of the humanity of Christ.

But what do these scars mean to Jesus?

Isn't it strange that the Resurrection brought Christ back to life, but left Him scarred.

Here is Jesus, the man, appearing to his friends and showing them the scars that his life, his suffering, and his

death, inflicted on him. Isn't it amazing that, in whatever occurred at the time of the resurrection, the scars were NOT obliterated? They remained. They are still there.

We have a permanently scarred God. And he comes, scarred, to be with us with whatever scars we bear, with whatever wounds we carry, and with whatever doubts we harbor.

Isn't that incredible? Isn't that an amazing demonstration of God's love for us? That he would continue to carry the scars, the reminders of the pain and humiliation he went through.

Think about what it means for Christ to have scars on his hands. During this Pandemic, we learn how much our hands have to do with the spread of the virus.

Our hands are the one part of our body that is almost always in view of our sight. We can't see our ears unless we look in the mirror. We see our feet if we intentionally look down. But our hands are almost always before us. No matter what we do, we usually see our hands as we do it.

That is why in the Old Testament, some people would wear small boxes on their hands. Inside the boxes was a small parchment with a portion of Scripture.

In Deuteronomy, God told the people (Deut 6:6-9):

“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.”

This way, if a person reached to steal something, there was the Word. If a person went to hit a person, there was the Word. If a person went to touch someone in an adulterous way, there was the Word.

Now what does Jesus see when He reaches out for us? He sees the scars on his hands...

Therefore, when Jesus reaches out to judge, He sees the scars on his hands.

When Jesus reaches out to bless or comfort, He sees the scars on his hands.

When Jesus reaches out to receive us, He sees his scars.

Thomas needed to see the scars in Christ's hands.

Those scars remind us of the humanity of Christ. Those scars remind Christ of his love for us.

Let us pray: Almighty God—even in the midst of this COVID-19 Pandemic--you gave us the joy of celebrating our Lord's resurrection. Give us also the joys of life in your service, and bring us at last to the full joy of life eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.