

“Healing Wounds”

John 20:19-31

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From the Pulpit

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Prayer for Illumination: Living God, with joy we celebrate the presence of your risen Word. Enliven our hearts by your Holy Spirit so that we may proclaim the good news of eternal and abundant life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Some things take a long time to heal.¹

I remember my first bicycle accident that left me with a gaping wound in my thumb. I was six years old when I collided with my best friend on his bike, careened into a tree, and wound up in a tangle pile by the curb. I ended up with blood gushing out of my thumb. I was so startled I am sure that I screamed most, if not all, of the way home.

While six stitches and a large oversized bandage did their job to heal and protect, it was my first taste of injury more than a skinned knee. I also experienced disbelief that this had altered my playground activity schedule. It certainly slowed me down. I remember the blood and the screaming and I remember getting stitches in the hospital, but I also remember how long it felt like it took to heal.

If you should ask, yes, I have the scar to prove it.

Some things take a long time to heal.

Wicked sinus infections.

Bursitis, tendonitis or any other sort of -itis.

Hip replacement #3.

Other things take a long time to heal too.

A broken heart.

The loss of a relationship.

Not getting tenure or into your number one choice school.

Losing a loved one.

A life with chronic pain.

An emotional wound from self or others.

The unknown trauma of historic pandemic isolation.

A broken spirit.

Many of us have experiences that make it hard to “recover”.

Somehow, no matter what we face, we are forever changed. Some wounds — however invisible to the naked eye — are not easily mended.

Some things take a long time to heal.

Some wounds do not go away. The most difficult are the wounds that we don't see or those that we don't share. They remain invisible, operating below the surface of our lives. When and if these wounds surface, they are often unrecognizable and misunderstood.

Which brings me to the text for this morning. The Gospel according to John, Chapter 20 is the common text we hear on the 2nd Sunday

of Easter. It's the story of the resurrected Jesus who enters the locked room where the disciples gather in their disbelief and fear. It's where he greets them with a familiar greeting., "Peace be with you" and shows them his crucifixion wounds. It's where Jesus' wounds identify him. The disciples see for themselves that the Jesus crucified, has been raised. In that moment they rejoice.

But the disciples bodies are still shaken from all they had witnessed and experienced.

They are stuck in an initial cycle of loss, trauma and fear.

How do they get over what they saw? What they witnessed? The gruesome spectacle, humiliation and death of their friend? Even more, how do they come to grips with the story of Jesus' resurrection and now abandoned tomb?

Some things take a long time to heal.

This familiar text also tells us that one of the disciples wasn't there when all this happened. Thomas. He must have been picking up take out when Jesus appeared to everyone else. Quite frankly, when Thomas returns he finds his friends' testimony a little hard to believe.

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 (John 20:25).

A week later, when Jesus returns a 2nd time to the disciples in the locked room, Jesus shows Thomas his wounds. Thomas gets his chance to see for himself. He comes in close. He wanted to be sure that the Jesus he saw crucified is the One whom God raised from the dead.

Jesus shows the wounds he carries out of his own desolate grave. Jesus' resurrected body doesn't show faded scars – they are fresh wounds, still raw for Thomas to see and touch.

“Isn't it curious that God could raise Jesus from the dead but didn't heal the nail wounds in his hands? The power of death is conquered, but the [scars] remain.”²

Jesus shares those wounds. He doesn't pull away or wince. But he opens his cloak to show Thomas and the others his pierced side. His woundedness is on full display for his friends. Those wounds haven't healed right way. He doesn't shy away from them, he doesn't use a scar minimizer or Hollywood make up to cover them. The disciples recognize him by the real and raw wounds. In his wounds Jesus makes real and available the pain of the world which he has taken on.

This account of John displays the veracity and triumph of Christian faith; of believing. And yet it is a story about wounds. Many interpretations focus on the Christ's victory in the resurrection, reflecting Christianity's unease with the wounds that remain on the body of the risen Jesus.

What I want us to consider this morning is the how this story on the First and Second Easter evenings in the locked room helps expand the narrative to our present world where wounds mark all of humanity.

By looking again and again to Christ's woundedness, we discover ways to live with our own.³

In her book, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the afterlife of Trauma*, Theologian Shelly Rambo considers the story in the Upper Room as an extension of the healing stories in the gospels. In the Upper

Room, the disciples gather around wounds in a different way. In his early ministry, Jesus directed the disciples to the wounds of those who approached him to be healed.⁴

Now, they gather around his wounds, first to watch his execution and second to make sense of his curious return – the marks of his resurrection. This was the way that Jesus encountered people: he tended to wounds, even naming the ones that they did not know that they had.

In his return to the disciples, Jesus brings the memory of all worldly suffering forward, and he begins to teach the disciples and us a way of engaging wounds. Jesus' body was marked by social forces of his day. The crucifixion marks are signs of this denigration and humiliation at the hands of the Empire. This is the part of the history of this body.

Jesus' wounds identify him. They connect us with our own wounds, and with all suffering. Jesus' crucifixion nails the suffering of his one body to all the other suffering in history, before and since. Jesus' body bears the marks of universal suffering.

Jesus' body bears the wounds of all in minority communities who have endured brutality and injustice; so many indigenous and transgender people yet unnamed. Jesus' body bears the marks of the eight, six of them Asian American women, who died in Atlanta last month and the ten who died in Boulder, and this week in Texas and South Carolina, as well as countless unnamed people wounded and crucified through the eons and around the globe.

Even for Jesus, life after resurrection still has wounds. We are still wounded. For some, the Monday after Easter feels a lot like Friday.

And how are we going to shake that feeling?

For us, witnessing is less about seeing and believing than it is about remaining with a trauma, taking each day to heal on its own time, and finding a way to move forward to healing, trusting that our risen Lord is with us, just as he was for his friends.

In our present moment, Jesus, the risen Christ comes to us, behind doors locked by fear. He invites us to identify and tend to the private and public wounds. He bears witness to the possibility of public healing and transformation, and invites us to do the same.

Thanks be to God.

¹ Beth Merrill Neel, Some things take a long time to heal, *The Christian Century*. 2014.

² Richard Hays: "Fingering the Evidence," *The Christian Century*. April 1, 1992.

³ Rambo, Shelly, *Resurrecting Wounds*. Baylor Univeristy Press: Waco, TX. 2017.

⁴ Ibid.