

Scars and Resurrection: John 20:19-31; Acts 4:32-35

Every scar has a story to tell. And people like to tell their scar-stories. Our scars tell a part of our life story. They tell the stories of life-saving surgery, of battle wounds, of accidents both serious and silly. We think back to the time when we were wounded, we think about the people who were there, sometimes we laugh at the stupidity that led that to that scar, or sometimes we mourn the time and the moment that wounded us so deeply.

And of course, there are the scars that no one can see. The scars of a wounded heart or a wounded ego or a wounded mind. These are the scars that are left when others hurt us, when we lose people we love, when we are betrayed, when we are abused or victimized. These kinds of scars have stories as well, but it's often more difficult for us to talk about them. We hold these scars close and hidden.

But what do scars, which are signs of both death and resurrection have to do with one another? Why is it important that the resurrected Jesus insisted Thomas put his fingers in Jesus' side and see the wounds on his hands? Well, most obviously, Jesus' wounds were the proof that he really was the same man who had been crucified a few days earlier. The wounds proved the violence that had been done to him, on behalf of the living.

Jesus' wounds are our reminder that there isn't any new life unless there has been death first. Without his wounds, we aren't healed. Without his wounds, which he suffered for us and on our behalf, we are still bruised and bloody and unable to move into new life. Without *his* wounds, our wounds would be fatal – eternally.

Jesus' scars are our reminder that something life-changing has happened. They are our reminder that Jesus suffered for us, died for us, overcame death for us, and has brought us into the presence of the Father. Jesus' scars have made our lives possible. And the lives that Jesus made possible are lives of wholeness and peace. When Jesus came among his disciples, he shared his wounds with them in the context of sharing his peace with them. He came among them and said, "peace be with you."

Last year at this time, I preached a sermon about the idea of "shalom" – what we often translate as peace, but which is so much more. It is health, wholeness, salvation, life. The peace that Jesus brings upon us, and the new life that he breathes into us, are possible because of his wounds. We don't have this new breath of resurrection life without them.

Well, what about the scars the disciples bear? Scars of betrayal, of guilt or shame, or rejection and abuse, of persecution and mockery. How did they experience new life in the context of these wounds and the scars they formed? How did they reconcile the little deaths they experienced with each wound with the new life of resurrection that Jesus had come to give them? As Jesus' modern day disciples, how do *we* live resurrection with *our* scars?

Looking at our passage from Act gives us a bit of a clue here. The Romans were persecuting the disciples and all of the new believers, their Jewish friends were shunning

them. They had been kicked out of the synagogue. Family members had called them traitors and in some cases betrayed them into the hands of the authorities. They were receiving fresh wounds every day. Some of them were mocked and humiliated. Others were beaten, tortured, and killed. In Acts 4, we read about how all of the believers came together in supportive, life-giving communities. They shared what they had with one another so that not one was in need. They pooled their resources so that everyone had enough. And within that context, they could each receive the spiritual care they needed as well. Their community meant that the wounds that they were constantly afflicted with could heal over and form scabs and eventually scars. And that as they healed, they proclaimed the presence of the resurrected Jesus, made real and present to them by the Holy Spirit. The resurrected Jesus gave their scars context and meaning, and allowed them to move forward into the new life of new Kingdom living that God had in store for them.

What about us? How do we live with the scars in the “land of the living”, as the Psalmist says? All of us are the walking wounded. Some of our wounds still ooze. Some of them have developed thick scar tissue over them. How do we proclaim the resurrection and actually live in the new life that comes with the resurrection?

We all know what happens when people have been so wounded that they become inert. They can't move forward. They can't see a way out. They can't comprehend life change. And we all know what happens to things (and people) that don't change – they die. And we are surrounded by the walking dead every day: people who have let their lives become consumed with anger because of what they have suffered at the hands of others, people who have failed to change in light of their wounds because they can't take any responsibility for themselves, people who are so consumed by guilt or shame that they are deathly paralyzed.

The next time someone takes a swipe at you in anger or blame or accusation, before you internalize or personalize their attack, stop for a minute. Stop and think about what kinds of unhealed wounds have contributed to their behavior or their words. I suspect we would have much more compassion on our attackers if we understood their wounds a bit better.

But... if we can see our wounds in the context of Jesus' resurrection, then wounds can be healed and we can live in newness of life.

I think we must look to those early Christian communities for some answers about living Jesus' resurrection with him. The only way that our scars will have context and meaning is if we can see them in light of Jesus' wounds and scars and in light of the new life that Jesus brings to us through them. Wounds that lack context and meaning can never heal. They will always bleed. And eventually, with too many open wounds, we will bleed out and die.

And we do this by living in the context of authentic Christian community. It is among the company of those who bear Jesus' resurrected life that we experience wholeness –

shalom – Jesus’ peace. It is among the company of those who are Jesus’ hands and feet that our wounds can be tended to. It is among the company of believers that the Holy Spirit is moving and breathing new life into people and situations and nations. – the community is how we live together, the community is how we support one another, the community is how each one is cared for so that no one has need of anything, anything material or anything spiritual or anything psychological.

We live with the juxtaposition of life and death everywhere around us. We live with this juxtaposition *within* us. But the good news of Easter is that Jesus has healed our wounds with his own and in that act has given us his new life to live in. To live resurrection in the context of our scars, is to live *his* life in the context of *his* scars. We live in his life when we are his hands and feet and body in the world. We live in his life when we are animated by the Holy Spirit to bring his peace to each other and to the world. We live in his life when we are bound together in community so that each one is loved, cared for, and empowered to live a whole life in Jesus Christ.

Here’s the thing about the Resurrection. It doesn’t matter one bit that Jesus was raised from the dead if we don’t actually *live* in the newness of life that he offers freely, and which he enables us to live by the Holy Spirit. But living in that new life requires change. Being healed from our wounds requires change. We aren’t great at change. For the most part we are fairly comfortable, we like things the way they are.

But if we are going to embrace new life, embrace resurrection for ourselves here and now and not just when we are at death’s door, then we need to see that Jesus’ wounds have encapsulated our own on the cross, and through death they have been healed. Scars are left, to be sure. But Jesus heals our wounds with his own. The scars keep us ever mindful of this fact. And they enable to live life in the land of the living with appropriate thanks and praise for God who has done such a great thing for us. And, like those early Christians, we live in real community, real sharing, loving, giving, living community. And Jesus is present and living in that community by the power of his Holy Spirit. This is where our wounds and scars are given meaning. Here is where our living resurrection happens.