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John 20:19-31

WOUNDED PLACES

I had gone to visit the woman in the hospital shortly after she had had surgery. Standing at her bedside, I inquired how the surgery had gone and she began to describe how the surgeons had made an incision in her chest, when she said, "Well, here, do you want to see?" And without any inhibition or waiting for me to reply, she pulled up her hospital gown to reveal the wound. Now, in truth, I did *not* want to see her wound or anything else that lay beneath her hospital gown.

Wounds are not a very pleasant sight: the raw, red, inflamed skin, the blood and other secretions oozing out. They are painful to see. And there is something intimate about wounds. Sometimes they are found on intimate parts of the body we *typically* let only the closest of family members see. But there is also something intimate about letting others witness our places of pain. To share and reveal our pain is an intimate thing. And so usually, usually we keep our wounded places hidden and out of sight. Just as we might hide an ugly scar on our body, we hide our family struggles, our bad habits, our grief, our loneliness, our depression, our despair. Our wounds are not pleasant to witness, they embarrass us, and make us feel vulnerable, and so we usually keep them private from all but our most intimate of relationships. And sometimes we keep our wounds private even from them.

But here we have Jesus, the Resurrected Jesus, appearing to his disciples and freely showing his wounds to them. He shows them the wounds on his hands and the wound on his side. And when Thomas, who was elsewhere when Jesus first appeared to his disciples, when Thomas had trouble believing the others, Jesus even offers to let Thomas touch the wounds if

that will help him believe. Yes, Jesus is alive, but he is not all fixed up. He is alive, but he comes bearing his scars. The Resurrected Jesus is a wounded Jesus.

In American Sign Language, the sign used to identify Jesus is this: the middle finger of one hand touches the palm of the other hand, and then the middle finger of the second hand, touches the palm of the first hand. That is the sign used for Jesus--a sign that identifies him with his wounds.

The Resurrected Jesus does not show up all healed and pretty. He comes wounded. He comes with scars. He invites the disciples to see his scars because his scars are witnesses to his love. They tell the story of his great love.

Our physical and emotional scars also tell the story of our lives. They tell the story of our efforts to love. They tell the story of our failures and mistakes in life. Our scars tell the story of our disappointments and our grief. They tell the story of where we have been treated poorly, wrongly, unjustly. You don't live very long in this life without getting wounded and bearing scars.

Jesus does not wait until we are all fixed up to come to us or to love us. Instead, the scarred Jesus, the wounded Jesus comes to us while we are yet wounded. He comes with love and with forgiveness to heal us.

You may recall that the Resurrected Jesus found his disciples hiding in a locked room. These disciples were pretty scarred themselves by the ordeal they had just gone through. Today they might be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. They had endured the trauma of seeing their friend and teacher brutally nailed to a cross and watched him die in agony. They felt the terror of thinking that this same horror could also happen to them. And in addition, the disciples endured the wounds of shame and guilt that came from knowing how badly they had

failed their friend--how they had betrayed him, denied knowing him, abandoned him in his time of need. The disciples in that locked room were wounded men.

And Jesus comes to them in their wounded condition and he says to them, "Peace be with you." He doesn't offer judgment. He doesn't blame them. He doesn't lecture them. Instead, he gives them peace--a healing salve to their wounded places.

You and I will never be all fixed up in this world. We just won't. We are broken and imperfect. Life itself and other people will hurt us. And so we will always be wounded. But the wounded Jesus loves us still and offers us peace. His peace is not about floating through life untouched by hardship or distress. That is not how Jesus went through this world. His feet were planted on this earth and carried him through human brokenness and tragedy. But the peace Jesus offers is the awareness of God's love and forgiveness. It is the awareness that your life and your pain matter to God. It is the awareness that God's life-giving power is present. And so we can be at peace.

Jesus says to us wounded people: Peace be with you. I think that peace comes when instead of blocking Jesus from our wounds, instead of pretending we don't have any wounds, I think that peace comes when we let Jesus see and touch our wounds. And part of the way that can occur is when we let others know about our wounded places. This does not come easily to most of us. But sometimes we can find helpful examples: in Twelve Step Recovery groups people display a rare honesty about their wounds; in our worship here during Joys and Concerns we sometimes get a bit honest about the places where we are hurting. The peace that Christ offers us comes when we let others know about and touch our wounded places.

And then, then we are invited to touch the wounds of other people. And this isn't always easy either. Because wounds, be they physical or emotional or social, wounds as you know, can

be messy and unpleasant. But here's the thing: wherever we see wounds--there we will see Christ. Wherever we see racism and sexism, hatred and intolerance, exploitation and neglect, suffering, poverty, grief and loneliness--in all these places and conditions, there is the wounded Christ. He is wounded because we are wounded. And wherever we touch the wounded places of others with love, and healing, and justice, and compassion, there we will have touched Christ himself and offered his peace to a wounded world.