

John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "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."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Healing Wounds - April 11, 2021

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How do we experience loss? This pandemic year has been one of extraordinary loss for our world, our nation, our families and ourselves. Yesterday we celebrated the life of our longtime member and friend Helen Masarek. We grieve with Susan and her family. Very soon we will be holding a memorial service for Cass Burns, a service which follows much, much too closely on the service we held for her husband Ray. Our sorrow is with her children and all her friends.

And that's just 2021!

I know all of us have had friends and family members, if not ourselves personally, contract the Covid-19 virus. Most have survived and recovered fully. Some are still suffering aftereffects. Over half-million Americans alone have died — an incalculable, tragic loss. Millions more around the world have died. The pain and grief are undeniable.

The Covid virus is, however, merely the latest wound to lash us, just the latest scar on our souls. To be human is to experience pain and suffering. It is our stock in trade. Our wounding and our personal suffering begin from infancy and continue throughout our lives. These come in many forms. Not just disease, but rejection, abuse, the termination of relationships, the abrupt loss of a job, or a home, or a way of life we loved.

Yet for many of us, we may make a show of pretending that our losses and suffering never happened, or if they did, it did really matter very much.

I'll be honest with you, I've come to positively hate the phrase, "It's all good." No, my friends, no. It's not, repeat not, all good. Loss and pain and suffering are not good. I know some people say these words in order to show a brave face to the world. I know some people say it as a way of pretending that nothing can defeat them — they won't crumple in the face of whatever evil the world dishes out. But pretending that, "It's all good" doesn't automatically make things "all good."

Perhaps the phrase is a giant misunderstanding of what Paul wrote the Romans in chapter 8, verse 28 where he states, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." Maybe that verse has been wrongly abbreviated to "It's all good." What Paul means is that from losses, from setbacks, from sorrow and pain, good can emerge for those who trust in God. But for not one second is Paul saying any suffering is automatically good! I mean Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane knew perfectly well what was about to happen to him. He knew he would be arrested, tried, convicted, and put to death the most

horrible way possible: nailed to a cross. Of course Jesus' fear was so great that he sweat was like drops of blood. Of course he prayed to God that he be spared what was about to happen to him. He did not want to suffer. He did not want to die. As we recalled last week during our Easter service, Jesus' pain and suffering was decidedly not good for him personally. He did not seek it — not one bit.

Yes, we call Good Friday "Good" because by Jesus' suffering and dying for us and God's raising him from the dead for us, he redefined and re-created God's relationship with humanity. Jesus saved us through his suffering on the cross and yes, because he suffered, goodness happened.

The lesson of Jesus' suffering is that from the worst pain, the worst suffering, and the worst loss that can happen to a human being, resurrection, restoration, new life can emerge and that certainly is a good and wonderful thing.

Today's scripture passage is generally used by preachers to talk about Thomas, good old "doubting" Thomas. You know, the not-so-good apostle who had the nerve to speak the truth about his feelings concerning the supposed resurrection of Jesus. Poor Thomas has gotten a lot of bad press over the centuries. Nowadays, some preachers are treating him with more understanding, saying that Thomas' ambivalent reaction to the disciples' report of seeing the Lord alive was, in fact, perfectly normal.

Yes, the subject of most sermons on this passage is usually about Thomas and Jesus.

However, something that strikes me as both highly interesting and highly overlooked by most is that fact that the risen Christ retained the wounds given to him on the cross. The holes in his wrists and feet where the drove the nails were still there. The huge hole in his side where a spear was thrust into his body was still there. In other words, the risen Lord retained the wounds and scars of his suffering. They did not disappear when he emerged from the tomb. The body of the risen Christ was still marred with all the reminders of his life and his death. They did not go away. You might ask why was this necessary? Why didn't Jesus emerge from the tomb with his resurrection body fully restored and whole? Why did he retain the wounds of the past?

Now one reason, of course, is that Jesus kept his wounds precisely because he knew that Thomas and others would want to see and touch them as proof that the risen Christ was the same as the crucified Jesus. After all, Thomas did insist on seeing and touching Jesus' wounds in person. I have a feeling that more than a few of Jesus' followers shared Thomas' doubt and had Thomas' questions: they just didn't speak them out loud.

So, yes, the risen Christ's visible wounds demonstrated that he was the same Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified on the cross. That connection is clear.

Yet there is a much deeper and more human reason why the Risen Christ, the Resurrected Jesus kept his wounds, a reason that has everything to do with how we human beings handle our grief, loss and pain.

As I told you before, I hate the phrase, "It's all good." For me, "It's all good" is the biggest lie there is. Nobody gets over their grief, pain, and loss very quickly at all. In fact, the truth is nobody is able to rid themselves of the wounds to their souls completely.

I could pause right now and ask you to remember some of the pain you have endured in your life: physical, spiritual, emotional, mental pain. But I don't need to. I'm more than sure that my words up to this point have been more than sufficient to help you recall things you did not want to think about — and I'm very sorry for that. My purpose today is not to cause you more pain by reopening old wounds, defeats, and losses. No, it's quite the opposite.

The fact that the risen Christ carries on his resurrected body the scars, even holes, of the mutilated, crucified Jesus should be proof enough that try as we might, wish as we might, pray as we might, the scars and hurts of the past can never completely go away. Once we are wounded, in the o-so-many-ways we can be wounded, those memories will remain with us always. And we know that the slightest touch, the tiniest smell, the hearing of a word, they all have the power to bring that pain back full force and then suddenly things are definitely not "all good" at all. Not at all.

In our natural Christian desire to share the good news of the resurrected Jesus, we forget about the day we call Holy Saturday. Ever hear of it? We don't mention it very much. During Holy Week we start with Palm Sunday, the triumphant entrance into Jerusalem. Scene 2 is Maundy Thursday with the Last Supper, Jesus arrest, trial, and condemnation to death. Scene 3 is Good Friday, Jesus torture, carrying his own cross, suffering, and death. And Scene 4? Scene 4 is Easter! Resurrection Sunday. Jesus restored to life, Jesus bringing hope. Jesus defeating death. All wonderful. All glorious!

But there's still that day in between. That Holy Saturday. That day where Jesus' followers were living with one thing and one thing only: the certain knowledge that their friend and master was dead, gone, and could never be seen again. Holy Saturday for Jesus' disciples was reality, reality as they understood the world. Sure, Jesus said he would be raised, but how? But what? Their

minds, like our minds, knew totally and utterly that life was life and death was death and endings were endings. On Holy Saturday, the future ended for the disciples. Period.

Yet, don't most of us live a kind of Holy Saturday existence? All of us, every one of us, who has experienced suffering, hurt, and pain of any kind cannot, and will never completely let it go. We are prisoners of our pasts and our pretending the past does not exist does not make it nonexistent. I cannot see how our saying, "It's all good" makes the past go away. It won't. It can't. Not completely.

That, friends, that is why the risen Christ continues to carry the wounds of his crucifixion. He carries them for us, because we continue to carry our own wounds, our own scars, our own pain. The wounds on Christ's body tell us that far from denying his past pain, Our Lord is reminded of it all the time. He cannot pretend it didn't happen. He cannot deny that he wasn't crucified. He can't say that everything is OK, because he has the scars that scream everything is not OK.

And there, there, there friends is our good news! Our savior is not about pretending. Our savior is not about living a lie. Our savior never denies the awful, painful, terrible truth of what happened to him.

And if Christ doesn't, why should we?

I've said it once, and I'll say it again and again and again: Most of the problems in this world, problems at all levels: personal, family, community, national, global, are rooted in the same cause. We are all in collective denial about the evil surrounding us: both the evil that has happened to us and the evil that we, yes we, have caused ourselves and others.

Those scars of the past are not going away, ever. But they don't have to. Hear the good news and be at peace with yourself. We don't have to carry the scars of the past alone. We do not have to pretend they didn't happen. We don't have to show a brave face to the world while our insides are burning with pain. We don't have to go it alone.

Our Risen Lord bears the scars of his past and carries them with him. That means the Jesus who suffered and died for us all carried and continues to carry the wounds and pain of us all. Yes, in life we may indeed have to show the world how strong we are, how fearless we are, how we are able to rise above our pasts. But inside, alone, away from everyone, we can strongly, fearlessly, and boldly share our grief and pain with the one who himself was abused and wounded and knows first hand all that we are going through. The time has arrived to accept that Jesus Christ is enough to bear your burdens, feel your pain, and sustain you in all your troubles. Let him. Just let him. Now.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.