

Easter 2C (4/28/2019)

Acts 5:27-32

Psalm 150

Revelation 1:4-8

John 20:19-31

Resurrection is not divorced from incarnation; risen life incorporates our scars. Acknowledging our pain and the pain of others, we bear one another's burdens in the spirit of Christ. This kind of bearing together paves the way for trust and closeness. And collectively, we can name our wounds from a place of freedom, preserving the possibility of healing and new life.

My earliest memories revolve around an incident that took place in my childhood home before I turned two years-old. Wrestling with my mother as she tried to force my little arms into a coat on a cold spring morning, I twisted away from her and promptly ran into the sharp corner of a nearby wall. The force of the collision split my forehead to the bone, and I bled profusely. My mother was sick with worry, as any parent can imagine, and rushed me off to the pediatrician's office. Covering my face with a blue sheet, the doctor dabbed the wound with an anesthetic and proceeded to stitch it up. I can still remember the surgical light shining through the fabric of the sheet, the murmuring of the adults in the room, and the strange sensation of the needle and thread pulling my numbed skin back together. Get a good look at my forehead and you'll see the vertical scar that serves as a permanent reminder to mind my parents!

I'm willing to bet you have a scar story to tell, too. Have you ever known a person without any scars? It's difficult to imagine anyone getting through the years without a few cuts and scrapes, or worse. Some scars we can point to with

a sense of humor, even pride. These tend to be superficial, physical scars that tell stories with happy endings. But other scars expose deeper physical or emotional pain – the scars of abuse, trauma, mental illness, heartbreak, loss. These scars may in fact be open wounds, sources of ongoing suffering and shame. And for this reason, they're harder to talk about.

The tragic irony is that these are precisely the wounds that benefit most from the loving attentiveness of others. But for fear of embarrassment or rejection, for fear of showing weakness, we tend to conceal them and try to bear them alone. This can have disastrous consequences as wounds fester over time, and our repressed pain resurfaces in ways that cause further harm to us and to others. "If we do not transform our pain," writes Franciscan priest and mystic Richard Rohr, "we will most assuredly transmit it – usually to those closest to us: our family, our neighbors, our co-workers, and, invariably, the most vulnerable, our children."¹

But what does it mean to "transform" pain? It certainly doesn't mean to put on a happy face and expect it to go away. There's no such thing as "just getting over it." No, **the only way out of any crisis is through. To transform pain means first to feel it, to come to understand it, and eventually, to own it in such a way that it holds less power over you.** As a result, Rohr explains, wounds can become "sacred wounds," experiences that hold the promise of something beyond the pain itself.

¹ <https://cac.org/transforming-pain-2018-10-17/>.

There is something of this wisdom in our Gospel from John today. On Easter Sunday evening, Jesus comes to the disciples in the depth of their grief and fear. The trauma of the crucifixion is fresh, and Mary Magdalene's testimony of the resurrection has yet to sink in. Not only do the disciples mourn the death of their leader and friend, but they also mourn the death of their dreams. What a devastating blow that after three years of hoping and praying for a different world, the powers that Jesus confronted have summarily done away with him. By a perversion of justice, his life, his voice, his vision for abundant life have been snuffed out. And his community is disconsolate.

If you were to guess what form the risen Jesus would take that first Easter evening, would you imagine that any sign of suffering and shame would remain? Jesus is the Lord, the embodiment of resurrection and life² – would you imagine that his scars would be intact? What remarkable continuity between the Jesus the disciples had known prior to his death, and the Jesus they are only now beginning to know in resurrection. **The crucified one is the risen one is the crucified one.**

Even more remarkable is Jesus' self-assurance in displaying his scars. He doesn't try to hide his wounds, but draws the disciples' attention to them. "Peace be with you," he greets them. Then, he immediately shows them his hands and his side. *I'm alive, he insists, the real me, not some spirit that has escaped the realm of bodily existence. See my scars? These are the signs of my suffering. They'll always*

² John 11:25.

be a part of me, but I've overcome them now. Jesus' wounds have become sacred wounds. His pain is transformed.

Maybe this is what he means by his offer of peace. "Peace be with you.... Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side." **If Jesus can show his scars, defying the shame of the cross, then maybe his friends can, too. Rather than locking their pain away, the disciples have permission to throw open the doors. They can own their grief instead of letting it own them.**

By practicing courageous vulnerability, the risen Jesus extends a holy invitation. It's an act of love to let someone in, and an investment in relationship. To quote researcher and author Brené Brown, "Because true belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance."³ *I'm alive – the real me. See my scars? These are the signs of my suffering. They'll always be a part of me, but I've overcome them now.*

Dear friends, risen life incorporates our scars. Acknowledging our pain and the pain of others, we bear one another's burdens in the spirit of Christ.⁴ This kind of bearing together paves the way for trust and closeness. And collectively, we can name our wounds from a place of freedom, preserving the possibility of healing and new life.

³ *Daring Greatly.*

⁴ Galatians 6:2.