

## Sermon Text – Sunday, April 24, 2022 – Pastor Paula Kraus

### First Reading: Revelation 1:4-8, Second Reading: Acts 5:27-32, Scripture: John 20:19-31 – Easter Truth

This is the story typically read on the second Sunday after Easter, the story of Thomas' doubt. This comes immediately after Jesus appeared to the couple on the road to Emmaus, it was the evening of the day of resurrection. We could talk about doubt this morning, about how Jesus did not condemn the disciples for their doubt but offered them proof so that they would believe. We could talk about the place doubt has in our belief system – that doubt, and faith are partners to our believing in Christ. But we've had those conversations – and there is so much more to this bit of scripture to explore. I don't want to miss anything by rehashing what we've already been told over the years. What we don't often focus on in this scripture is the presence of the risen Christ – scars and all. Jesus's scars are the "truth" of our Easter Joy, they are the proof of resurrection.

While the disciples were contemplating all that they had heard and seen on that day, they were locked in a room 'for fear' of what would happen next. Jesus shows up even when they are fearful. The locked door could not keep him from offering them a blessing of "Peace be with you." Jesus shows them his wounds, maybe so they could believe he was real and not an apparition. In that first encounter, Jesus reminds the disciples he is sending them to complete the work he started. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." I think he is offering them a blessing of "Peace be with you" to quell their fear and apprehension about what would be next. As he breathes on them, he is breathing the Holy Spirit into them to enable them to be witnesses.

But the scene quickly moves forward a week and the disciples are still together in the house with the doors shut and locked. Thomas, who had not been with them on that first day was now present. But – the other disciples who told him about Jesus' appearance obviously gave him no reason to believe their story. The appearance of Jesus did not compel them to leave the safety of their locked room, why would Thomas believe they saw something as life changing as the resurrected Jesus. Like the disciples who thought the witness of the women who encountered an empty tomb was a load of crap, Thomas probably thought the disciples were full of bunk as well. Thomas wanted to see for himself. So, Jesus shows up through Thomas's doubt and offers peace and affirmation. Touch and see, see and believe. That was enough for Thomas to say, "My Lord and my God." Jesus' scars bore the truth of his resurrection.

Why would Jesus resurrected body bear the scars of his crucifixion and death? Aren't we supposed to be a fully new creation in eternity and if that is so, why does Jesus carry with him the reminder of his suffering? Verse 31 in this scripture is the point of the message – ". . . these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. . ." We are to be witnesses to the truth of Easter and Jesus's scars are the "truth" of Easter.

I have always found it a little curious that the disciples remained in that locked room fearful of what would happen. We don't know much about what may have been going on in Jerusalem after Jesus' crucifixion, maybe there was a crack down by the Roman authorities to ensure no trouble after having released the known insurrectionist Barabbas. So, it is possible the disciples wanted to keep their heads down for a while. But – Jesus has appeared, in the flesh scars and all, risen from his tomb and you think that would embolden them to proclaim that

good news. Jesus comes to them even through locked doors and offers peace then reminds them – “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” They however have not yet figured out how to live in this new kingdom created by Jesus resurrection. What more would it take to compel them out of their stupor?

Jesus shows up – bearing the reminders of his suffering offering peace and affirmation of faith and forgiveness. Jesus’ resurrection does not erase the horrors of his crucifixion, yet Jesus offers peace. Peace be with you, receive the Holy Spirit and go about the work I have sent you to do! But they stayed in their safe space – on the eighth day they were watching and waiting in a locked room.

Folks – this is the eighth day, are we still locked in our safe space, waiting for Jesus to show up? Are there people among us living in doubt because we are unable to give any reason for them to believe? Jesus’ resurrection is about transformation – although he was changed into something new, he still bore the scars that reminded his followers not only of the horror of crucifixion but also the joy of his risen and living presence with them. We who have come to believe in Jesus through the witness of others and are baptized in Christ are also living transformed lives. But, is our witness compelling or do we negate what we say by living lives that do not reflect Jesus’ resurrection. Following Jesus should change us, should embolden us to show transformed / resurrected lives. “I once was lost but now am found.” Our lives should reflect joy of transformation, the joy of Christ’s presence.

I believe the fact that Jesus’ resurrected body bore the scars of his suffering should compel us to show our own scars as an effective witness to our resurrection with Christ. If those who pierced him are able to see him and recognize him by his wounds they too are freed from sin. Maybe that is a signal to us that Jesus bore his scars to confirm this fact – God is capable of taking even our worst human experiences and transforming us into wholeness. Jesus’ body was dis-membered on the cross but is re-membered each Sunday in our sanctuary and in the witness of countless saints as scars are revealed to prove transformed lives.

We know that eventually Peter and the disciples left the safety of that locked room, they had more encounters with the risen Christ, and they began telling their stories in Jerusalem and further. In the scripture from Acts that we read this morning, we see that this teaching caused conflict but the response from the disciples was, “We can’t help it.” “We must obey God rather than any human authority.” They too had bore scars of witnessing for Jesus, but those scars became power and witness to the transforming power of Christ.

The apostles acknowledged to the authorities “We must obey God rather than any human authority” – is that what guides us in today’s world? Do we let our modern culture of individualism or nationalism silence our speaking Easter truth? Jesus’ resurrection is not the end of his story but the beginning of the Christian movement. A movement that through forgiveness subverts established power and puts all earthly power – including political power – subject to the kingdom of God. We are part of that kingdom, part of a government of which God is head. We must obey God rather than any human authority.

This scripture from the Gospel of John is about witness, it is also about building a community of believers. Jesus shows up through fear, through locked doors, through doubt and offers peace. Jesus’ scars reveal the truth of our witness – He lives. He does not come to the disciples wearing a crown of glory, showing off the riches he has gained at the right hand of God. He does not proclaim prosperity as he offers peace. He does not say, believe in me and all your money problems will be over, believe in me and you will stand out in the community as powerful and prosperous citizens. No – he has told them that they too will suffer. Jesus stands

with them, shows them the marks of his suffering, eats meager meals with them and offers peace, comfort, and mercy.

We cannot overlook the scars, they reveal that even after enormous intense suffering Jesus lives. The scars we bear in life can also reveal the truth of our witness – we too are risen to new lives in Christ. If we can't show our lives have changed because of Jesus – there are probably Thomas's out there who think our stories are bunk.

If this church isn't changing lives than maybe our witness is also bunk. The work that we must do for the kingdom of God is not worked to erase the scars of our past – it is not plastic surgery to make ourselves appear perfect. The work that is true witness to resurrection shows the scars, reveals the imperfections that make us who we are, and reveals how much we are transformed. We don't have the physical presence of Jesus and we are not able to put our hands into the nail holes or his side that was pierced. We are however, collectively, the body of Christ and just as Jesus' scars proved to Thomas the truth of his resurrection, our scars can prove to the world the truth of transformation through belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

We don't rely on prosperity to preach the Gospel. We don't have to show richness from a monetary stand point – we only have to witness to God's truth – Easter truth. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and we proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world. We witness to the fact that in bonds of Christian faith we yield ourselves to God and serve the One whose kingdom has no end. The abundance of our faith comes from abundant forgiveness, mercy, compassion, and justice – for all nations. In our scripture from the book of Revelation we read this morning we know that “EVERY eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account ALL the tribes of the earth will wail.” Jesus' forgiveness, mercy and justice is available to all – not some, not only the rich and prosperous, not only the powerful or popular, but to all – every last living creature.