

## **Sermon April 7, 2024**

### **Witnesses - how do we know?**

#### **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.

## Sacred Scars

One thing you can be sure of... get a bunch of Penicks together and they are very competitive. When I was 11, we went to California to visit for the summer. We went to the beach for the day and my Uncle Mike organized a softball game. It was an especially competitive game, as the men and boys all whipped their shirts off, the competition shifted to who had the greatest scar.

- ♥ Joe ran bike into wall
- ♥ Cousin Pat – waffle scar from Nana’s old-fashioned heater
- ♥ My Uncle’s burn from the exploding pressure cooker
- ♥ Uncle Pat & Uncle Mike’s matching scars – kidneys.

That stopped them all. There was something so special and life-affirming about those scars, that no one could top it.

Scars. We all have them. Some are big and others are small. Some are funny, some are sad or even scary. But each scar tells a story.... They represent part of who we are and where we have come from. Sometimes the scars remind us of such painful times that we hide them away, cover them up, pretend that they are not there. Some are invisible, hidden deep within our soul, searing our hearts. But other scars we show... we display them with pride. We tell the stories of how we got them; we hear the stories and feel connected. They are visible reminders of wounds which we have all received.

Each scar tells its own story.

And so, when the Risen Jesus first visits the disciples, he bears the visible reminders of his wounds... visible reminders that have not yet healed enough to become scars.

Visible reminders of his own, special story.

When the disciples see these wounds, they know that they are in the presence of their beloved teacher. He is not a ghost or a mirage. And when

Thomas can reach out and touch them, they are reassured that the one who was crucified and dead is now very much alive. And they are reminded of all that he had gone through.

And they see all this when they need it the most. The disciples are cowering in fear after the horrible death of Jesus, too frightened to leave the locked room. Only Thomas is able to find the nerve to sneak out and leave to look for some food, and as a result almost misses out on the experience. Because suddenly, in that locked room, Jesus appears and greets them with words of peace. He shows them the scars and they are transformed from fear to rejoicing... from sorrow to hope. In the stories of those scars, new life begins.

The cross is empty, but the scars remain.

These scars remind us that not only is Christ divine, but Jesus is also fully and completely human. Jesus felt deep, excruciating pain, and through the resulting scars and resurrection, we are able to experience deep, life-affirming redemption.

The cross is empty, but the scars remain.

Jesus, God's own son, still bears the wounds from his life with us on earth. The resurrection did not erase his human experience, and the scars speak of his solidarity with human suffering... with our suffering. These scars remind us that God is with us through all things, especially the worst of times that leave the deepest wounds. These scars are sacred.

And as long as our lives wound us inside and out, leaving scars that sear our bodies and hearts, we can be assured that even when *the cross is empty, the sacred scars remain.*

We can see the woundedness around us when bullets fly in Nashville and Finland... when a mother grieves the loss of her young child after a car accident... when air strikes kill children and aid workers.

The image of the risen Christ with wounds in his hands and his side reminds us when we suffer, so did our God; when we cry out in loneliness, so did our God. When we feel abandoned and alone, remember that Christ hung on a cross and yelled, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

We don't have a God who stands at a distance and watches but one who entered fully into the reality of our pain. So, when we suffer, we know that Christ can say, "I've been there, and look: I have the wounds to prove it."

Those sacred scars become part of our story, and our scars, just as sacred in God's eyes, become a part of God's story in our lives. The scars of Christ become scars of hope as we deal with our own bitter wounds. Some scars we love to show off, others we want to hide so that no one ever knows they are there. Yet our scars are something we all have in common -- something everyone shares. We all have experienced pain, both physical and emotional, and in Jesus' scars, we know that God is truly with us.

Peace be with you, he says. Peace be with you.

Look at your neighbors, look at your friends... look even at those who have wounded you. We all bear scars, and we all turn to one who bears scars for us and brings us peace. We are connected to each other through our faith in one who suffered and brings us new life.

Can't you hear his voice, calling you today?

*"Peace be with you. As Abba God has sent me, so I send you."*

We don't need to see the wounds or touch them... in faith we know that God shares our pain through Jesus Christ. And through Jesus, we share the pain of our siblings. Looking in each other's eyes, we acknowledge each others' pain... we touch hands, and know that together we can accept Christ's gift of peace.

May it be so. Amen.

## Blessing Service

### Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

There is a season for everything, a season for every purpose under the heaven:

a season to be born, and a season to die;  
a season to plant, and a season to harvest;  
a season to hurt, and a season to heal;  
a season to tear down, and a season to build up;  
a season to cry, and a season to laugh;  
a season to mourn, and a season to dance;  
a season to scatter stones, and a season to gather them;  
a season to embrace, and a season for holding back;  
a season to seek, and a season to lose;  
a season to keep, and a season to throw away;  
a season to tear, and a season to mend;  
a season to be silent, and a season to speak;  
a season to love, and a season to hate;  
a season for war, and a season for peace.

### Reflections on Our Season Together

The experiences we have cherished;  
what we will miss;  
the dreams and desires we hope to fulfil as we move forward.

### Blessing With Oil

May the God of Exodus and Emmaus, the God of seasons and turning points, be with you in this time of transition.

May she who is the midwife of change teach you to be gentle with yourself as you let go of the old and wait the birth of the new.

May she who is the womb of time strengthen you with this oil of wisdom and gladness.

### Offering of Spiritual Gifts – Laying on of Hands

### Closing Hymn