

## Scars and All

### Second Sunday of Easter – John 20:19-31

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, April 3, 2016*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

*Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!*

When I six or seven, war of sorts broke out in our little suburban Phoenix corner of the world. An argument arose that probably began as a territorial dispute – you know, “You get off my property!” “It’s not your property, it’s your dad’s!” “Oh yeah, well get out!” “Oh yeah, make me!” Our scuffle progressed through the name calling stage and the pushing and wrestling on the ground, to throwing stones at each other in the alley. Normally, this exercise resulted in nothing more significant than a rearrangement of the gravel, since none of us had either the arm or the aim to pose a problem. But this time, Danny Miller, my sometime best friend and sometime bitterest enemy got lucky – or unlucky, depending on your point of view. A rock left his hand, arched through the air, and came straight toward my right eye. If I close my eyes, I can *still* see it coming at me. The fact that the corner of my right eyebrow has a bit of an interruption, gives evidence to just how close that dispute came to real disaster.

When I was eight or so, I was playing with some friends of ours, the Faulkners. We were playing an elaborate game of hide-and-seek in which it was required that the seeker actually *tag* the hider once he or she had been discovered. I was the oldest of our merry band and therefor arguably the best hider. But eventually, little Larry Faulkner spied me and gave chase. I was laughing and running, sure that my longer legs would get me back to base long before he could catch up. Now, most houses in Phoenix back then had a casement type of windows with a handle that turns to swing the metal-framed window outward. I came running around the corner of the house, laughing over my shoulder, as Larry slipped further and further behind. I turned just in time... to make firm and painful contact with the corner of one of those windows. This big scar here on my forehead, which my hair *used* to cover quite nicely, thank you, is testimony to the fact that I was a better hider than I was a runner.

When I was ten, my folks had left the five of us kids with our favorite baby-sitter while they went to some church function. We were all crowded into my parents’ room, lying about on the bed watching TV in the dark, when I decided the time was ripe to explore the goodies in Mom’s backing cupboard. I went to the kitchen, telling the baby-sitter that it was for water, and opened the cabinet door to gaze at the nuts, and the sugar sprinkles, and my favorite – the chocolate chips. Determined to filch at least a handful of the treats, I placed both hands on the countertop, flexed my knees and sprang with the intention of landing my bottom on the top of the counter. I never got there. As I sprang up, my head hit the open cabinet door and I dropped to the floor in a heap. Convinced that I was the recipient of proper punishment for trying to help myself to the goodies, I slunk back to the dark bedroom without a word and held my wounded head to the pillow until it became obvious that the wetness that was spreading on the pillow was coming from a gash in my scalp. I can remember being much sorrier for our panic-stricken baby-sitter than I was for my own larcenous self. One of these days, when my hair finally recedes that far, and I know it will, that scar will be silent witness to my ill-fated cupboard raid.

My mom used to say that with all the times that I managed to knock my head around, it was an absolute wonder that I was able to make it through high school, much less college and seminary. But I have scars elsewhere as well. I have a scar on my arm from a lesson about acetylene torches, one on my

foot that some of you have heard about before from running barefoot over a broken mason jar, and several that aren't on the outside at all – from events in my life that I seldom discuss, but think about often. Each scar tells a story, each scar is the visible evidence that something has happened to me, each scar testifies to something about who I am, where I've been, and what I have done.

We all carry scars, don't we? If we had time this morning, I suspect that each of *you* could also show-n-tell about some scar you have and just how you got it. Some are out where others can see them, others are much deeper. But for each of us, those scars are part of who we are.

As John's story of Easter continues in our Gospel lesson this morning, we see that the disciples were behind locked doors. Jesus was dead and the authorities were after *them*. Then suddenly Jesus is there, greets them with his peace, and shows them his hands and his feet. He shows them his wounds. He shows them his scars.

The Risen Christ was so changed that the Gospels record that he was beyond recognition. You will remember from last week, that Mary Magdalene didn't know him until he spoke her name. Next week, we'll be reminded that the disciples didn't recognize him at the lake until he had given them advice to cast their nets for another miraculous catch. From Luke's story, we know that the two on the road to Emmaus had an entire afternoon's conversation with him, and only recognized him in the breaking of the bread. The Risen Christ had a new, exalted body. Yet he still had the *scars* that had laid in in the tomb!

Jesus showed those scars to his frightened, bewildered disciples to show them who he was. They may not have recognized him to begin with, but when they saw the scars in his hands and feet, they *knew* that it was him. Thomas wasn't with them the first time. When *he* finally showed up, the rest told him, "We've seen the Lord! We've even seen his scars." But Thomas said that *he* wouldn't believe unless he *too* saw those scars, unless he *touch*ed them. So the next time they came together, Jesus again came to be with them, and invited Thomas to do just that. Whether or not Thomas actually *touch*ed the scars, the story doesn't say, but seeing those scars, Thomas fell on his knees and said, "My Lord and my God!"

Those scars were the proof of who Jesus was, of where he had been, of what he had done. Those scars were the proof that he was the same one they had seen betrayed in the garden. Those scars were the proof that he was the same one they had seen crucified. Those scars were the proof that he was the same one they had seen sealed into a tomb! He was not some clever impostor. He was not some figment of their imagination. He was not some filmy apparition. He was for real! They saw the scars and they *knew* that even death could not take him away. There he stood among them, scars and all!

And, you know, I believe with all my heart that our Lord *still* has those scars. I believe that in the forty days he met with his disciples after his resurrection, he showed them those scars again and again. I believe that as he ascended from their sight to his rightful place in heaven, he took those scars with him. And I believe that seated at the right hand of the Father, in the fullness of his glory and power – Jesus Christ *still* bears those sacred scars today. Because those scars are *still* the proof who he is, of where he's been, and of what he has done. That pock-marked forehead torn by the thorny crown is full proof of Christ's union with this suffering, broken human world. Those nail-scarred hands and feet are proof of the pain and the death that bought comfort and healing and eternal life for the whole human family – and for each and every one of us. That spear-pierced side is full and sufficient proof that death itself has been utterly and totally overturned.

To be sure, the world will scar us – outside *and* inside. But no matter how life wounds and scars us, we can find healing and victory through the one who has every wound, every scar life can inflict, even the scar of death, yet is alive! When, like the disciples huddled in the room that morning, fear and anxiety harden us into inaction, the scars of Christ give us courage to carry on with the work we have been given to do. When like Thomas, our doubts make us question who we are and what we are about, the scars of

Christ renew our identity as his own. And when the accuser comes before the throne of God and into the quiet corners of our heart and points to our disappointments and our failings and the utter sinfulness of our nature, Jesus Christ holds out his sacred scarred hands and says once again that the accusation against us *will not stand*.

Our Lord, our Savior, our Redeemer *still* has the scars of his Passion and death, he still has the scars of his life among us, and with us, as *one* of us! The chains of whatever bondage humanity had sold ourselves into, have been *broken*. Whatever was lost in Eden, has been restored at Calvary and the empty tomb. Whatever ransom was owed, has been fully and *finally* paid. And *Christ*, and *Christ* has the scars to prove it!

Alleluia! Christ is risen! *The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!*