

Scars and All updated in 2024

Second Sunday of Easter, Year B, John 20 vv19 to 31

When Jesus was preaching, teaching, healing, and spreading the news that God's kingdom was here in God's world, he wasn't very much concerned with writing anything down – his words, his deeds, his miracles, none of that. Prophets in the Old Testament had scribes who followed them around and preserved their words and actions but not Jesus. God made flesh dwelt among us – the most momentous occurrence in the history of our world since the world was created – and he didn't make sure anybody wrote anything down.

What he did make sure of, what he was concerned to do, was to build a community of faith – those who believed in him, those who believed in his words, those who saw his deeds. Jesus invited everyone he encountered to enter into his community – the kingdom of God. He especially invited those who had been pushed to the fringes of society because *that* was not what God had wanted for these people he had rescued from Egypt. God had rescued his people from an empire driven by the power of pocketbook, property, and position in society. God rescued them in order to create a new kind of society who lived in right relationship with each other, with the world, and with him...but, here they were, in Jesus' time, living according to the rules of the empire he had rescued them from. Jesus came along to set them straight once again – to show them the way of living in God's kingdom, to show them how to be a community of faith living in right relationship with all things and with everyone.

Our gospel story today opens with the core group of that community of faith. As the curtain parts and the lights come up, we see this community of faith...a

bedraggled, despairing, terrified community of faith. The disciples, in the locked room, huddled in fear, eyes swollen from tears and bleary from lack of sleep, huge, dark circles underneath, ears straining for the first tell-tale thud of a soldier's heavy tread...Because, you know, when the leader is arrested and killed, the followers are next. But, they hear nothing...nothing but the thud of their own beating hearts against the background static of the occasional stifled sob.

Exhausted and hopeless, John lets his eyelids close...just for a moment, he thinks. A startled gasp jolts him upright and his eyes pop open to behold Jesus. Jesus is there...somehow...in that locked room. Suddenly, there's a clamour of noise as the disciples, excited and confused, gather around and try to ask Jesus questions all at the same time and Jesus quiets them... "Peace be with you," he says. Peace be with you.

Peace...Not the "peace and quiet" after a busy day...Not the eerie peace that falls when the bombs and guns have stopped...*God's* peace. It is the peace beyond our understanding. It is the tranquility and quietness of spirit that lifts us beyond the circumstances. When Jesus spoke these words of peace to his disciples, the only peace they knew was what was called the "Roman peace". The power of Rome kept everyone in line with the threat of violence. If you didn't fall in line, they punished you, they made a horrific example of you – Jesus nailed to the cross, dying in shame and agony was Rome's way of saying to everyone else: If you dare stand against us, this is what we'll do to you. That is the world's peace – punishments matched up with various crimes trying to stop people from breaking the law. That's the peace the disciples knew. That's the peace the world still knows.

Jesus teaches us a different peace. God's peace comes from victory over evil. It is peace that comes not from the absence of war but from no longer desiring war, no longer even knowing what war is. Only God can give us this peace because this is the peace we have when we are in right relationship with God. Being in right relationship with God means that we love God – with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, with all our strength – but it also means that we love ourselves, others, and the rest of God's creation. God's desire – and God wants us to desire this too – God's desire is to reconcile all things to Himself and to each other. God's peace. The peace the disciples were given.

“Peace be with you,” Jesus says to them and then he gives them an astounding, priceless gift. In the moment of their grief and hopelessness, when they were painfully aware of Jesus' absence, suddenly he was there, breathing reassurance, breathing his presence into them...breathing the gift of the Holy Spirit. The same breath that moved over the waters and created this beautiful world out of chaos, light out of darkness. The same breath that breathed life into the dust God had shaped into Adam. That breath breathed life into the disciples. That breath brought light into their darkness. That breath gave them the gift of his presence always, even unto the end of the age. And that breath, gave them God's peace.

It is the same peace that Jesus brought once again a week later...this time to Thomas. Peace be with you, Thomas...the one who needs to see my scars to believe. Now, poor Thomas gets a bad rap. He is called “Doubting Thomas” because of this passage of scripture. But, let me point out that all of the disciples doubted. Jesus showed them his nail wounds and pierced side and *then* they rejoiced. John does not intend for Thomas to be looked down upon. Rather,

John's point is to reassure his readers – and that, of course, includes us – John reassures us that faith is no less a possibility for us now than it was for the original disciples. “Adored by God are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” Faith is available to all people, in all places, and in all times.

Christ's resurrected body, the body Thomas saw that day, still bore the scars of his death on the cross...An everlasting witness to the salvation God gave to us when we were still sinners. When Thomas saw those scars, he did more than believe his master was standing in front of him...Thomas fell down on his knees and worshipped because he knew God was standing before him. God with the scars of suffering. Christ's body, scarred for us.

And here we are...Christ's body here on earth...We certainly have scars – scars left by hurtful words, scars left by broken relationships, financial troubles, health issues. We are all scarred in some way. Then, we look out the window at God's good creation, the earth, and it doesn't take long to see the scars there as well. Huge swaths of land destroyed by raging forest fires, the local landfill site heaped high with garbage, a continent's worth of plastic floating in the ocean, hungry, hopeless people lined up outside the food bank...Our world is broken and scarred. Yet, like Christ's broken body, resurrected through the power of the Holy Spirit, scars and all, never to die again so, too, will we be resurrected and, so too, will God resurrect this broken world, scars and all, never to die again. Why? Because God so loved the world...We have hope. We are ever straining toward the peace of God. God's peace that will be everlasting and complete when all things are reconciled to each other and to God.

“Peace be with you,” Jesus said to his disciples and he breathed into them the gift of his presence, the Holy Spirit, and he sent them out – just as the Father had sent him – to spread that peace, the good news of salvation through what God had accomplished in Christ. And that hopeless, terrified, small little community of faith became the confident community of faith standing before the religious leaders refusing to stop spreading the peace of God, declaring that they will listen to God, not humans. And that small little community of faith became the communities of faith spread throughout the Middle East and Asia, became the communities of faith spread throughout the world, became the community of faith sitting right here today.

“Community of faith” is a description that does not quite say all it needs to say. It doesn’t fully get to the heart of who we are together. We are not just a community, not just a group of people who come together to worship or to fundraise or to share fellowship. The Spirit who breathed life into creation, the Spirit who was breathed into the disciples, is the Spirit who dwells within each one of us through baptism...different individual person – same unifying Spirit. We are, each of us, connected together, joined together in a deeply intimate, profound way that transcends time and place. It is a bond among us that cannot be broken by distance or even death. Bound together by the Spirit, one body of Christ, that same Jesus Christ breathes on us the responsibility of this priceless gift. As my Father sent me, so now I send you. God’s purpose is the ultimate reconciliation of all creation to God and to each other. We are, each one of us, ministers of reconciliation, revealing God’s kingdom through living the way of God’s kingdom. It is not enough that we worship together. That is extremely important – crucial, in fact, in our ongoing transformation – but not the whole of

our purpose. God's purpose will never be fulfilled without us bringing it outside these walls. "God's kingdom come, God's will be done on earth as in heaven" must be more than prayed. It must be lived.

In believing, we have life in his name, John tells us. Life that comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit...life given to the dry bones of those who had turned from God in Ezekiel's vision. Life given to the lepers, the blind, the oppressed, the outcast...life that is not just living but being truly alive, living in community – truly alive in the love and peace that passes all understanding breathed into us by Jesus; the same peace we will shortly breathe between us as we share this peace with each other.

Thomas saw the scars of his broken Lord and knew he was looking at the power of God's limitless love to call forth life from the worst death-dealing wounds sin could inflict. And not only that...he knew he was looking at God. As we look at the wounds sin has inflicted on creation, on the vulnerable around the globe, and even in our own lives, we act in the confidence that the One who breathes into us his Spirit continues to call forth life from death. Indeed, we are sent forth as a living testimony to such resurrection life. We find God amid the scars and brokenness of the world and we reveal God to this scarred and broken world.

Says the risen Lord who stands among us even now, "Peace be with you."