

First Trinity Lutheran  
April 15, 2012  
Second Sunday after Easter  
John 20: 19-31

### **God is Scarred for Us**

Everyone who enlists in the Army must have a physical medical examination. I heard a story some time ago about a new recruit who was waiting in line for his physical examination. The person in front of him was asked by the medic doing intake if he had any scars or identifying marks. He answered, "No." The medic at the table said, "Boy, everybody has some scars or other identifying marks. You better tell me yours or I'll have to take you outside and give you some!" Suddenly the guy remembered a scar or two.

The medic was right, of course, and it seems that every one of us has at least one scar and a story to tell about it. When I was a child, I took a utility knife to carve a piece of wood. The knife slipped off the wood and into my thumb. The blood started flowing instantly and I ran to my mother for help. Some of you know that I have somewhat of a phobia for blood and my mother must too because as soon as she took one look at my thumb she yelled for my father. My father cleaned my thumb off as best he could and rushed me off to the hospital emergency room for stitches. I look at my thumb today, and every time I reach for a knife, I see the scar and I remember -- I remember to be careful. I have a few other scares on my body and I won't bore you with those injury stories but I remember pretty well each story behind them, and I'm sure that all of you have stories behind your scares as well.

In the movie, Jaws, three men are out at sea searching for the Great White Shark. During a lull in their search, they find themselves sharing coffee and sharing horror stories. Each one has scars and each one tries to one up the other. One of the characters has scars from the war; another has scars from a previous shark attack. The character played by Richard Dreyfus rips open his shirt and points to his chest without speaking a word. Another man asks, "What? Bypass surgery?" "No,"

answers Dreyfus, "Betty Sue, 7th grade. She broke my heart." All of us have scars. You can't live life without being hurt. Whether it is from an accident, surgery, or some other injury.

In today's Gospel reading Thomas looks at the other disciples and says, "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." What do these scars mean? For Thomas, it serves as proof of the Resurrection. Thomas has been given a contemporary nickname. It is "Doubting Thomas." That was not his real nickname because in the Bible he is referred to as Thomas the twin. He earns that nickname doubter because he expresses doubts. "Unless I see the scars...I won't believe," says Thomas. Throughout most of the written record we have about this man, Thomas was really a person of great faith and belief. It is Thomas who is the first to say to Jesus after the Resurrection, "My Lord and my God."

After the Resurrection, many were witnesses of Jesus's scars. None of the disciples really believed in the resurrection at first. We think of Easter as a one day event, but it actually is a time of many days, forty to be exact in that period between the time Christ rose from the grave and the day he ascended into Heaven (Acts 1:3). Scholars are divided as to how many appearances there were. Some say 9, some say 12 and others say 16 appearances. St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:3-8): that after the resurrection Jesus "appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred at the same time, most of whom are still living, (at the time Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians) though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles.

The witness to Jesus' scars became part of the fabric of evidence that the Resurrection was not a rumor or a figment of imagination brought about by grief and denial. The Resurrection was real. To Thomas, that is what the scars of Jesus meant -- the Resurrection is real.

So what do these scars mean to us? Well for one it serves as a reminder of the humanity of Christ. There is something about scars that seems to make a person "more human".

We are sometimes suspicious about people who seem to be "too perfect", about children who don't have some signs of scraped knees, about models whose hair is perfect the moment they step out of the ocean surf, about people who are in their "twilight years" who have no signs of graying hair or wrinkling faces. There is something about our scars that makes us real, believable, trustworthy.

Yet this story has somewhat of a twist to it. Jesus says to Thomas "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe. He seems to be referring to people like us who believe but have not witnessed to Jesus' wounds first hand. But today we can and do touch Christ's wound when we help others who are wounded and hurting. One great example of a woman who has dedicated herself to healing wounds is our current Surgeon General Dr. Regina Benjamin.

After graduating from medical school her medical training was paid for by a federal program, the National Health Service Corps, under which medical students promise to work in poor areas with few doctors in exchange for repayment of their student loans. It is generally one year of service for every year of paid tuition. She was assigned to a poor shrimping village in a community called Bayou La Batre. After her tour of duty was completed she could have left for a more prestigious medical practice with much higher pay, but she chose to stay in this community and founded the Bayou La Batre Rural Health Clinic in 1990. When people couldn't pay, she didn't charge them. When the clinic wasn't making money, she didn't take a salary for herself. When Hurricane George destroyed the clinic in 1998, she made house calls to all her patients while it was rebuilt. When Hurricane Katrina destroyed it again and left most of her town homeless, she mortgaged her house and maxed out her credit cards to rebuild that clinic for a second time. She tended to those who had been wounded in the storm, and when folks needed medicine, she asked the pharmacist to send the bill to her and when Regina's clinic was about to open for the third time, and a fire burned it to the ground before it could serve the first patient, well, you can guess what Dr. Benjamin did. With help

from her community, she is rebuilt it again. For nearly two decades, Dr. Regina Benjamin has seen in a very personal way what is broken about our health care system. She's seen an increasing number of patients who've had health insurance their entire lives suddenly lose it because they lost their jobs or because it's simply become too expensive. But for all that she's seen and all the tremendous obstacles that she has overcome, Regina Benjamin also represents what's best about health care in America -- doctors and nurses who give and care and sacrifice for the sake of their patients.

It is interesting that the Resurrection brought Christ back to life, but left Him scarred. Here is Jesus, appearing to his friends and showing them the scars that his life, his suffering, and his death, inflicted on him. Isn't it amazing that, in whatever occurred at the time of the resurrection the scars did not disappear. They remained.

We have a permanently scarred God. And he comes, scarred, to be with us with whatever scars we bear, with whatever wounds we carry, and with whatever doubts we harbor. Isn't that an amazing demonstration of God's love for us? That he would continue to carry the scars, the reminders of the pain and humiliation he went through.

Our hands are the one part of our body that is almost always in view of our sight. We can't see our ears unless we look in the mirror. We see our feet if we intentionally look down. But our hands are almost always before us. No matter what we do, we usually see our hands as we do it.

Now what does Jesus see when He reaches out for us? He sees the scars on his hands... Therefore, when Jesus reaches out to judge, He sees the scars on his hands. When Jesus reaches out to bless or comfort, He sees the scars on his hands. When Jesus reaches out to receive us, He sees his scars. Those scars remind us of the humanity of Christ. Those scars remind us of Christ's love for us. Amen