

John 20: 19 - 31**Second Sunday of Easter - Year B**

Ernest Hemingway once wrote, "The world breaks every one..."¹ Whether or not that is entirely true, the simple truth is that none of us get through this life unscathed, not even the Son of God as Holy Week has just reminded us.

We all carry the wounds of living this human life. There are the physical wounds: of violence, of accidents, of plain stupidity. There are the emotional wounds of cruelty, of loss, of those inexplicable events that don't make sense, no matter how long or hard we try to figure them out. You know this from your own lives, no one gets through this life unscathed. Given time, most wounds become less raw, less exposed, many heal. Yet they still leave an indelible mark, a tangible reminder on our bodies, our minds, our hearts of that which led to the wounding.

Our physical scars tell a story. Yet not all scars result from trauma, from loss. Some women bear caesarian scars from the bearing of a child. For the most part, I imagine these are scars born out of joy, hope and love. Scars speak.

Which leads me into Thomas' famous encounter with Jesus. Thomas is confronted with the other disciples' claim, "We have seen the Lord". The claim that substantiated the swirling rumours that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. And Thomas' response, "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". Thomas is perturbed and incredulous. He has been castigated for his doubt and disbelief, but he had good reason.

Resurrection was viewed with fright and confusion in the ancient world. The ancient Greeks believed the dead lived in a shadowy underworld, a half-life of yearning and sadness for that world which was now lost to them. The boundaries between these two worlds had to be maintained or chaos would reign². The Jewish idea of resurrection was more positive, but it was something that was going to happen at the end of time, not *now*, not in a room with some frightened followers of

¹ "A Farewell to Arms", Ernest Hemingway, 1929.

² "Chose life: Christmas and Easter Sermons in Canterbury Cathedral", Rowan Williams, Bloomsbury, 2013, p.123.

a recently crucified leader. Jesus' resurrection turned the disciple's view of the world: of life, of death, of belief on its head.

Thomas cannot readily accept this shift. He cannot hold in tension the discrepancy of that which he thought he knew about how the world operated and what the other disciples were telling him. Earlier in John's gospel, talking about his death and resurrection, Jesus had said to the disciples, 'You know the way to where I am going'. But the disciples didn't understand, because they were still locked into a particular imagining of what the coming of the Messiah meant, and it didn't involve a horrific, seemingly powerless death at the hands of others. Thomas was the one to voice their concerns," "Lord, we do not know where you are going!"

Thomas was a sceptic. He probably felt more comfortable dealing in analytical facts and empirical based evidence. This made him someone who wasn't prepared to simply pretend he understood things. Wasn't prepared to remain silent about what was troubling him. I need proof of what you say is true. This isn't always the most comfortable space for people like Thomas to inhabit, particularly in faith communities. When so much of faith involves trust in that which we cannot see, when so much of God and his dealings, or seemingly non-dealings in the world remain mystery - inexplicable, at times exasperating, painful mystery.

Yet the church, the world needs people like Thomas. Those who do not remain silent when they are troubled. Those who are prepared to voice their doubts, to question that which is being presented as a given. Those who stretch us to examine and expand our own reasoning for what and why we believe. Those who keep us all accountable.

We know what happens when people simply fall into line. Simply accept that which they are told to believe. It can lead to the abuse of power in our churches, in our parliaments, we see it. The gulags of the Soviet Union and the ovens of Auschwitz didn't just appear. They were, in part, the culmination of the actions or perhaps more so, inactions of those who didn't question, who didn't speak up about what was troubling them, who just accepted. That is why we need more Thomas' in our places of work, of politics, of worship.

Jesus respects Thomas' request. He appears a week later and tells Thomas to look at the evidence, grasp hold of the tangible. Jesus shows Thomas his scars, and Thomas responds, "My Lord and my God", he finally understands.

"The world breaks everyone... and afterward many are strong at the broken places". Hemingway has given us the resurrection story. Jesus was broken beyond our imagining, our capacity to truly comprehend how much the sins of the world bore down on him on that cross. But that later encounter in that room, the here and now is the *afterward* and Jesus is more than simply strong, he is imperishable, immortal. He is now the risen Lord of all seated in heaven at God's right hand.

I imagine heaven as the apex of beauty and perfection. It is not marred by the disfiguring, ugly consequences of sin as this world is. Have you ever wondered why Jesus still bore his scars post resurrection if he was going to ascend to heaven where all is perfect?

Presumably Jesus could have had any resurrected body he wanted. Yet he chose the one that bore the scars, the constant reminder of that horrific ordeal. Every scar tells a story. Jesus' scars tell us about the cruelty of this world. Of betrayal and fear. Of regimes that will do anything to maintain their status quo, their power base. Yet the scars also speak of immense courage and hope, love and reconciliation. They are testament and memory, badges of honour of all that Jesus has done and won for us.

Philip Yancey says this of the resurrection, "Because of Easter, I can hope that the tears we shed, the blows we receive, the emotional pain, the heartache over lost friends and loved ones, all these will become memories, like Jesus' scars. Scars never completely go away, but neither do they hurt any longer. We will have re-created bodies, a re-created heaven and earth. We will have a new start, an Easter start".³

Christ is risen, alleluia, alleluia!

³ "The Jesus I never knew", Philip Yancey, Zondervan Publishing, 1995, p.219.