

## ***When Woundedness Reaches Out To Woundedness***

*a sermon delivered by the Rev. Scott Dalgarno on April 12, 2015  
based upon John 20:19-31*

Years ago when I graduated from seminary I had no job. So, my then wife and I went to live with my wife's father in Eugene. I had become "The Meathead" from Archie Bunker.

I worked cleaning dorm rooms at the University, and as a movie extra. Finally, that August I received a phone call from the pastor of a very well-to-do church on the coast near Los Angeles. I had applied to be their assistant pastor.

First thing he says is, "What does your wife do for a living? Let me tell you why I have to ask that," he said. "We can't pay you enough to live here," he said. "You'll have to live in Glendale, and commute." He went on to say that they would interview me by having a member of their session who was a flight attendant for United, fly up to Eugene on her day off. She did and she spent the morning telling us all about how great living in LA was. Finally, over lunch I told her I knew LA was great. My best friend lived there, we had family there. What I couldn't get past was the idea that I couldn't live in the community where I would be a pastor.

"Who told you you'd have to do that?" she asked.

"Your head-of-staff," I said.

"That's silly," she said. "That's not a problem at all."

"Oh," I thought. "Great, they must have another pot of money somewhere."

She said, "We'll get you on some television game shows." Not the kind that give away appliances either. No, we'll get you on the ones that give real money."

I could just imagine jumping up and down on **The Price Is Right**. Well, no I couldn't, so the whole thing ended at that moment.

I was so pleased with every conversation I had with your search committee.

The subject of game shows never came up,

Every time we met I came away thinking Southminster is the real deal. So I want to say to them here and now that I am very grateful for their care and thoughtfulness throughout the process.

In the gospel writer, John's, version of Easter, the disciples were wondering, like I wondered, fresh out of seminary, "What do I do next?" Then they heard the unbelievable news that Jesus was out and about – he had risen from the dead, but they hadn't yet seen anything to confirm it, so they closed the door and locked it out of fear .... as if they were in quarantine.

And they waited. Some probably wondered if it wouldn't be safer to just get out of town -- go up country again to Capernaum where the Romans weren't the menacing presence they were in Jerusalem.

But, for now they were waiting; waiting for the initial threat that had come on Good Friday to settle down enough so they could actually go out into the streets again by daylight.

Then without warning Jesus simply appears to them; appears in their midst saying, "Peace be with you." He tells the disciples to take a good long look at his scarred hands, and side.

Next scene is eight days later when he shows up again – coming right through the locked door or maybe a wall – who knows? He invites the disciple, Thomas, to touch him -- to place his fingers in the print of the nails and to put his hand in his wounded side.

This is pretty odd stuff. Now, of course, Thomas is the one that tradition has called "Doubting Thomas," so Jesus's invitation to touch his wounds makes some sense, but there is a prior question that needs answering; one that Sunday School children often ask but adults miss.

The question is this: if Jesus has been resurrected, why the heck does he have wounds in his hands, side, and feet? I mean, if God had gone to the immense trouble of raising him from the dead, why didn't God fix him up – why didn't the Almighty repair those holes?

Scholars might say, "Well, that's the way the disciples could identify that it really was Jesus --- but as is clear in the story just before this one in the gospel of John, Mary Magdalene knows this is Jesus from the sound of his voice. She didn't need to see anything.

In Luke's gospel account two disciples recognize him when he breaks the bread in half in the motel breakfast room where they stop off to have a meal in the little town of Emmaus. There's no mention there of wounded hands. Why are there wounds in this version of the story?

I'll tell you, the child who asks such a perceptive question probably knows there is something in those scars beyond mere proof that it's Jesus.

There is something in the essential nature of scars that cries out for us to pay attention to here.

We heal (you and I) but we also scar. There is always some evidence left behind of what this world has done to us. Scars – they are our body's version of memory. Do you have some? I bet you do.

Cynthia Audet once wrote the following:

*Growing up I had a scar on my face — a perfect arrow in the center of my cheek, pointing at my left eye. I got it when I was three, long before I knew that scars were a bad thing, especially for a girl. I knew only that my scar brought me attention and tenderness and candy.*

*As I got older I began to take pride in my scar, in part to stop bullies from taunting me, but mainly as a reaction to the assumption that I should feel embarrassed.*

*It's true, I was embarrassed the first couple of times someone pointed at my cheek and asked, "What's that?" or called me "Scarface." But the more I*

*heard how unfortunate my scar was, the more I found myself liking it.*

*My friends liked it, too. They made up elaborate tales about how I'd gotten it in a fight or from a dog attack. They laughed at their stories and thought I was all the more interesting because I could laugh with them.*

*When I turned fifteen, my parents on the advice of a plastic surgeon decided it was time to operate on what was now a thick, shiny red scar. As my father drove me home from the local mall, he explained that I would have the surgery during my summer vacation, to allow time for it to heal.*

*"But I don't mind the scar, really," I told him. "I don't need surgery." It had been years since I had been teased. And my friends, along with my boyfriend at the time, felt as I did, that my scar was unique and almost pretty in its own way.*

*After so many years, it was a part of me.*

*"You do need surgery," my father said, his eyes on the road, his lips tight.*

*"But I like it," I told him. "I don't want to get rid of it."*

*"You need surgery," he said again, and he lowered his voice. "It's a deformity."*

*I don't know what hurt more that day: hearing my father call my scar a deformity,  
or realizing that it didn't matter to him how I felt about it.*

*I did have plastic surgery that summer. They cut out the left side of the arrow leaving a thinner, zigzag scar that blended into the lines of my face when I smiled.*

*The following summer they did the same to the right side of the arrow. Finally, when I was eighteen, the surgeon sanded my cheek smooth.*

*In my late twenties, I took a long look at my scar, something I hadn't done in years. It was still visible in the right light, but no one asked me about it anymore.*

*I examined the small step-like pattern and the way it made my cheek dimple when I smiled. As I leaned in awkwardly toward the mirror, I felt a sudden sadness.*

*There was something powerful about my scar and the defiant, proud person I became because of it. I have never been quite so strong since they cut it out.*

Scars. Scientists chip a 5200 year old corpse out of the alpine ice and look at his body. They can tell **not** only what killed him, but also what he survived, and at what age. There are scars, marks on the body, and they tell of human resilience and they tell us how hard the living of every day has been for as long as humans have walked this earth.

So . . . why didn't God fix Jesus' body up? What is the story saying to us today, we who wait, like the disciples, to find out what life after Covid-19 will truly look like and feel like after the massive change, this massive amount of loss.

Perhaps the story is saying that we can't really "see" Jesus unless we see him **with** his wounds. The resurrected Christ is forever the wounded Galilean peasant – resurrected but not repaired. He carries scars from his stay with us, and he carries them forever.

So, let me suggest that our connection with Jesus is made most profoundly through an acknowledgement of our own woundedness.

And, look, this is made so clear in the last 24 hours of his life.

Have you ever been betrayed by someone you loved, or by a cause you gave yourself too? "Behold," said Jesus at the last supper, "one of you will betray me."

Have you ever been let down by your closest friends or by people who have broken large or small promises without apology? On the night in which he was arrested Jesus looked into Peter's eyes and said, "Could you not even stay awake with me for an hour?"

Have you ever found yourself in a position, because of circumstance or poor health, where you would have been happier NOT to go on living, but you were still afraid to die?

You found yourself praying (even though you might be pretty agnostic about prayer), “Help me; get me out of this.” Jesus once said, “God, if it be your will, let this cup pass from me.”

Have you ever felt utterly alone; completely abandoned? Jesus cried out from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Have you ever felt like saying any of that? Maybe you have. That’s why we are here today, looking at this story, two thousand years along. It’s the humanity of Jesus that makes him relevant to our lives. Woundedness reaches out to woundedness.

So, the story of doubting Thomas may not be about *believing* stuff about Jesus at all – maybe it’s about how vulnerable Jesus made himself on this earth, and what that means to us who have found ourselves beaten to a pulp by unforgiving forces in our world.

The defense in the trial of the officer who murdered George Floyd is claiming, as we knew it would, that George Floyd was guilty of his own murder. Finding no sane recourse, the defense is attempting to reduce George Floyd to a stereotype – a gutter dwelling drug addict. When, in fact, George Floyd could be any of us who had surgery and found ourselves dependent on pain-killers.

It’s just a high tech case of blaming the victim when, in fact, we all are terribly vulnerable and have wounds of one kind or another that will not easily heal.

“Peace be with you” Jesus said to his traumatized disciples. Then he blew upon them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.

Maybe it’s also about how when we feel traumatized ourselves, that same Jesus is willing and able to blow his spirit into us again so that we might be renewed and resurrected in a way ourselves.

Barbara Brown Taylor tells the following story.

*Many years ago now, I and about three hundred other people attended a baptism at which Desmond Tutu, the retired archbishop of Capetown, presided. It was an impromptu thing, arranged at the last minute during a conference we were all attending in the mountains of North Carolina. Tutu had completely wooed us by then—first, by showing up in an orange dashiki, baggy shorts, and plastic flip flops; and second, by giggling a lot—this Nobel Peace Prize winner had come through hell on earth in South Africa with his ability to laugh intact.*

*The way I remember it, someone in the audience knew a family who had just welcomed a baby with Down syndrome into the world. They wanted their baby baptized, but they didn't belong to a church. So this person in the audience—their obstetrician, maybe?—asked Archbishop Tutu if he would do it and he said yes, on the condition that all of us who were there could serve as witnesses. That way, when it came time to ask the question about whether everyone present would support this child in his new life in Christ, the baby and his family would hear more than three hundred people shouting, "We will!"*

*So that's how it happened. On Sunday we gathered in the auditorium for the service. There was a makeshift baptismal font set up on the stage, with a pitcher of water on a table beside it. The place looked as nice as the auditorium at a camp conference center can look, which isn't saying much— but it didn't matter, since the Archbishop only had eyes for that baby. Before he invited the family to come forward, he poured the water into the font. Then he prayed over it in his native language ... which has lots of tongue clicks in it.*

*Next, he did something I have never seen anyone else do before or since. He leaned over the water and blew on it—once this way, and once that way--like he had all the time in the world. He breathed the sign of the cross on the water, and then he invited the family to walk through the sea on dry ground with their baby in their arms.*

*It was the evidence of things not seen.*

*It was a moment full of the peace that passes all understanding.*

*Did the family come through to the other side with their wounds intact? Of course they did, but in the midst of much rejoicing, too.*

Everything about living this crazy life of ours is such a mixed up, bittersweet salad. It's arugula with strawberries.

You've all been through so dang much the last few years – as human beings in a pandemic and as members of this church. God love you, you've come through intact and now the world is poised to open up.

If I've learned anything about Southminster from your search committee it's that community matters to you – that you are extended family.

Well, through the agonizing grace of God this horrid pandemic has been schooling us in how precious community is, and how delicious being alive is meant to be.

Marilynn Robinson's wonderful novel *Gilead* is about an elderly minister who has congestive heart failure and knows he doesn't have long to live. The Reverend John Ames lost his first wife and infant daughter, Rebecca, years before, but later in life he marries again and has another child, a son. The book is his letter to his tiny son, so that the boy will remember his father.

Rev. Ames writes the following ...

*Here I am trying to be wise, the way a father should be, the way an old pastor certainly should be. I don't know what to say except that the worst misfortune isn't only misfortune—and even as I write these words, I have [my lost] infant Rebecca in my mind, the way she looked when I held her ... because every single time I have christened a baby I have thought of her again. That feeling of a baby's brow against the palm of your hand—how I have loved this life. (p. 56).*

*How I have loved this life.*

I will close now with a poem by Pesha Joyce Gertler ..  
It's called,



## **The Healing Time**

Finally on my way to yes  
I bump into  
all the places  
where I said no  
to my life  
all the untended wounds  
the red and purple scars  
those hieroglyphs of pain  
carved into my skin, my bones,  
those coded messages  
that send me down  
the wrong street  
again and again  
where I find them  
the old wounds  
the old mis-directions  
and I lift them  
one by one  
close to my heart  
and I say holy  
holy.

Amen