

“The Marks of the Wounded”**John 20:19-31****Andrew Foster Connors****2nd Sunday in Easter****April 28, 2019**

When I was growing up in the anti-Catholic, Protestant world in which I was raised, I was reminded often of the differences between our two traditions. They needed a priest to be a mediator between them and God. We didn't need a mediator - Jesus was that for us. They believed they could earn salvation with good works. We believed it was a gift through faith. They believed they were actually drinking the blood of Jesus - gross. We believed it was a symbol. But one of the differences drilled into me again and again was the cross. Theirs had a crucified Jesus on it emphasizing his suffering. Ours was empty emphasizing his resurrection.

As I gained perspective on the othering that human beings do to elevate ourselves or our traditions at the expense of others, and also perspective on the ancient Catholic-Protestant divide that was passed down through generations, I was able to slowly get perspective on our distinctions and process them that way. To learn to live with difference, appreciate my own tradition, even adopting a difference perspective from other traditions without denigrating others. But the symbol of the empty cross has stayed with me for a long time. *“We emphasize Christ's resurrection; they emphasize his suffering.”*

This was exceptionally good news: whatever suffering you experience in life will be wiped away in the life to come. Whatever wounds you experience, will be erased. Whatever negativity befalls you in this world will be ended in the world to come. I'm not sure when I starting doubting this version of the Gospel. It may have been when I began to see how this kind of future-centric faith has been used through the centuries to pacify people's quest for liberation. Don't worry about the inequities you are experiencing now. Don't worry about the power imbalances that have weighed heavy on your life now. God will do a new thing when you are dead and gone. Or it may have been observing this dynamic more personally in the lives of people who essentially give up on the here and now abundant life that God promises, and wait for it in the sweet by and by.

Or it may have been the pastoral conversations that I've had with people about death - their wonderings about it, their fears about it and realizing that we don't have a lot of concrete answers that we can give beyond the hope and assurance that God's love is stronger than death. When we offer much more than that, we are attempting

explaining things that we know nothing about, confusing hope that comes through faith, with evidence that we have no authority to give.

Plus, the questions people asked of me complicated the empty cross, wipe everything clean version of the Gospel I had been given. I remember a conversation I had with an elderly family member before her death. I was in seminary and we were discussing death - but I was discussing it as an idea. I forgot that she was staring death down. She was asking me about the reunification of family members after death - how she would recognize them and they her - and I realized that I didn't have a lot of details I could give to her. All the Gospels want to emphasize that the same Jesus who was crucified is the one who was raised. He was recognizable. So, I told her, I don't know how it works but the testimony is that they will recognize you in your current body.

"*This old body?!*" she responded, very agitated. "It better not be this old body." I stopped answering questions I knew nothing about. If emphasizing resurrection meant wiping the slate clean at some point in the future, then it had a negative impact on those Christians struggling for justice or liberation now. If resurrection meant cleaning up all the stuff that we didn't understand here about suffering and death, then it had a negative impact on those actually living with suffering and death. Perhaps all of these things together helped me to begin questioning the empty cross resurrection as it was taught to me.

It would appear in today's text that we are discouraged from questioning that resurrection news. That's the upshot of the text. History even grants Thomas a title - "Doubting Thomas" - a label that sticks. And this label seems rooted in some reality. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe," Jesus says. The implication is that we shouldn't need what Thomas wanted. We should just believe.

And yet Thomas only wanted what everybody else got in the Gospel of John. Mary Magdalene got to see Jesus at the tomb. The rest of the disciples got to see Jesus behind locked doors. Thomas wants what they all got. A little empirical verification. I think Thomas gets a bad wrap.

But reading Thomas closer, he doesn't just want to see Jesus. He wants to see his wounds. "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 wants to see the wounds. And Jesus presents himself with the marks of those wounds intact. Jesus carries the marks of his wounds into the resurrection. "We emphasize Christ's resurrection; they emphasize his suffering" is a false dichotomy. Because the resurrected Christ appears with his wounds - transformed, yes, but still present.

Theologian Shelly Rambo, who many of us were introduced to by one of her students, McKenna Llewellyn, says that being an Easter people is about tending to wounds. The resurrection is not about wiping slates clean. If the resurrection were about wiping slates clean think about the implication of those of us who are carrying

wounds today.¹ We would basically be saying to them, “Get over it.” No, Easter is about bringing our wounds into the space of the community that is willing to touch them, tend to them. And in so doing, we recognize God.

Because our God is the wounded one. The one who carries the wounds of our sin in God’s body, the wounds of our planet in God’s body. Jesus carries wounds forward into the resurrection and invites us to bring our own wounds into the same community where they can be tended to, and, over time, healed.

We all carry wounds. You don’t need me to name them. You carry them with you. Our city carries wounds - marked by violence, tragedy, and despair. The earth carries wounds - the forests we have torn from the ground, the fossil fuels we have stripped from the land, the climate that we are changing to the detriment of so much of life. Believing in the resurrection is not about waiting around to die so that we can be saved. It is not about our wounds being magically wiped clean by a distant God from on high. It is about healing that comes from a God who knows what it means to be wounded, and to find healing after. A God who can be located by the marks of the wounded. A God who brings healing not by forgetting our wounds, but by acknowledging them, tending to them, and in so doing, transforming them.

And while I can’t say much about the sweet by and by I can say that if we end up in whatever space, or dimension, or eternity that is behind our comprehension, we will recognize Christ by his wounds. Perhaps he will recognize us by our own.

Lisa Bouler Daniels grew up with wounds but she didn’t know the half of it. She knew she was adopted and at age 52, she set out to find her birth family. The four siblings she found were shocked to learn they had a sister, older than them all. It turns out that Lisa mother had become pregnant with her after a sexual assault. She and her husband kept this information from their own children, trying to protect them from the pain. Suddenly the whole family was dealing with wounds they didn’t even know existed. And yet, there has also been healing. Lisa marveled at the strength of her birth mother and her adoptive mother. Her siblings gained a new understanding of their mother’s protective parental nature.

StoryCorp, which documented their story, says that “while the siblings still struggle with the pain their mother had to go through, they’re grateful to have found each other.” They still struggle with the pain, and they’re grateful. They’re grateful for a

¹ Shelly Rambo, *Resurrecting Wounds: Living in the Aftermath of Trauma*, (Waco: Baylor University Press), 2017. Roger Gench references Shelly Rambo’s theological reading of this passage in his Easter Day sermon, 2019, NY Avenue Presbyterian Church, Washington, DC.

strong mother and to have another sister in their life.² The marks of their wounds are intact and the healing is real.

Sounds like Easter people to me. Hope found in the midst of wounds that are tended to. Healing that comes over time in God's community of people who have been invited to tend to acknowledge the wounding of our God, the wounds of each other, and tend to them. A cross big enough to hold the marks of our suffering and the healing that comes from our God.

Unlike Mary Magdalene, and all the disciples, we may not get an appearance of Jesus. But we can still tend to his wounds in each other.

² "Part Of My DNA': An Adopted Woman Learns Of Her Birth Mother's Resilience," StoryCorps, April 26, 2019 heard on NPR Morning Edition, <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/26/717079333/part-of-my-dna-an-adopted-woman-learns-of-her-birth-mother-s-resilience> .