

April 11, 2021

**“Show Your Scars”
Sermon by Rev. Susan Drake**

Psalm 147 1-11

*Praise the Lord!
How good it is to sing praises to our God;
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.
The Lord builds up Jerusalem;
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.
He heals the brokenhearted,
and binds up their wounds.
He determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.*

*Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;
his understanding is beyond measure.
The Lord lifts up the downtrodden;
he casts the wicked to the ground.
Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving;
make melody to our God on the lyre.
He covers the heavens with clouds,
prepares rain for the earth,
makes grass grow on the hills.
He gives to the animals their food,
and to the young ravens when they cry.
His delight is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his pleasure in the speed of a runner;
but the Lord takes pleasure in those who revere him,
in those who hope in his steadfast love.*

John 20:19-29

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "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."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Message "Show Your Scars"

This resurrection story in John is loaded with powerful imagery and language. John tells a story in which Jesus is like a ghost, an apparition that can move through walls. I think his point in writing this story was to show that death was not going to have the final word when it came to Jesus. There is a lot about fear and forgiveness in the story as well, about the holy spirit, about peace and about doubt. When Thomas doubts the disciples and doubts Jesus himself, Jesus doesn't chastise him, or shame him or make fun of him, he just simply shows him his scars. Jesus in this story tells us it is okay to have doubts. That is what we humans do, we mull things over, pick them apart, try and figure them out. It's how we learn and integrate new things into ourselves.

Many of us are skeptics. I enjoy figuring out if something is true by studying the evidence from every angle, thinking it over. In fact I believe we could use a lot more of that in our world today. But there are limits to what we can learn except from experience. I have learned it is impossible to know what someone is going through if you haven't been through those things yourself. We often have the arrogance to think we know what other people are going through and judge their actions by our own limited understanding, like telling someone who is grieving that they should be over that by now, moving on. Or telling someone who is a minority that they should be happy because things have gotten so much better. Or telling trans people that it's all in their head, or telling someone who is depressed that they just need to exercise more. We don't know what we don't know. Assuming we do can just deepen someone's wounds and heap more coals, more shame on somebody who most likely is already deeply wounded.

For me the people I listen to are the ones that have been through what I am going through. When someone is honest enough to show me their scars, like Jesus did. When they tell me their story, share how God brought them through something, then I can believe them, then I can trust them when they tell me things will get better. Now when they give me advice on how to survive the pain I give their words credence. With all my heart I think God is in this miracle of human interaction. That when someone opens up about their scars, shows them to others, they give permission for people to come forward and say, "That happened to me and I need help".

In Recovery circles this is a fact of life. It is a cornerstone to addiction and trauma recovery to be able to use your pain and scars and help others by telling them your story. When someone gets a coin, a chip to mark an anniversary of being sober or clean the group says in unison “Tell us how you did it” and in that retelling of their story, newcomers hear and see themselves in the words and stories and the healing process begins and continues because someone had the courage to share their pain and share what helped them on their journey. I have been reading a book by Nadia Bolz-Weber. She is a recovering addict turned ELCA pastor she wrote: “It was there in the midst of my own community of underside dwellers that I couldn’t help but begin to see the Gospel, the life-changing reality that God is not far off, but here among the brokenness of our lives.”

The same holds true when you are grieving. We can all understand loss but unless you have lost the love of your life, you don’t know what that is like, or experienced the loss of a child, or felt the pain of divorce or depression. *When we hurt so bad it feels like our heart will break in two is when we need people that show us their scars to help us get through, the ones who will get down in the dirt where you fell and be a light in the darkness of your ache and pull you up by telling you “they got through it and so can you!”* If you pretend to be perfect, if you let pride repress your genuine reactions and emotions, the depth of your hurt, when you try and toughen up and pretend you have no fear then you block this beautiful, redemptive, transcendent force of God.

No one will know that you bear scars, that you possess the power of your experience that can help them through. No one will know that you can be trusted when you say “things will get better”. And if you are the one in pain, say it out loud, allow God to find someone, like a matchmaker, to come forward and say, I went through that and it is hard, but let me tell you how God got me through it. God’s redemptive, healing, transcendent love can flow through you when you let yourself be honest and vulnerable. Let yourself tell your story, reveal your doubts, and show your scars.

It didn’t take long for me to figure out that you all are more than just people that show up on Sunday. You have helped each other through some of the deepest blows that life can deal us. You pray for each other, you show up for each other, you bear each other's burdens. I want to yell it from the top of our old, rickety, steeple, *come, all who are weary!* This is what community looks like! This is what church can be like! I want others to hear your stories of faith, how you got through hard times by leaning into God and each other, by seeing and showing each other your scars. May the breath of God breathe on us, stirring a resurrection within these walls, giving us peace, courage and a renewed calling to be part of God’s healing, transcendent and redemptive work in this community and our world. AMEN

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PARKSIDE COMMUNITY
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show your scars

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