



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“THE BEST SCAR STORY”

Scripture Lessons: Psalm; John 20:19-31

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, April 17, 2022
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

John 20:19-31

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.’

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Let us pray...

Almighty and everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts, be pleasing and even joyful in your sight. For you are our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

My guess is that just about all of us have a good scar story. A story about a time when we may have cut our finger while trimming the hedges or cut our leg while shaving or maybe we were in a car accident. As pastors, we are privy to the kinds of scar stories that often fall often under the category of “surgical scars,” and be it a long scar down the front of someone’s chest, just above their heart or scar on the top of their head or on their knee or shoulder. There are a lot of scar stories!

I've sometimes imagined the disciples sitting behind these closed doors, just after the crucifixion. They had not yet seen our Risen Lord, and were scared that what had happened to Jesus might happen to them. At some point, they probably began to pass the time in a way like we might pass the time, by telling stories, and there's nothing quite like a good scar story. I imagine Peter, saying, "And look at this one, this is where I got hooked when I was a kid, the barb went straight through." Not to be outdone, his brother Andrew may have lifted his foot, "and this is where I stepped on that shard of clay." But then, out of nowhere, our Savior appears, and I like to playfully imagine him saying something like this: "You think that's a scar, take a look at this one! This is where the nail secured my hand/my wrist to the cross. ...And right here is where the spear pierced my side!" Naturally, the disciples rejoiced upon seeing Jesus; but one of the disciples, the one we call Thomas, he was not with the others when Jesus first appeared. And Thomas, he just couldn't believe what the others were telling him about their visit with the risen Christ. What's more, he wasn't going to buy into all of the hoopla. He wasn't going to pretend that things were suddenly different. They could have gotten hold of some bad wine for all he knew. And so, he says this: "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." Bible tells us that it was about a week between the time when Jesus first showed his wounds to the disciples, and the occasion we read about in our New Testament Lesson this morning, when Jesus finally appears to Thomas.

Now, for our purposes, I want us to consider what it means that Jesus is risen, that he is back and that he has the scars to prove it. I want us to consider what it means that Jesus chose to reveal through his resurrected body, something of that which he had to go through in order to get it! Friends, for Jesus to reveal his scars, it means, first of all, that he had them. In other words, it means that the very wounds of Calvary, that mocking inscription above the cross which read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" his own words, "My God my God, why have you forsaken me?" It means that all of things that happened to Jesus, and which caused him great pain, they are still very much a part of his story! To be certain, we will never gain a truest appreciation for the one whose life and ministry we celebrate every time we gather around this table. If we do not pay attention to his scars, the very lengths to which he went to prepare this table!

Alton Lang was playing the part of Jesus in the famous Passion Play, the one that is held every 10 years in Oberammergau, Germany. One evening a presumptuous tourist came along and saw the cross that Lang had carried throughout the day placed off to the side and among some of the other props. In a flippant sort of way, the tourist said to Lang: "Let me feel this cross you carry." He probably thought it would be some kind of cardboard cutout, painted to look like the real deal; well, let's just say that that tourist got a rude awakening when he tried to lift that cross which weighed in excess of 200 pounds. He could barely lift in a few inches off the ground. "Why does the thing weigh so much?" he asked. And with great reverence, Alton Lang answered: "Sir, if I could not feel its weight, I could not play the role." I doubt that any of us ever contemplate deeply enough the weightiness that comes with being a disciple. To be certain, the cross is not something that is designed to fit neatly into our Good Friday observances, only to be set aside for the other 364 days a year! No! Being a follower of Jesus is about seeing the scars of our Savior daily; it's about seeing the mark of the nail in his hands and placing our hand in his side; it's about being reminded that sin hurts! It hurt Jesus...and it hurts us!

Living on this side of heaven, as we do, we know a lot about sin. In fact, not only as good Reformed Christians do we believe in total depravity, but we actually practice it daily! And our scar stories, they run deep and maybe they're not physical. Maybe they are relational, emotional, spiritual. Perhaps, our scars are those past mistakes of the past, our worst choices, those things that have happened to us which are undeniably and categorically harmful, if not sinful. Ah, those are the kinds of scars that we wear often on the inside! And what's worse, we sometimes allow them to have upon us the effect of a scarlet letter, a branding of sorts, a kind of stain that never seems to come off. But how dare we think, even for a moment, that that is to be our lot in life; that we, as the children of God, who bear upon our brow the seal of Christ who died, that we would presume to walk around as if to give sin another victory. Oh, let us never forget that even Jesus kept his scars, but they didn't slow him down, and they shouldn't slow us down either because all those things which fall short of the glory of God they now have been placed in the context of the resurrection, and of Christ's victory over sin and death. And because that everything has changed; and we, like Christ, are invited to move from being wounded to raised, to move from death to life!

Consider how it is that the Bible tells us that our sins, our past, that it is finished and gone! And, of course, that doesn't mean that our past didn't happen or that there are not consequences that we have to deal with from time to time. After all, we still have our scars and we see them, we feel them, we remember them, we learn from them! But they do not define us! No! God defines us, and, according to God, we are his children, precious and beloved! When Jesus says, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side." He's telling us to believe, to believe not only in the redemptive work that Jesus has accomplished, but also very good work to which Jesus remains faithful even now. His scars, they undoubtedly tell and part of the story. Indeed, the brunt force, the pain and the anguish that brought about those wounds in the first place and which left those scars. All that happened, but what also happened is Jesus came back to life again! And, that is the most important part of the story, because the resurrection is what allowed Jesus' wounds to heal, and it is what allows our wounds to heal as well!

Think of it this way, the scars of life cannot have the last word in our story, any more than they had the last word in Jesus' story, because the final word which has been spoken is a word of mercy. It is a word of grace. It just so happens that, in the scars of Jesus, we actually find our purpose, because those scars represent the good and merciful and redemptive work of God. And if Christ is willing to suffer in order to accomplish that good work for us, then shouldn't we work as hard as we can to help others understand that good news for themselves. And sometimes, I suppose it will be easy, it will amount to no sweat off our backs. Oh, but, at other times, it may feel like we are trying to lift a 200-pound cross. The truth is, in our walk of faith, there are many scars yet to come. And I'm not talking about the lasting impression of a medical procedure or the marks of mistakes and what not. I'm talking about the scars which come when we take seriously the role that we have to play in God's drama of redeeming love. Oh, make no mistake about it, wrong can still be made right in our lives and sin and death can continue to lose its sting and love can continue to prevail in new in surprising ways! So, when someone asks us if we have a good scar story, let us respond with resounding, "Yes!" Let us show them the wonderful work

of God in our life, how knowing Jesus has made a difference. Let us show them the very joy of Christ which gives us life and life abundant, not in spite of his scars, but precisely because of them!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.