

“HE KEPT THE SCARS”
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I Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

When I was in the first grade, our family lived in Richmond, Virginia. Just for one year. Before that, we lived in New York, and then when I was in second grade we moved here to Elkton. I don't remember a whole lot about that year in Richmond. I don't remember our house, or our school. I do remember that we had a little pool in our backyard, and I remember one other thing – something that happened one day.

There were a bunch of us kids in the backyard, and my brother Richard, who is four years older than me, was showing off a newly acquired skill. He had a Boy Scout pen knife, and he had learned how to throw it pretty accurately. He could throw that thing and hit a target every single time. I, and all of the rest of the kids, watched him do it, over and over again.

Thus it was that I, at six years of age, became part of his showing-off that day. He convinced me to put my hand down on the ground, with my fingers splayed

out, because he could throw that pen knife and it would land in the ground between my fingers.

So I put my little hand down, spread out my fingers, and watched with all the others, as he took aim, threw the knife, and then watched in horror as it went right into my little finger, instead of the ground! All I remember after that was screaming my bloody head off and watching Richard head for the hills to escape the wrath of my mother!

All things considered, it wasn't a terrible injury. Mom wrapped it up good, and it healed in no time – although there was a scar for a long time – a scar which, I must say, I threw in my brother's face as often as I could. It finally went away, but I got a lot of mileage out of it before it did!

I think a lot of people had childhood scars – scraped knees and elbows, or scars from surgery after limbs were broken. Then we got older, and the scars might have changed. Some physical scars, for sure, but then others, scars maybe not visible, but there nonetheless. Scars brought about by pain we've endured, suffering that's come upon us, roads travelled through hardship and loss.

I daresay most of us will carry some scars within us from this coronavirus pandemic. Some of the scars will be scars of grief, having lost someone to the virus. Some of the scars will be scars of stress and fear, having lost the certainty of being safe in the world. Some of the scars will be of anxiety and uncertainty, having lost jobs and income.

A pastor named Rick Fry made the comment a few weeks ago that he was having trouble getting his mind around celebrating Easter as usual this year. He was wondering how we could be filled with joy and celebration in a time of such suffering and trial. Listen to what he said: “I’d like a church that confesses that even as Christ is risen, he still bore the visible scars of his crucifixion.” (On-line, Rick Fry, “Is There a Place to Name Suffering on Easter Sunday?”)

Well, Pastor Fry is getting his wish fulfilled this Sunday, because today we hear again of Jesus appearing to his disciples after the resurrection, and as he does, he bears the scars of his death on his body. You heard Mike read the lesson. Jesus came to the disciples, who had locked themselves away out of fear, and after offering them peace, he showed them his scars. After that (the Gospel writer says) “The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.” It was the scars that proved it was Jesus indeed.

Later on that day, one of the disciples who had not been there when Jesus first appeared, Thomas, arrived on the scene. They told him what had happened, but he wouldn't believe it, unless he saw Jesus and his scars with his own eyes, which is exactly what happened a week later.

They were all together in one place and Jesus appeared again, offered them peace, and then went right over to Thomas, and showed him his scars, inviting him to touch them. In that moment, Thomas knew it was Jesus and proclaimed, "My Lord and my God!"

Oh friends, isn't it interesting that the Lord of life, risen from death, made perfect and whole by God his Father still bore scars? Were I an artist I probably would have painted him pure and spotless. But no, when he returned to be with those he loved, he kept the scars.

Why is that? Well, let me suggest a number of reasons.

First, the scars would always be a reminder of what he endured, what he endured for us and our salvation. When the disciples looked at him, they saw the places where nails were pounded – his hands, his feet; they saw the place where a spear pierced his side. Visible reminders of the price he paid, the pain he suffered, the horrors he endured, that humanity would be set free.

Pastor Janet Hunt, in reflecting on the scars Jesus bore, thought back to something that had happened in her childhood. She was twelve or so, and she and the rest of her family – her mother, father and three sisters – were going camping. They had arrived at the campsite with their trailer, and they were trying to get the trailer into place. The wheels were caught on some kind of grade, so they were struggling to get it moved.

Her father was standing at the back of the station wagon, near the trailer hitch and he told the others to go to the back of the trailer and give it a good push. So they hunkered down and pushed with all their might, and Janet says, that she could feel the moment the trailer lurched forward – unfortunately trapping her father's hand between it and the hitch.

She says that before she knew it, her mother rushed to her father's side, wrapped his bleeding hand with a towel as quickly as she could, and drove him to the closest emergency room. The four girls sat by the campfire waiting and waiting for what seemed like hours – all consumed with guilt thinking they had caused his wound.

A few hours later their parents returned. Her Dad had a big white bandage wrapped around his now stitched-up hand, and he was quick to assure them that it was his fault, not theirs, and how glad he was that it was him that was hurt and not one of them.

And of that experience, she wrote this: “Dad bore the scars of that particular afternoon on his hand the rest of his life. I sometimes think the mark on the palm of his hand said as much about who he was as anything did.” (On-line, Janet Hunt, “Scars and Stories,” *Dancing with the Word*, 04/12)

Oh, truer words could never be said of Jesus, as well. The marks on his hands and feet, the mark on his side, said as much about who he was, to the

disciples and to us, as anything did. The marks, the scars say “I suffered for you, I endured agony for you, I did it for you.”

A second thing I think we can learn from this Gospel story is that Jesus kept the scars to show us that scars are a part of life – of everyone’s life. They just are. Everyone suffers in life, at one time or another. In fully embracing his humanity, Jesus suffered as we do. He bore scars from his suffering, just as we bear scars from ours.

Do you remember the movie “Jaws?” The movie that scared a lot of us out of swimming in the ocean back in 1975? Well, there was a scene in “Jaws” where three men were out at sea searching for the man-eating Great White Shark. There was a lull in the action, so they were sitting around having coffee, sharing horror stories. Each man had scars and was trying to “one up” the others.

One man showed a scar from fighting in a war, another showed a scar from a previous shark attack, and then the other man, the one played by Richard Dreyfuss, ripped open his shirt and pointed to his chest without saying a word. One of the other men asked, “What? Bypass surgery?” “No,” Dreyfuss replied, “Betty Sue. 7th

grade. She broke my heart.” (On-line, Maynard Pittendreigh, “The Scars of Life,” 4/15)

Oh friends, there are all kinds of scars from all kinds of pain that we suffer. You can't go through life without some pain, and the scars are reminders of that. In seeing Jesus' scars, we are reminded that he lived as we live, he knew what we know, he hurt as we hurt. We have a Savior who knows our pain.

Which leads me to my final observation – and that is that Jesus' scars and our scars are not only signs of pain and suffering – but more than that, they are signs that God brought him and brings us through it all.

You know, sometimes, after we've endured hard times, we forget. We forget that we would not have gotten through it without God. Scars serve as a visible reminder that God has brought healing.

Jesus, the risen Christ, kept the scars, and they served as a visible reminder that God brought him through all of that pain and sorrow and suffering and carried

him to glory. He, and anyone who saw him, would always see in those scars, that they were a part of him, but were not the end of the story.

I read this week about a woman who is a worship leader in Joel Osteen's church in Texas. One year, she developed a goiter on her neck, and it grew rapidly, to the size of a fist! It had gotten so big that it was threatening to block her windpipe. Surgery was needed, but she had trouble finding a surgeon who would agree to do it, since the dangers were many. The growth was very close to her vocal chords, so she might lose her voice, which Osteen says was amazing.

Well, she finally found a doctor via the internet, met with him, and he said he would do the surgery though it was very risky. He did the surgery, and praise God, it was successful.

She had been told that the recovery would take up to a year, but three months later, she was singing again! And amazingly, a year later, she had more range than she had had before the surgery! But here's the thing: when she sings, there's this scar around her neck – very noticeable – and she doesn't try to cover it up. Joel says that she is at peace with the scar, and he says that, at one time, it

didn't look good. It was pretty ugly. But for her, that scar is a reminder of the faithfulness of God, who saved her life, who put the right people into her life at the right time, and who restored her voice to sing his praises. And if ever anyone asks about the scar, she gets to tell them about the God who saved her life and can save theirs too! (On-line, Joel Osteen, "Peace With Your Scars")

Dear friends, we have, as one person put it, "a permanently scarred God. And he comes, scarred, to be with us, with whatever scars we bear, with whatever wounds we carry, and with whatever doubts we harbor." (Pittendreigh)

Oh friends, what that says to all of us. He bore the scars for us, and he carries us through all that would scar us. So let me finish today with words from the pastor who was yearning for that Easter service that would speak to what we're going through during this pandemic. He said this:

"I'd like the church to be a place where we can name our suffering, and yet also confess the untamable wild force and healing power of God that reaches beyond our imaginations, and is even more real than our pain. Resurrection is a power and reality in itself that doesn't need to be forced, because it's real. Because the Spirit

that raised Jesus from the dead is active and alive. Although our lives are messy and complicated, and many suffer more than they can bear, we trust with our whole lives in the God who raised Jesus from the dead. And at church we can name our longing to be touched by the wild, dazzling reality of resurrection, even in the midst of our suffering, even when we don't feel it. Indeed, we can name our longing in full confidence that we are upheld by the same Spirit that lifted Jesus from the dead and breathed new life into him." (On-line, Rick Fry, "Is There a Place to Name Suffering on Easter Sunday?" 04/15/14)

So, dear friends, as we continue on the journey through this pandemic, and live with unease, anxiety and yes, suffering and sorrow, may we find rest and peace in the arms of Jesus, our scarred Savior. May it be so.

Amen.