

Second Sunday of Easter, Cycle A

1Peter1:3-9 and John 20:19-31

When I lived in Scranton, I became friends with a man named Clarence. He was homeless when we met, crippled and struggling with addiction. He got an apartment, which my family and co-workers helped him furnish. Every conversation we had began the same way: "Hello, Bernadette! How are you?" "I am fine, Clarence. How are you?" "I'm blessed," he always replied serenely. And I would think, "Dang it, Clarence! You are amazing! Your life is a train wreck and this is what you say?!?!"

When the risen Jesus appeared, it was his wounds that the disciples required as proof of his identity. These wounds were still gaping – not old scars, but big enough for a finger or a hand to fit into. This element of the story is important for two reasons. First, Easter Sunday does not erase Good Friday. Jesus' life, a finite human life, a life of compassion, led him inevitably to rejection, torture and a criminal's death. No one can take that away. The wounds of that suffering continue to be part of him, even after he defeated death. Whatever suffering we experience -- job loss, betrayal, a failed marriage, the death of a loved one, mental or physical illness, war or abuse – we often pray that God will simply remove the suffering. When that prayer goes unanswered, we may wish that we will get over the pain, as if we could tidily step out of the suffering zone and be our old selves once again. This Sunday's gospel tells us that is not possible. We know this: like Jesus, we have our gaping wounds, still open years after the actual event that inflicted them.

This aspect of the gospel is especially important as we shelter in place. Amidst the flattening of the infection rate in some countries, people are still dying; real people with valuable lives and beloved families are dying. The stress of sheltering in place has us all antsy, impatient, aggravated and anxious. Essential workers are tired and some are getting the virus. Perhaps we dream of a day when all this is past and we will resume life as we knew it. But the reality is that we will carry wounds from this time, even as the human race resurrects.

Is it worthwhile to probe old wounds? Jesus does not scold Thomas for his macabre demand to probe Jesus' wounds; he invites it. It certainly can become a hamster wheel of dysfunction if we wallow in the wounds, honoring them like war monuments. However, to pretend they are not there, to ignore the pain, is paradoxically to give it control over our lives. We must feel the pain honestly until it is drained of its potency. The wounds will always be sore and sad, but they will no longer determine the direction of our lives.

This leads to the second way the woundedness of the risen Jesus is important for us. When Jesus first appears to the disciples, he shows his wounds as proof that he is who he says he is. Well, then, that peace he gives to them and the forgiving power of the Holy Spirit he breathes on them should have resulted in changed behavior, right? Yet, here they are, again, a week later, hiding behind the same locked doors in fear. Thomas gets the rap as the doubter, but aren't the other disciples just as bad? Thomas, too, thinks the wounds will be the proof he needs to believe in the resurrection, but that is not it. What does the trick is that Jesus simply appeared in their midst. It is so simple a fact that we often miss it. We think we open the door and invite Jesus into our lives. We think God must prove things to us on our so-called rational terms. Instead, no matter what kind of barriers we set up, Jesus comes and stands in our midst and says, "Peace be with you." And he keeps coming back, week after week, until we can cry out with Thomas, "My Lord and My God!"

1Peter describes this same fact in a different way. It is so full of God's gracious gift that the abundance may become a blur: God, "in great mercy, gave us a new birth into a living hope." An "imperishable, undefiled and unfading" inheritance is "kept in heaven for you" and you are "safeguarded" "by the power of God." I was so frustrated to read multiple times in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* that preachers across the area were "grappling" to explain the resurrection in the midst of the pandemic. On the contrary! No grappling involved! God has rebirthed us into a living hope! Let us ponder that merciful phrase: our hope is living. It is not a plaque on the shelf or a music box to be played when we need thirty seconds of cheer. We exist in hope. Wounded? Yes we are; always gonna be. But Jesus is with us, safeguarding us from our wounds being all that we are or the end of our story. We do not need to be strong enough to unlock our doors or invite him in. Shazam! Jesus is here. He brings peace. Take it! Recognize that you, wounds and all, are indeed blessed.

- ❖ What wounds do you have? Do any of them keep you locked up, as the disciples were?
- ❖ Sit quietly. Realize that Jesus is with you. What does he offer you?