

Sermon for Sunday, April 28, 2019 - "Look at the Wounds"

Second Sunday of Easter
April 28, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace from the One who is, who was and who is to come. Amen.

Maybe Thomas needed proof and that's why he wanted to see Jesus' wounded hands and feet.

Or, maybe he needed to see the wounds because he wanted to acknowledge what they'd all been through - that they'd just seen Jesus tortured and killed. Before jumping right to "he is risen, praise the Lord," maybe Thomas needed everyone to be a little more honest and real about the whole thing. Maybe Thomas wanted an authentic encounter with Jesus who had really suffered and died.

I don't know what Thomas was seeking, but I do think he was on to something in wanting to see Jesus' wounds. Those wounds are an important part of the story for us today as well.

So often Christianity is portrayed as a muscular faith with powerful claims about resurrection, life and belief. It is such good news that God raised Jesus from the dead - love and life are stronger than hatred, death, evil, fear. Yet, it's also amazingly good news that we have a wounded savior who knows what it is to suffer and die. Both the resurrection and the wounds are important. We need to hold these two parts of the story together in order for the message of Jesus to be good news for us and for our world.

If we just emphasize "he is risen!", then it's easy for Christianity to feel disconnected from the realities of life. Yes, Christ is risen but still hatred and evil seem really strong, still our loved ones die and too soon, still we live in aching bodies, still we struggle and fear.

Jesus' wounds show us that we aren't alone in any of this. Jesus has entered into it with us, with you. He knows, from deep within, what this vale of tears is like.

Jesus doesn't just come and say: Hey, everything's going to be fine, all's well that ends well, and this has a 'happily ever after ending' because I have triumphed over death.

No, Jesus comes and gets right in there with us in the mess and ache and pain of this life. He doesn't defend himself against it but is present to everything and to us in an open-hearted way. We have a savior who is wounded and vulnerable.

This is good news for us.

This also needs to shape how we live as Christians in the world. Christ rose triumphant over death, yes, but we must avoid triumphalism - being smug and superior and arrogant about our own beliefs. Christians of all stripes do this. If we act this way, our lives don't show the good news of Jesus, and we can't share the peace that Jesus has given us for the sake of the world.

In a world in which so much public discourse is strident and self-righteous, in a world marred by religious violence and fear of the other, we need to live differently. We need to be vulnerable, as Jesus was.

Thomas got to see the wounded Jesus in the flesh, and it helped him to see Jesus' death and resurrection as good news for him. Now that people can't see the crucified and risen Jesus right in front of them, they need to see his followers living with open-hearted vulnerability as he did. This is what we are called to do as Jesus' followers - as those who are sent to bear witness to the authentic hope of this story, sent to share the peace Christ has given to us.

We can practice vulnerability by listening deeply to others and sharing more of ourselves. It's harder to hate people when you know their story and know more about why they hold the positions they do.

Do they carry wounds related to the issue? Do you? Can you share that?

We need to listen deeply enough to find what we appreciate in another's views. We need to share what gives us pause in our own position rather than stridently defending it.

Another way we can practice vulnerability together is through jazz music. These jazz services this spring are teaching us to listen - to the musicians and to each other. They ask us to risk a bit and try new things. The variations and improvisations open us up and maybe even push us out of our comfort zones a bit, helping us to be more open-hearted and vulnerable.

I love how the music this week and last is providing a powerful way to experience the fullness of the good news. Last week we had the Good Shepherd Band offering glorious, joyful, rousing songs of life out of death. This week we get jazz music that is more vulnerable, that holds the tension, wounds and dissonance of African American life while also opening us to surprise and delight. All of this music helps us to enter into the story of Easter.

Beloved, our world needs people who can be open-hearted and vulnerable. This is hard, risky work - it can be frightening.

Yet, we can do this because we are not alone. Jesus has entered into all the mess, ache, and pain of our lives and has risen again, showing that life and love will prevail.

He remains open-hearted and present to us even now.

He gives us his body and blood, broken and shed for us, for you.

Because he is with us, we can listen, share, risk, give and love.

Our lives can show the good news of Jesus, our vulnerable and risen savior.

Our lives can share the peace of Christ.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.