

John 20:19-31 Thomas

April 7, 2024

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

So, today is lovingly known as Thomas Sunday, or Doubting Thomas Sunday.

For a long time, people have been so preoccupied with Thomas questioning his fellow disciples about seeing Jesus, for doubting them, that we have often missed something that is really important. How Jesus is recognized.

So, how do the disciples recognize Jesus? Is it the way he talks, the way he walks? Is it the way he smells? No. It is by his wounds.

The disciples, Jesus' best friends, do not recognize him until they see the marks of the crucifixion. The holes in his hands and the slice in his side.

When the disciples see Jesus in the resurrection, they recognize him by his wounds. He is still wounded – still wounded, but alive!

So, tell me then - why do some Christians think that we have to hide our wounds? Why do Christians have to appear as if they have never been hurt? Why do we need to put on airs as if we have it all together when Jesus himself willingly shows his wounds to everyone and then proclaims – I was killed, but look – I am alive!

For me, Jesus showing his wounds is the more important lesson on Thomas Sunday.

If Jesus willingly shows people his wounds, why don't we? Why don't we say – this nearly killed me, but look – I am alive! Why don't we say – this tried to take me out, but look – I am alive? Why don't we say this person hurt me terribly, but look – I am alive?

Jesus' wounds tell us that the things of this world may kill us on the inside – like violence and injustice – but look, we are still alive. The things of the world may try to kill us on the outside as well – like violence and injustice – but look, we are still alive. Wounded and still alive, and because of that, we are able to bring life into the world.

Jesus knows all of the hurts of this world, but they did not keep him in the grave. Instead, he was risen on the third day to proclaim to us that wounds are a part of life, but they are not the end of the story.

Wounds go with us into the resurrection, into our new life in Christ, so that through them we can live differently in the world. So that, through them we can live differently than the world. So that through them, we can live not inflicting wounds on others, but forgiving others for the wounds they have inflicted on us, just as Christ is forgiving us.

Only by accepting our woundedness are we able to form a support group with others who have also been wounded and together with the Holy Spirit bring resurrection into the world, together proclaiming – peace be with you, together being the Church, together being the wounded and resurrected body of Christ in the world today.

Without wounds there can be no resurrection. So, wounds are nothing to be ashamed of. We all have them. Some are external and some are internal, but they are all eternal – they all go with us into life everlasting, because they make us who we are.

So, the last thing any Christian, any little Christ, should do is hide their wounds, because Jesus, the big Christ, didn't. He didn't hide his wounds. Instead, he transformed them into good news. Peace be with you.

And how can we make a difference in the world, how can we bring resurrection into the world, how can we pronounce peace be with you, unless we talk about our wounds? How can the things that kill us be transformed into something life giving unless we show them to the world?

If we do not show our wounds, then we have lost our mission for the world.

The Church is the wounded and resurrected body of Christ in the world, and we have to publicly share what is killing people, including ourselves, by showing our wounds and then showing how we live differently with those wounds – not lashing out in anger, but opening our arms for embrace just as Christ did on the cross.

There is no shame in showing wounds and if anyone tries to shame us for showing our wounds, then they have forgotten that the resurrected Christ was known only by his wounds, by his resurrected brokenness.

Too often we walk the tight rope of not wanting to show our hurt, but vulnerability is the hallmark of being Christian, little Christs.

God, in Christ, was absolutely vulnerable for us – he came as a tiny infant who grew up in the world and then was thrown to the wolves who crucified him on the cross because they thought the Roman Empire was the way to go instead of the Kingdom of God.

Christ bore all those wounds for us and invites us to take a close look at them. In the resurrection, God shows us through Christ's wounds that human empires lead to death, but the Kingdom of God leads to life – eternal life.

So, when this world wounds us, crucifies us, God's rule will bring us back to life, because God's Kingdom is all about life – eternal life connected to the source of all life, so that we can eternally live in hope instead of constantly dying in fear.

In the Gospel reading for today, you will notice that the disciples were locked up in fear until Jesus came to them after the resurrection and showed them his wounds. You'll notice that the following week, when Jesus came to visit again, the doors were shut, but they were no longer locked in fear. The disciples were no longer afraid.

And we have to wonder about Thomas, who wasn't with the others on that first Easter Sunday. Was he absent because he was afraid? If the authorities are after all the disciples, why would you be there with them? It would be safer to be someplace else, right?

Fear is a great motivator and fear can lead people into sin whether they want to sin or not. In fear, Thomas turned away from his community, and perhaps turned from God as well. The Biblical understanding of sin is separating ourselves from God and Thomas did separate himself.

On that first Easter Sunday, Jesus went to his disciples and forgave them for their desertion and denial, and then he gave them the Holy Spirit so that they could keep it going. So that they could continue the forgiveness of sins and thereby bring peace into the world by bringing people back into community.

And so, after Jesus left, what did the disciples go do? They went out to find Thomas, to tell him Jesus has been resurrected, to tell him he is forgiven, to welcome him back into the community. And then, the following Sunday, Jesus himself shows up again in the community to directly forgive Thomas in the flesh.

Jesus tells Thomas - See – I am alive. See – here are the wounds. See me and believe that death is not the end of the story. See me and know that injustice, violence, and death cannot separate you from God. And now that you know that - go and share that good news with everyone. Go share my peace with the whole world.

In John 11:16 – Thomas is fearless when he says – Let us also go, that we may die with Jesus. This is when Jesus went to Lazarus who had been dead for 4 days.

What Thomas didn't realize when he said that, was that Lazarus would be brought back to life just as Jesus would be resurrected into eternal life, never to die again.

Death is not the answer. Resurrection is, and so Thomas was not killed with Jesus.

Later, in John 14:5, Thomas said to Jesus, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

Jesus had told them, "I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

In the resurrection, Thomas finally fully understands all that he already knew. He knows Jesus, who is the way. Jesus is the way, because he is the one who unites us to God and the way goes through death and into resurrection. The way is the forgiveness of sins which leads to life everlasting.

And Thomas also knows the Father. The Father is merciful and abounding in unending, unconditional, and unlimited love for each of us, a love that cannot be severed by sin or death, by injustice or violence, by empire or oppression.

Fear separates us. Forgiveness unites us. So, we go out into the world empowered by the Holy Spirit with our wounds in order to forgive those who sin against us, just as Christ is forgiving us, thereby bringing Christ's peace into the world and reuniting broken communities.

If we have no wounds, we have no need for a Savior and Christ has died for nothing. So, show your wounds and proclaim your need for Christ. That is what invites people into the true Christian community, the crucified and risen body of Christ.

If we have no wounds, we cannot be the Church, because the Church is the body of Christ, the body who is wounded and resurrected for the sake of the world. It is by our wounds that we are to be known in the world.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Thanks be to God. Amen.