

“From Pouter, to Doubter, to Shouter,” John 20:19-31, Easter 2-C, April 28, 2019

It probably is very difficult for any of us to understand, really, what those first disciples of Jesus were fully experiencing, when they were gathered together, up there in that Upper Room in Jerusalem, behind those locked doors that first Easter evening. St John tells us that these 10 men were fearful for their very lives; fearful that what happened to Jesus could quite possibly also happen to them; also, especially given the fact that the roman government was known for its **extremely harsh sentences of judgment that they rendered upon people whom they believed posed any kind of threat to the “Pax Romana,”** in Latin; a threat, that is, to the **“Peace of Rome.”**

One reason these men folk were so enormously frightened is because they had completely rejected the Word of God **that had been brought to them earlier in the day by the women folk!** -- **If you were here last Sunday, you heard St Luke tells us that when the women arrived at the burial place of Jesus, bright and early, how completely taken aback they were to discover that the stone had been rolled away from the entry to Jesus’ tomb.**

Moreover, when they went inside the tomb, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus! While they were perplexed about this, suddenly ***“TWO MEN STOOD BY THEM IN DAZZLING APPAREL, AND AS THEY WERE FRIGHTENED AND BOWED THEIR FACES TO THE GROUND, THE MEN SAID TO THEM: “WHY DO YOU SEEK THE LIVING AMONG THE DEAD? HE IS NOT HERE BUT HAS RISEN, AS HE SAID HE WOULD AGAIN ON THE THIRD DAY! REMEMBER HOW HE TOLD YOU, WHILE HE WAS STILL IN GALILEE, THAT THE SON OF MAN MUST BE DELIVERED INTO THE HANDS OF SINFUL MEN AND BE CRUCIFIED AND ON THE THIRD DAY RISE!”***

“AND THEY REMEMBERED HIS WORDS” and for these women folk, that made all the difference in the world! When these dear ladies shared the events of that first Easter morning with the men-folk, St. Luke tells us, ***“BUT THESE WORDS SEEMED TO THEM AN IDLE TAKE, AND THEY DID NOT BELIEVE THEM!”***

Wrestling with the resurrection? Why, of course, all eleven of Jesus’ remaining disciples had heard the Gospel much earlier in the day, but all eleven of them rejected the GOOD NEWS, BY HARDENING THEIR HEARTS AGAINST THE GOSPEL! And Thomas was there and had heard it too!

From a human perspective we might conclude that this was **UNDERSTANDABLY SO, BECAUSE THINGS LIKE A THE RESURRECTION OF A DEAD BODY: (1) Was not then, nor is it yet today, an every day occurrence. (2) Secondly, because this defied all human logic. (3) But thirdly,** they were left wrestling with the Good News of our Savior’s resurrection because **they hardened their hearts against the Word of God.**

By that first Easter afternoon, all eleven of Jesus’ first 12 disciples had heard the Gospel, including Thomas. The only one absent was Judas Iscariot because he had taken his own life, believing that there was no way that Christ would have forgiven him for his great betrayal.

Friends, let me tell you, there are 45 different verses found throughout the whole Bible, whereby the Triune God is constantly cautioning us, whom he had done his best, to make us his people, and to adopt us to become his very own children, so that we might know, believe and experience his great love for us as our Heavenly Father; 45 verses telling us not to harden our hearts against **“THE WORD OF GOD!”**

But in the interest of time, I am only going to share two of these Bible references with you, both of which are found in the New Testament Book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 3:7-9, we read: ***“Today if you hear God’s voice do not harden your hearts, as your forefathers did in the wilderness;”*** meaning during the Exodus event. And in the

very next chapter, in Hebrews 4:5-7, we read: *“They shall not enter my rest! Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of their disobedience. He again fixes a certain day, **“Today,”** saying through David, after so long a time, just as has been said before, **“Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts”**”*

One of the ways that the Risen Christ, who suddenly appears among these men-folk disciples, in his glorified body, there on that first Easter evening, works to soften their disbelieving, hardened hearts of his disciples is: **BY SHOWING THEM HIS SCARS! AND IN DOING SO—JESUS IS AUTHENTICATING—THAT IT REALLY IS HE, WHO IS STANDING RIGHT THERE, BEFORE THEIR VERY EYES.**

Friends, I don’t believe that I can adequately, or faithfully, preach upon this Gospel lesson this morning unless we also spend a little bit of time talking about Jesus’ scars; wounds in his hands and feet that were left there by the nails that had pinned him to the cross, and that wound in his side, which when the Roman soldier shoved a spear in Jesus’ side, the Bible tells us that both water and blood poured out.

That’s why I want to bring to your attention, briefly, that best-selling novel that was written by the American author, Peter Benchley, back in 1974, entitled: **JAWS**. It tells the story of a **great white shark that preyed upon a small resort town, off the coast of New England. The plot involves the three men who tried to kill it.** But even, far more popular than the novel itself, was the release of the movie, that Hollywood produced just one year later; also **given the one-syllable title of “JAWS” in 1975.**

One of the **most memorable scenes** in the whole movie is when **Richard Dreyfuss and his companions, seated around a dinner table, one evening, begin comparing the scars on their bodies that they had received over the years past. Some of these scars, they received were from boating accidents, but most of their scars they received from shark and barracuda bites.** Well, there you have it: **These veterans on the high seas began showing each other their scars.**

In the process, a shirt is pulled up. A sock is tugged off. Pants are pulled down. These **old sailors reveal more and more of their gouged flesh, their old, dated scars, utterly engaged in the art of one-upmanship.** More and more clothing falls to the floor until they are left standing, in little more than their underwear. **That’s, finally, when they look at each other, throw back their heads, and laugh.** And that’s precisely when the uncaught shark named “Jaws” bumps their boat right after that! According to the **four Gospels** found in the **New Testament:** There are at least 12 different episodes mentioned when and where the Risen Christ makes his resurrection appearances known to his people!

But let me tell you friends, that in a great many of these post-resurrection appearances, the Risen Christ was not immediately recognized by his followers as their Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Here the men-folk of Jesus’ most inner circle of disciples **are gathered together that first Easter evening behind locked doors for fear, that what the Roman authorities had done to Jesus, could easily become their own fate too,** when suddenly Jesus stands among them and says: ***“Peace be with you” (John 20:19)!***

According to St. John’s careful wording, there is no indication that these disciples immediately recognize this human figure standing among them to be the Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus Christ; even though he is standing right there among them. -- But John does tell us, precisely when it was that these disciples did recognize Christ’s presence in their midst! For, we read in **verse 20:** ***“When Jesus had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord!”*** And not a moment sooner! ***“Then!” “Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord!”***

Here's a possible insight, at least to the first half, of our Gospel lesson this morning: **"These disciples of Jesus, even though he was miraculously standing right there, next to him, was not immediately recognizable by them, until Jesus showed them his scars—only then—did they rejoice!"**

And yet, this easy-to-overlook detail has a lot to say to us modern church members. Here we have a risen Jesus, safe and sound in the bosom of his Father, now past the trauma of Good Friday; so that there should have been nothing but **"GOOD TIMES"** ahead of him and them, but these disciples do not have a clue who JESUS is, not until he shows them his scars!

Why? Because there is a profound connection that exists between the risen Christ and the scars of Christ. Easter does not totally negate Good Friday.

But have you ever listened to any of those false prophets, found all through the Church of Jesus Christ, today who will tell you: **"Jesus will always bring you peace and joy!"**? Have you ever heard anyone say anything like this? They say: **"If you are a real Christian, you will always have peace in your heart!"** Well, what if you feel sadness, and a great deal of sadness? Does this mean that you are not a real Christian?

Most every human being, to some degree, bear real and traumatic scars in their lives; both physical and emotional and spiritual scars, from the traumatic things that they may have experienced as they have made their way through this life. But when Jesus comes in our lives, some people are misled into believing that everything that will happen to them in their lives after that, will be nothing but sunshine and roses!

So, what does this story have to say to us about the Church of Jesus Christ today? What does it say about all the people, who even as Christians, still carry around scars and old wounds today?

I believe, it means, in part, that there are occasions when we should be trustworthy-enough to show our scars to one another; to stop pretending that they do not exist and to stop believing the lie that good Christians, with the right kind of faith, will never have any such scars to carry around with them in their lives!

Perhaps the true test of an authentic church is to follow Jesus' example: *"He showed them his hands and his side."* That is, Jesus was willing to show to his disciples, his wounds!

How can we find safe avenues by which to show each other our wounds? To genuinely be the church is not enough that we simply try our best to put up some FALSE FRONT AS STARCHED PEOPLE, WHO ASSEMBLE FOR AN HOUR EACH WEEK, WHILE SELDOM EVER COMING TO KNOW VERY LITTLE ABOUT ONE ANOTHER!

For us to truly be the Church, means that we have to be continuously committed to our gathering around a scarred LORD, WHO PROFOUNDLY TOUCHES OUR OWN SCARS AND UNITES US INTO HIS COMMUNITY WITH PRECISELY WHAT WE HAVE IN COMMON: **NOT SO MUCH BY BOASTING OF OUR POTENTIAL, NOR OUR SOCIAL STANDING, NOR EVEN BOASTING ABOUT OUR OWN DENOMINATIONAL THEOLOGY, BUT WHAT WE ARE TO BOAST ABOUT THE MOST, IS OUR WOUNDS.** Left to ourselves, however, there are those times when what we want, IS MUCH MORE THAT THIS STORY SEEMS TO BE OFFERING US!

But the only answer the Bible offers to creaturely suffering is JESUS! GOD'S RESPONSE TO OUR HUMAN SUFFERING AND TO THE "GROANING" OF THE WHOLE CREATION" IS NOT OUR SIMPLY RETELLING STORIES OR THEORIES ABOUT JESUS, BUT OUR BEING LED INTO DIRECT CONTACT WITH JESUS HIMSELF.

And so, he stands in the middle of the community! **"Peace be with you,"** says this Jesus with his own palms outstretched, with his own wounds wide open for each of our personal examination!

And that's why we say this to each other, every time we are about to celebrate Holy Communion: "It is far more than a way of simply saying, 'Good Morning!'" It is each of us sharing our profound hope with another human being.

It is offering the promise to others that Christ knows about their world, and that true **peace is discovered in the cleansing waters of our BAPTISM and in the EATING AND DRINKING OF OUR LORD'S TRUE BODY AND BLOOD; FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF ALL OUR SINS!**

Easter has a lot to do with Good Friday! *"He showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced!"*

It is a great comfort to me that Jesus' wounds were openly presented to his followers that first Easter evening! This is precisely how so many of Jesus' disciples came to know that it was truly Jesus!

And perhaps this is still true, and perhaps, others will come to know that Jesus is alive when his church dares to show their scars to one another and say: "Peace be with you!"

"Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hand, I will not believe," said Thomas.

Thomas, as we all do, at times, had hardened his heart against the Word of God.

We really don't know where Thomas was that first Easter evening, do we? Maybe he had gone out for a walk in the park, hoping to hear the birds sing, that they might somehow, some way, to some degree, at least, ease up some of the tremendous pain that was so deeply and pervasively consuming his whole life!

Jesus did come among the disciples, for a second time, 8 days later, and Thomas' life was drastically changed. Maybe he was away the other 10 disciples that first Easter evening because, he needed some personal time alone, to POUT over the great letdown he was experiencing in his own heart, now that Jesus was dead, and Thomas must have personally believed that those past three years of his life, that he had spend following Jesus, were all a huge waste of time.

When Thomas does return, however, he is changed from being a pouter, to a doubter. But I am glad that our Lord did not leave him in his state of endless doubt. The Risen Christ did appear to him, and although Jesus tells him, reach out and touch my wounds, there is no indication that Thomas did any such thing!

So, what does Thomas do? By the grace of God, he becomes a believer too! He is changed from being a pouter, into a doubter, and into a shouter! For he then cries out to our Risen Savior: "My Lord and My God!"

And aren't we glad that we are all capable of doing the same thing by the grace of God? Because this is the power of God's Word: *"These things are written that you too, may believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name!"*

Jesus bore scars even on Easter. So, must we come to terms with our own. Our scars are a large part of who we are. As we share them in community, perhaps Christ is saying: ***"Ah, dear child. I could not see you until now!"*** **AMEN**