

Luke 24:36-48
Marks of New Life
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The hope of Easter is this: Jesus' Resurrection does not make our wounds disappear, instead it animates and awakens them, giving them a new and redemptive purpose.

Anyone here have a scar on their body? Those scars tell a story, right? On my knees and on my wrist you will see the evidence of my athletic field exploits—such as they were. Another scar on my hand that tells of the impulsiveness and extreme hunger that led to moment of poor decision making involving a can of soup. Some of the scars we bear are on the outside, perhaps you had something infectious removed...or something was put in to help prolong your life.

For many of us, I would imagine most of the scars we bear, however, are on the inside. The scars of having something hurtful said to or about us, or the scars of someone who let us down in the past. But what the hope of Easter tells us is that God will repurpose and not erase these wounds, giving them a new and life giving mission, to touch others.

This morning we are going to look at a scene from Luke's Gospel which follows the encounter two of Jesus' disciples had with him—unknowingly—on the road to Emmaus on the first Easter. In that encounter we saw last week just how small their hopes for Jesus were. This morning those two disciples have made their way back to where the rest of Jesus' friends were, and are no doubt telling them about what they had seen at supper in Emmaus.

Listen with me now as I read for us from Luke 24 starting with verse 36

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!"³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.³⁸ And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?"⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish,^[b]⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.

⁴⁴Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,⁴⁷ and that repentance for^[c] the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

In their account of the resurrection, one thing that all four gospels describe is the shock and bewilderment of the disciples when Jesus returns to them. You can hardly blame them though, people rising from the dead is not something you see everyday—unless you spent any time around Jesus, in which case then it's something that is sort of a regular thing.

But this is different, the risen Christ was bodily raised, and yet the text tells us that he was not bound by physical laws, he could come and go, appear and disappear at will. Resurrection was gripping and terrifying to them. In Matthew 28 when Jesus gives the Great Commission (Go baptize and make Disciples in my name), it says that they worshipped; but some doubted. In Mark 16 when the two Marys see the angel in the tomb who tells them he's not here he's risen, it says they went out and fled from the tomb, afraid, and said nothing to anyone. John tells how Peter James and John go back to fishing after Jesus died. Well, we had a good run, back to the boats fellas.

The Scriptures tells us that the tomb was not the end of the line for Jesus and that there was life after death. But for the disciples, and even perhaps for you (if you are here and you still have doubts about this stuff, that's ok, this is the right and good place for you to be) they couldn't see it and had a hard time believing. The church is absolutely the right place for people with bewilderment and doubt, even skepticism because these are the marks of an authentic search.

And do you see what Jesus does here? Instead of chastising them, he does not get frustrated with them. Instead in this tender moment, with such patience and kindness, Jesus extends his hands to them, and says look. But he doesn't stop there, and this next part is just incredible. So incredible in fact that I need to set it up a bit.

First century Palestine was surrounded and deeply influenced by the Hellenistic Culture of the Greeks. A few hundred years prior Alexander the Great had conquered vast swaths of the Mediterranean World infusing it with Greek language and culture. For the Greeks, who were steeped in the teaching of a guy named Plato, they believed that the physical body and the physical stuff of this world was inferior to the things of the spirit. That the goal of life was to finally shed this body and escape this world and rise to the level of pure spirit.

It followed into the first few centuries of the church's life as well. One of the early heresies suggested that Jesus was not fully human, that he merely appeared to be human, but that he was some other substance, and whatever it was, it was not human like you and me. So, this is a bit of the cultural milieu in which the disciples found themselves.

Now back to Luke 24, look with me at what it says next, Jesus says: Look at my hands and my feet see that it is I myself. And now this is incredible, Jesus says, "Touch me and see." Do you realize that in all the Bible there is only one story about Jesus being touched while he was alive? Now, Jesus touched many others. And there was a woman who touched the hem of his garment. Another washed his feet with her hair. But the only other time in which someone reached out to touch Jesus was to betray him with a kiss. Maybe that's why all these resurrection appearances include Jesus inviting his followers to touch and see what, as one scholar puts it "Life after life after death" looks and feels like.

The promise of resurrection is not that we will all somehow be wiped away to a cloud somewhere where we'll have finally have the body we've hoped for, or our bumps and bruises, and our scars will be wiped away. No, the promise of resurrection is that the Kingdom of God will finally be revealed in our midst, and that we will have life after life after death.

And do you notice that Jesus' resurrected body is not wiped clean of the wounds from Calvary? The scars remain, why? I think they remain in order to reveal the extent to which our wounds can also be healing to others. When Jesus invites his followers to touch his nail imprinted hands, what he is

showing them is that the thing that seemed so utterly devastating and full of hurt was also part of God's restorative purposes. Even the most despicable evil ever imagined is not beyond God's ability to breath new life and hope.

The wounds on Jesus body tell the story of hurt redeemed. And when you allow Jesus to come into your life and allow the resurrection to live in you, your woundedness, your places of hurt and sorrow are reanimated and become the source of your witness to new life.

I was reading an article this week in which the author said: "We seem able to touch one another in our brokenness in ways that we never can in wholeness. God likes to use broken things--broken flasks, broken bread, broken bodies, even relationships that are broken with a kiss. Here, touch my hands and my feet," Jesus says to his disciples. "Get in touch with the physical scars, the bodily pain of human beings. Touch the hurts of real people, and you touch me."

In 1993, Oshea Israel was a teenager in Minneapolis, Minnesota. One night at a party Oshea got into a fight, which ended when he shot and killed a teenager named Laranium Byrd. Laranium was the only child of Mary Johnson. A dozen years later, Mary went to the penitentiary to visit the man who murdered her son. After serving 15 years, Oshea was released from prison. Soon after, Mary brought him to StoryCorps to talk about their friendship.

****Audio clip****

When Jesus gets a hold of us, he invites us to see and touch his wounds. And through them he shares his resurrection power they become the most powerful conduits of God's grace in the world. And when scars of a mother who lost her son touched the deeply wounded young man what flowed into that relationship was nothing short of resurrection power—only resurrection power.

I love what verse 41 says: **they disbelieved for joy**. Disbelieving for joy, I imagine this is the posture of disbelieving for joy (taken a back in shock, and at the same time leaning in with curiosity). I think this is what we all experience when it becomes real to us that the scars we bear are not only reanimated with God's life, but are the very things that might save another's life.

Amen.