

Christ's Peace/Christ's Wounds  
John 20:19-31

from the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, IL  
Matt Matthews  
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A friend told me how her pastor began his Easter sermon with the sentence, "I have a terminal disease." He was not sick, but was simply illustrating how we each will one day die.

Few in his flock got the point. That's the only sentence in the whole sermon they heard. After service, a cluster gathered around asking him, "What are you dying of? How long, pastor, do you have left? Can I bring a casserole this afternoon?" Men and women had tears in their eyes.

To talk about death gets us off track, which is why we are so deft at changing the subject.

Roland Perdue, Rachel's aunt's favorite pastor, was invited by the local funeral director to lunch. Roland was new to town. Many of the funerals he'd be doing in his pastorate would be handled by this funeral home, and the director wanted to give Roland a tour. In the casket room, Roland asked why he had never seen a black casket. The funeral director said, in all seriousness, that "the color black was too suggestive of death."

Even at funeral homes we don't talk about death.

But Jesus is not afraid to bring up the obvious.

He's gathered with his friends after his resurrection. He tells them, "Peace be with you." And then, as commentator Frank Honeycutt writes, "Jesus does a rather odd thing . . . In absolute conjunction with sharing the peace, he showed them his hands and side. Look closely at the story and you'll notice there is not even a breath separating these comforting words of Jesus (*Peace be with you*) and the parading of his scars."

Jesus wasn't going to pretend that all was well with the world. He wasn't going to pretend that bad things don't happen to good people. He wasn't looking at the world through rosy glasses. "Our wounds are part of who we are." For Jesus, the peace and the scars go hand in hand. And, at least in this case, the scars precede the peace.

Jesus is being honest, even if we can't be honest, or won't be honest. Jesus is telling the truth. He's not glossing over what happened on Holy Week. We all die. We all bear scars, and hurts, and disappointments. We all have been wounded. We don't need to pretend it doesn't hurt. This is part of the road we are on. It is the "terminal illness" that we refuse to acknowledge.

Part of what he's saying, I think, is that we must stop pretending that we can somehow dodge the hurts of life. We cannot. Those we love will experience pain. We will experience loss. This is part of the landscape of being human. This is real. This is real life. And Jesus is rooted in this life. Jesus is not a mirage. Jesus shares our experience.

Another part of what Jesus is saying is that by God's healing power we will transcend our losses. Sure, we'll carry the scars. That old hurt will never fully go away. But life is more than what we currently see. Resurrection is as inevitable as death. Morning light follows every night. Scars heal. New life dawns.

"Peace be with you," Jesus said. And then he showed them his hands and side.

Paul talks about Jesus' death this way in Romans 6, and this helps form our understanding of baptism: "*5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. . .*

And, so, in baptism we symbolically go under the water---a symbol of death---and we are raised from water to new life. We come out of the water, and we *breathe*. We go to the cool dark of the tomb, and we step out into spring light. Living, dying, rising is life's natural mystery.

The wounds and the peace sit side by side like an old man and toddler sitting on the front pew bathed in quiet.

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Thomas wasn't with the disciples when Jesus first appeared. They told him that they had seen Jesus. They told him that Jesus had risen again. They told him that Jesus was alive. But Thomas said he would not believe until he saw Jesus with his own eyes. Thomas said he would not believe until he actually touched Jesus' wounds.

The next week, Jesus appeared again to the disciples, and this time Doubting Thomas was there. "Peace be with you," Jesus said. Jesus invited Thomas to see his wounds; he invited Thomas to touch his wounds. Thomas saw, and Thomas believed. *My Lord and my God!*

How is the peace of Christ connected with the wounds of Christ? For Thomas, he never would have known Christ's peace unless he had touched Christ's wounds. This is true in our lived experience: we can't appreciate the mountain top until we've trudged through the valley.

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In John's gospel, the peace and the wounds go together.

"Peace be with you," Jesus said. And then he showed them his hands and his side.

Glory,  
Glory,  
Alleluia.

The Lord is Risen. The Lord is Risen, indeed.