

April 11, 2010
Easter 2

"Real Wounds for Real People"

JOHN 20:19-31

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. ²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." ²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." ²⁴ Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." ²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." ³⁰ Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Did you lock your car when you parked in the parking lot of the church? How about your home? Did you lock the doors when you left your house? How about last night? Did you check the windows and doors before you went to sleep last night? Why do we carry keys in our pocket and why do we lock our doors? We do this because we are afraid, afraid that someone will break in to our homes and steal from us or even hurt us. We have US soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan because we are afraid of another terrorist attack and we want to do everything we can to protect our country.

Jesus disciples had locked the doors. They were huddled together in a room with the doors locked because they were afraid they might be put to death by the leaders of the Jewish people just as Jesus had been put to death. Their Lord and Savior had predicted that they would be hated for his name sake. They are afraid that these predictions are coming true.

Have you been afraid lately, afraid of what the economy might do to your job or nest egg? Are you afraid of the next visit to the doctor? Are you afraid of growing weaker in your faith instead of stronger? These are real fears that rise up in the lives of real people. This morning we see something that helps us rise up our worst fears. We see the love that Jesus has for us represented by the wounds that he carries in his hands and in his side. These are real wounds that can drive away the worst fears and doubts.

Jesus' wounds overcome our fears

The disciples experienced real fear as they locked the doors and huddled together like frightened little children. That seems a bit odd and strange considering all the reports they have received about Jesus rising from the dead. The women came with the report of seeing angels and an empty tomb. Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news, "I have seen the Lord." Peter and John came back with the report that the tomb was empty and the grave clothes were neatly folded, a powerful message that Jesus was in control. In addition to the first hand reports, they had Jesus' own words that he would be crucified and rise again on the third day.

I am going to ask you to complete some sentences with me this morning to illustrate what they disciples were forgetting in their lives. I know this is simple but please bear with me. The sky is ... blue. The grass is ... green. The flowers left over from the wedding are ... yellow. Jesus said he would rise on ... the third day. Why were they so afraid? Because they were real people with real fears and hang ups just as we are real people with real fears and worries and concerns. Have you ever been afraid to tell someone what you believe because you were worried what they might think about you? It happens all the time. It happens to the best of us, even if Jesus has risen from the dead and is taking care of us.

Jesus has compassion on these dear disciples who are behind the locked doors. "Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord." Jesus suddenly appeared. He did not need a key to unlock the door. He suddenly appeared. Don't think for a moment that Jesus can't be there for you in your worst fears and greatest needs. There is no pit so deep that Jesus and his love is not deeper.

From the lips of Jesus they heard the reassuring words, "Peace be to you." It sounds even better in the Hebrew language. "Shalom Aleichem." Children, you can tell your friends in school that you know a Hebrew word. It is the word, "Shalom." It means peace. Jesus offers a peace that this world cannot give, a peace that goes beyond human understanding. It is a peace that is connected to the nail marks in his hands and the large wound in his side. Jesus kept these wounds, these real wounds, to give his disciples the blessed assurance that every sin of unfaithfulness had been forgiven.

The Chairman and CEO of Home Depot once said the following: Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up: It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning, the lion wakes up: It knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death. It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle: When the sun comes up, you'd better be running." Solomon wrote about our dog eat dog world in Ecclesiastes about chasing after the wind. Embedded into this endless cycle of life that breeds fear is the greater fear of living each day knowing in my heart of hearts that my life does not measure up to what God expects of me and that I will be found lacking on the day of judgment.

Jesus comes into our lives and says, "Peace be with you." He says to you and me, "Let me show you my hands and my side. Look at my wounds and remember how I was wounded

for your transgressions and bruised for you iniquities. Look at the price I paid so you have peace with your God in this life and for all eternity." The disciples were overjoyed with they saw the Lord. The wounds in the hands of Jesus are real. They are the evidence, the overwhelming forensic evidence, that you have been forgiven and that you have peace with your God and that you are really loved.

Jesus wants us to take what we have seen in his hands and side and share that with the world. "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." He gives us the Holy Spirit to tell people their sins are forgiven when they see their needs, and tell them they are not forgiven when they refuse to see their need for forgiveness. I am holding in my hands a small bellows that can be used to pump up an exercise ball. Just as this bellows takes in air and then sends it out, Jesus lets us take in the love we seen in his wounded hands and side, and then sends us out to share that with other people.

How real are the wounds in the hand of Jesus that we carry with us every day in our lives? Permit a story to help illustrate the point. Twelve year old Michael loved to swim in the lake next to his home in Florida. One day it almost cost him his life. While snorkeling under the clear water, he didn't hear his mother screaming about a large alligator coming toward them. The cousins swam away, but the gator lunged for Michael, fortunately biting his mask, instead of his head. Michael swam as fast as he could towards shore, and just as he was about to reach the shore, the gator grabbed his foot and tried to pull him back. His mother meanwhile grabbed his arm and tried to pull him to safety. She was no match for the large gator that outweighed her by 200 pounds, but then when it opened its mouth to grab on more tightly, she pulled her son ashore. Later he would proudly show the large scars on his ankle where the gator nearly got him. What he was most proud of were the scars on his wrists, where his mother's fingers had dug in deeply to pull him to safety. They were living proof of her love and determination to rescue him. Look again at wounds in the hands of Jesus, the evidence of his love for you. Look at these real wounds, this perfect love that drives out fear, and gives you a permanent, lasting peace this world cannot give.

Jesus wounds overcome doubts

Not all the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. One disciple was missing. His name was Thomas. "Now Thomas, (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.'" If you were directing this scene for a movie, how would you have the disciples say these words, "We have seen the Lord?" I am sure you would try to show as much enthusiasm and excitement in their voices as possible. In contrast to their first hand testimony to what they have seen with their eyes, and heard with their ears and maybe even touched with their hands, we have stone cold, doubting Thomas saying, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, I will not believe it." If you had a doubt meter such as this where would you rate Thomas? I think you would have to give him a "10" for the high level of doubting in his life. I am sure you have heard someone say, "He is a real doubting Thomas." Thomas had real doubts, huge doubts, defiant doubts, sinful doubts. A man who once visited this church and worshipped with us, said that he would not accept things unless he could see them, taste them, hear them, touch them and smell them and feel them. Where would you put him on the doubt meter? Now let's get personal. Before pointing too many fingers at doubters we know personally, let's reflect

on times when we have lost touch with how real Jesus is as he sits at the right hand of his Father and takes care of us, his beloved Church.

Jesus comes to this man Thomas, the man who scores a ten on the doubt meter, and reaches out to him with the nail marks in his hands. "A week later his disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be to you.' Jesus sure liked saying peace to you, "Shalom Aleichem." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here. See my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Jesus does not come into the room and say to Thomas, "You are fired!" He does not come into the room and roll his eyes in disgust as he says, "Well, how's our doubter doing today?" Jesus takes the initiative and like the powerful Haddon collider blasting a proton, Jesus blasts Thomas' doubts into a millions of little pieces. Joyfully Thomas responds by saying, "My Lord and my God."

And then Jesus talks about all these people who follow after Thomas who will not see what Thomas saw, and yet they will still believe. "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who had not seen and yet have believed." When you swim in the ocean you use all of your senses. You use the sense of smell to smell the ocean water, the sense of taste to taste the salty water, the sense of feel to feel the coldness, the sense of hearing to hear the crashing of the waves, and your eyes to see the bright blue water. Jesus makes his wounds more real to you than a dip in the waters of the Pacific Ocean. All these things were written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that by believing you might have life in his name. Just think of it. We have seen the Lord and we will see face to face when he returns in glory. Amen.