

Sermon – 2nd Sunday of Easter (Year A)

Scripture Texts: Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31
Sermon preached at Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Episcopal Church

Focus Statement: *We are called to a living hope, which does not try to sweep away the pains and wounds of today, but which is sustained by Christ's victory over death.*

Loving God: May my spoken words be faithful to your written Word, and lead us all to better know the living WORD, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Outline:

1. Cool Scars

- a. Scars can tell stories that are worth remembering
 - i. Heather's "walking on logs with boys in the rain" scar
 - ii. The scar on my chin from Toby's last day
 - iii. Stretch marks from a mother giving birth
- b. Scars of Jesus
 - i. Speak to his sacrifice, ending the cycles of human violence, exposing the ways of empire that lead only to death
 - ii. Marks of his triumph over death – the wound in his side was unquestionably fatal, and yet here he is again, alive.
- c. Scars of the martyrs
 - i. Augustine, one of the great theologians and bishops of the early church, imagined that in the resurrection, all of the broken parts of our bodies would be healed and set right – except that the martyrs would still bear their scars.
 - ii. In Augustine's understanding, these would be marks, not of shame or weakness, but of glory.
 - iii. These scars, too, tell stories worth remembering!

2. Painful Scars

- a. Scars can also be continued reminders of pain
 - i. You don't get a scar without a fairly serious wound!
 - ii. Phantom pain from amputated limbs & scar tissues that impede movement are serious physical conditions.
- b. But the mental and emotional and spiritual wounds can be even more devastating:
 - i. Losses of loved ones can be crippling;
 - ii. Epigenetic research is revealing the measurable ways that racial trauma is being passed down through the generations;
 - iii. PTSD brings a significantly increased suicide risk;
 - iv. More than half of childhood abuse survivors go on to experience further abuse as adults, either as victims or perpetrators.

- c. We must not pretend that Easter or Jesus or faith give simple solutions to these problems.
 - i. All too often, we act like faith fixes things, and that the church should be a place for respectable, put-together people.
 - ii. But, if we look at the people who hung around Jesus, we see that many of them were far from respectable or put together.
 - iii. Theologians and therapists have terminology for when we hold these unrealistic, even damaging expectations of our faith and of ourselves: over-realized eschatology, spiritual bypass, and idolatry are real problems!
 - iv. A healthy church should probably look more like a hospital or a clinic than a country club!

3. Living Hope

- a. Thankfully, though, our faith DOES have something to offer when dealing with traumatic scars.
 - i. Our Epistle reading from 1 Peter calls us to a “Living Hope.” Living hope is more than just optimism, but it is less than certainty.
 - ii. Optimism is too weak – this wishful thinking is rooted only in our emotional state, and is therefore too easily shaken by a bad day or a rough night of sleep.
 - iii. Certainty is too strong, and is not something that we are generally granted with our finite knowledge and our complex world. Moreover, certainty would remove the need for hope.
- b. Already, but not yet
 - i. The way that Peter speaks of this living hope is different. It is a new birth – so something that is already begun and full of potential. And it is an inheritance kept for us in heaven – so something that is not yet received, but which we must wait and long for.
 - ii. Theologians speak of this hope as the “already but not yet”. Jesus has already been raised from the dead, breaking the power of death, but the victory is not yet complete and we have not yet been raised with him.
 - iii. The resurrection is a little bit like the battle of Gettysburg – which turned the tide of the Civil War and proved decisive in the Union’s ultimate victory...but was still followed by two more bloody years of fighting.
- c. How do we live in this already but not yet?
 - i. Thomas is an example for us of this living faith. He refuses to be paralyzed with fear. Thomas was the disciple who led the others to go with Jesus to see Lazarus, even when it might mean death. He also is not hiding with the others after Jesus death.
 - ii. I think this courage is rooted, in part, in Thomas’ willingness to ask the hard questions. He does this back in John 14, and again here. Asking

questions is a mark, not of doubt, but of faith. It is a mark not of despair, but of hope.

- iii. His courage is also rooted, I think, in his community. They do not condemn him (nor does Jesus!), but make room for his questions – and they continue to tell his story!
- d. Good news of Easter is that the story always goes on.
 - i. Jesus' story doesn't end in death, nor can it be contained in any Gospel (as John acknowledges here). Thomas' story, likewise, does not end with his denial and questions (according to tradition, he travelled furthest of any disciple, planting churches in India).
 - ii. So do our stories go on beyond our scars. God delights in using the things we would not expect to bring healing and to sustain hope!
 - iii. May we be a community that welcomes the hard questions, that cares for each other, that is full of Jesus' gift of the Spirit, that this might be a place where scars do become marks of glory.

Amen.

Notes:

- Connect to Peter's sermon in Acts: According to Matt Skinner on Working Preacher, the sermon is "largely about somebody who you utterly miscalculated, utterly kind of misdiagnosed is the means by which God has done something...This is about humanity versus the ways of God and our own propensity toward violence and exclusion and dehumanization.
- Our scars and broken places are regularly the ways that God works, though that is contrary to our calculations and diagnoses.
- Scars can harden us against others, or can call us into healing and forgiveness.
- Working Preacher: the "living hope" from 1 Peter is about more than optimism or evidence or experience; living hope sustains us in dark times, for that is where it is most needed and most provided
- Mockingcast – over realized eschatology is a problem; again, we need the *living* hope that makes space for our grief that persist even during and after Easter. Our scars are real, and some of them will not be made glorious until after our own resurrections.