

**Wound-er-full**  
**John 20:24-29**  
**First Sunday after Easter**  
**April 11, 2010**  
**René Rodgers Jensen**  
**First Christian Church**  
**Omaha, Nebraska**

**John 20**

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin ), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." 26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

When we read this account of Jesus' resurrection appearance to Thomas, we usually focus on Thomas's doubt, his insistence on proof that Jesus has risen. But this year, when I read the passage, I was struck by the fact that Jesus' hands and feet and side still bore the scars of the crucifixion.

I mean, the resurrection is about victory over the greatest enemy of all—death itself. After conquering death, cleaning up the scars from the crucifixion should have been a cakewalk. Today any reasonably competent plastic surgeon could probably get it done. Surely God could have managed it.

But the marks of the crucifixion, the marks of Jesus' torture and suffering are still there. Why is that? After all, resurrection is about new life and new beginnings, and surely new beginnings mean wiping out the signs of past suffering. The scars of the

crucifixion belong to Jesus' pre-resurrection life. Why are they still there even after he has risen from the dead?

Perhaps it is because the scars on Jesus' body remind us that Jesus experienced fully the pain and injustice of the world. The cross that held Jesus' body, wounded and naked, exposed in a way we can never forget, the violence and injustice of this world—not just in Jesus' time, but also for all time. To erase the marks of the crucifixion would be to deny that pain and suffering and injustice still exist. To deny that God continues to experience fully that pain and suffering and injustice.

In the summer of 1955, 14-year old Emmett Till traveled from his home in Chicago to visit relatives in Money, Mississippi. High-spirited and full of fun, the black teenager failed to understand how rigid the line was that separated black from white in Mississippi, and one day as a joke he whistled at a young white woman in a store. The woman told her husband. The husband and other men came in the middle of the night and took the boy away to an abandoned shed in a neighboring county. There they beat, tortured, and eventually murdered the boy. Then they wrapped barbed wire connected to a 70 pound weight around Emmett's neck and dropped his body in the Tallahatchie River.

When the teen's body was found, it was placed in a casket and shipped home to his mother in Chicago. The casket lid was screwed down and marked with the seal of the State of Mississippi. The Mississippi authorities did not want the casket opened and the Chicago funeral home had agreed to keep it closed.

The story might have ended there, with Emmett Till just another in a tragically long list of black men brutalized by white racists. But Emmett's mother Mamie insisted that the casket be opened. She wanted the whole world to see what had been done to her son. Fifty-thousand people filed by the casket to see Emmett's mutilated body. And in September, *Jet* magazine published pictures of the body of the dead teenager.

The pictures of Emmett Till's body bearing the marks of his horrific death became one of the factors that energized the growing civil rights movement. Almost all the black civil rights workers who fought so bravely in the 1960's for equal rights carried with them the haunting images of Emmett Till's mutilated, wounded body.

This is how God's resurrection power works. It does not shrink from the reality of suffering; it does not close its eyes to the ugly truth of human pain and human sin. Jesus carried on his risen body the scars of the crucifixion because the new life that is made possible through Jesus Christ is not something that wipes out past suffering; it transforms it.

Theologian Marjorie Suchocki writes, " The scars of the crucifixion mediate the truth of the resurrection...The transformation of Jesus that occurred in the resurrection is...no absolute new beginning. Rather, the transformation is fashioned through the experience of the crucifixion. Transformation bears the marks of the [life experiences] that lead to the very need for transformation. There is a continuity with the pain of the past in the resurrection life, for the pain of the past adds its shape to the transformed life...The resurrection power of God does not annihilate the past, it transforms it. That

which was—pain, loss, failure—is recognized and affirmed and becomes energy for a new, transformed life.”

What happened to Emmett Till was beyond horrible, but his death became an energizing force in the struggle for civil rights. The wounds on his body ultimately became a means for the transformation of a nation. The resurrection power of God does not annihilate past suffering, it transforms it.

Crusita Martinez’s abusive ex-boyfriend doused her with a bottle of battery acid and urine, and left her to burn. The attack seared off her eyelids and the tip of her nose, and covered her chest and arms with third-degree burns. She was so disfigured that her four-year old son didn’t recognize her at first.

Many would have sunk into despair, but God took what had happened to the young woman and shaped it into something good. Now happily married with a new baby daughter, Crusita has become a fierce advocate for abused women. She has counseled hundreds of battered women at Boston area shelters. She tells the women, “Life will go on. There’s hope.” Which is just what Geralda de Jesus needed to hear. Like Crusita, she had been a victim of an acid attack by her ex. She had been so ashamed of her appearance that she would go out only wearing a mask, but not any more. “Crusita,” she says, “has given me a dose of her strength.”

God’s resurrection power does not deny the pain we have suffered, it transforms it into energy for good. Crusita is one of so many whose own wounds have become a source of hope and healing for others. Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote the best-selling classic *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* after the death of his son Aaron from

premature aging disease. He used his own experience of grief, as well as his training and experience as a rabbi, to help others who had been hurt by life and by the trite answers offered in the face of human suffering.

When her 13-year old daughter was killed by a drunk driver, Candy Lightner founded Mothers Against Drunk Driving, an organization which has been incredibly important in raising the national consciousness of the dangers of drinking and driving.

Out of his bitter experience as an alcoholic and the healing found in his experience of God, Bill Wilson developed the program we know as Alcoholics Anonymous, which enabled countless alcoholics to stop drinking.

These are famous people, folks whose names we know, but there are countless unsung heroes. Perhaps you know someone who has experienced great pain in their lives, but who has channeled that suffering so that they are now a source of joy and inspiration. There is more than one of those folks right here in our congregation. Folks like Sandy Else, a member of our church, whose leg was amputated below the knee. For years, Sandy visited new amputees in the hospital to show them that they could still live a full and rewarding life.

God never promised that we would get through life without being wounded. But the resurrection power of God can transform those wounds into a source of healing and hope, for us and for others. Amy Carmichael, a missionary to India who knew great pain in her own life, once wrote, "God never wastes his children's pain." God never leaves us in our time of crucifixion, but can take our pain and suffering and transform it.

We are all wounded—some of us are wounded in big ways, some in small ways, but we are all wounded. But the resurrection power of God promises this—our wounds can become sources of hope and healing. They can become wound-er-full.