

The Community of the Wounded

(John 20:19-31)

Sermon delivered by The Very Rev. Matt Rhodes at Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia
Second Sunday of Easter, April 28, 2019

In the name of one God: creator; redeemer; and sustainer. Amen.

“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.”¹

In the immediate aftermath of the death of Jesus, his followers were living in a state of fear. Their teacher ... their friend ... their Messiah ... had been put to death. The new way of living they had experienced over the past three years had had been brought to a sudden and horrific conclusion. The world that had seemed to be moving forward ... a world in which they had witnessed signs of the fulfillment of the promise of the kingdom of God on earth ... now seemed to be hurtling backwards.

As the disciples of Jesus, they had gone within a matter of just a few days from playing a very public role as his companions to living as outcasts in hiding, afraid for their lives.

It was in this time of fear and seclusion that the risen Jesus appeared among them. In these hours when they were suffering the pain of their own wounds ... wounds of fear, and sorrow, and perhaps even guilt ... Jesus stood among them, **his** wounds visible to **them**. Seen by all, that is, except for Thomas. Despite their earnestness and their admonitions to the contrary ... **Jesus has risen** ... Thomas **did not** believe. The word of the other witnesses was simply not enough for him; he also needed to **be** a witness. And so one week later, he appeared again, this time so that **Thomas** could **see** ... and **believe**.

In one way or another, many in this world are wounded. Broken relationships. Broken hearts. Fractured health. Empty stomachs. Empty bank accounts. A life devoid of prospects or opportunities. Enduring the consequences of judging others, and perhaps discovering that judgment goes two ways. Living with the result of doing what is easy rather than what is right. Bearing the heavy mantle of disappointment. Carrying the deep pain of loss and grief.

These are the wounds carried by many ... the circumstances that have pierced their sides and the pain that has driven itself deep into their wrists. And it is because of these deep wounds that many often turn to the Church. When they do, when they turn to **us, what do** we show them?

¹ John 20:25 (NRSV).

People walk through the front doors of a church for a number of reasons: liturgy; music; education; tradition; outreach into the wider world. And they walk into a church to find **community** ... to feel that they are **not** alone ... to find the reassurance that there **are** others in the world experiencing things similar to what **they** are experiencing and feeling in their **own** lives. When they come through the door here, **what do they need to see?**

The theologian Elizabeth Johnston has offered one answer to that question. She writes, “People are waiting to see **the marks**. They are not looking for the marks in Jesus’ hands and side anymore. They wait instead to see the marks of the church — the wounds in **our hands** and **our sides** — the evidence that **we** are really connected to the Jesus who was crucified and raised.”²

I know that our desire is that we always put our best on display ... to offer our warmest sense of welcome and our most heartfelt invitation to join us. But should we not, in putting our best on display, also put our most **authentic selves** on display? Please do not misunderstand what I am saying here; I truly believe that we are authentic in what we show all those who come here. We do allow them to see a glimpse of this wonderful community of believers and to experience a bit of what time together here at Christ Church means to us and can mean for them.

No, what I am pondering this morning is whether we can do **just as much good** ... whether we can be **just as authentic** ... when we welcome them knowing that, like Thomas with Jesus, they may need to see our wounds to believe? Perhaps we can do even more for them ... and be more authentic ... by allowing them to touch the holes in **our** hands and put their hands in the wounds in **our** sides and letting them know that they are not alone with **their** wounds.

There is some wonderful language in Eucharistic Prayer C that is an admonition to us when we approach the altar as a community for the bread and wine. It reads, “Deliver us from the presumption of coming to this Table for solace only, and not for strength; for pardon only, and not for renewal.”³ Can this not also apply to those who seek **us** out ... those who desire to see **our** wounds?

If we allow ourselves to be vulnerable and show them **our** wounds, perhaps they will discover – to borrow the Eucharistic language – that in coming to find solace they have instead found strength. If we invite them to see the wounds in **our** hands and sides ... if we give them the gift of knowing that they are not alone in feeling the burdens of this life ... perhaps they will find that their seeking out this place for pardon led to their leaving this place feeling renewed.

And through it all may they ... and we ... hear the words of Jesus spoken anew: “Peace be with you.”⁴

Amen.

² E. Elizabeth Johnston, “John 20:24-31: Pastoral Perspective.” *Feasting on the Gospels: John, Vol. 2* (Kindle edition). The emphasis placed on certain words in this quote is my own.

³ *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 372.

⁴ John 20:21 (NRSV).