

Stephen R. Shaver

Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

April 7, 2024

2 Easter, Year B, Revised Common Lectionary

[Acts 4:32-35](#)

[Psalm 133](#)

[1 John 1:1-2:2](#)

[John 20:19-31](#)

+ + +

You can learn a lot about a person by asking them to tell you the stories of their scars.

One of mine is a thin line running through my left eyebrow: a relic of the time my fourth-grade best friend and I decided to slide down a rope through a jagged hole in a treehouse floor. We were trying to imitate the Ninja Turtles, but the outcome was a little less elegant than I'd planned.

I bet you could tell similar stories. Almost all of us, I suspect, have a scar or two with a good story attached. Childhood adventures gone a little awry are the best kind: a little scary at the time, but pretty benign in hindsight, and retold often enough to become family traditions.

But of course, not all scars are like that. Many of us have scars that tell more difficult stories, ones we might not want to share at parties. Many of our scars tell stories of pain and loneliness, neglect or abandonment. Many of our scars are the kind we would much rather not have others see. The pockmarks of a middle-aged man whose addiction has landed him in the hospital for what may be the last time. The thin marks hidden by the long sleeves of a young woman who hurts herself as a response to anxiety. The faded but still legible numbers on the arm of an elderly woman whose family died in a camp in Europe eighty years ago. Our scars do tell our stories—and sometimes they are stories we would just as soon had never happened to us.

Not all of our scars are physical, of course. Think of soldiers returning from combat whose lives may be impacted not by physical wounds but by the wounds PTSD has wreaked on their spirits. And our scars don't have to be that dramatic to be very, very real. We may not all be Holocaust survivors or combat veterans—but all of us know what it is to grieve for something or someone we have lost. Each of us, at some point in our lives, has had to nurse painful wounds of body or of soul. Our scars are part of our stories, for better or for worse. Whether big or little, the wounds we've suffered are part of what make us who we are.

Now today is the second Sunday of Easter—and we have five more to look forward to, for Easter is a fifty-day season of resurrection feasting. It's a time of ringing bells and Alleluias. Easter is about the joy of new life, the incredible, unexpected delight of Jesus' friends at discovering the world-transforming news that Christ is risen.

Today's gospel story from John about the first appearances to the disciples is filled with that joy. And yet in the midst of all the rejoicing, there's one thing Jesus does that seems a little ... well, perhaps out of place. Fresh from the empty tomb, radiant with resurrection glory, the first thing the risen Jesus shows his blinking and astonished friends is his scars.

It might seem a little incongruous to dwell on the scars at this point. We might even question Jesus' sense of timing. After all, the disciples know very well what happened—does he really need to remind them? It's a bit of a downer note in what could otherwise be a much more genteel resurrection appearance.

But the way John tells the story, the scarred hands and side of Jesus are actually critical to the encounter. It almost seems as if this is how they come to recognize him. It's after he first shows them his wounded hands and side that John writes, “the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.” Later, when they're relating the story to the understandably skeptical Thomas, the scars are the detail he picks up on and insists on seeing: and when Jesus appears the second time, it's after seeing the scars for himself that Thomas cries out, “My Lord and my God!” Both for the disciples and for Thomas, it seems as if the critical element of recognition comes in the fact that this glorious Person in their midst is the One who was crucified. In some fundamental way, the experience of the cross has left a mark on who Jesus is forever ... even in his resurrected glory.

We worship a God who has become one of us in every way: even to the point of being marked forever by the experiences of pain and shame that have been a part of Jesus' story. The resurrection isn't about undoing the events of the cross. It's not a conventional happy ending where things get put back the way they used to be before the bad things happened. It's something more mysterious altogether. Jesus doesn't simply stop being dead and go back to being alive the way he used to be. His death is swallowed up in a kind of life that is deeper than anything the universe has ever known. And in that life, the wounds of the cross that had been marks of shame become badges of honor and glory.

We worship a God with scars.

We are loved by a God who is not too proud to live life the way we do: to know joy and love and comfort, but also danger and degradation—and to be marked by those experiences just as we are.

And so on this second Sunday of Easter, we're invited to see the good news of the resurrection in the scars of the risen Christ. Not the scars of a dead Christ, as if suffering were good in itself—God save us from that kind of bad-news gospel that tells people to suck it up and endure injustice out of a misguided piety of punishment. But also, not a risen Christ without scars, as if the resurrection was good news for Jesus but has nothing to do with poor messed-up scarred people like you and me.

No. The wounded hands and side of Jesus in his glory are a foretaste of what God has in mind for the wounds of you and me and all creation. Through the power of perfect love, God can take even our most painful, scarred places and gently, tenderly, breathe into them the healing power of the resurrection.

I wonder where God's healing grace might be breathed into a wounded place in you today.

And I pray that in the fullness of God's grace all of us may experience our scars becoming no longer marks of shame, but marks of healing and glory, through the mercy of our risen Lord Jesus. Amen.

Intergenerational Sermon

I wonder if you have any scars ...

Scar stories; my eyebrow scar

I hope when you got hurt you had people to be with you and comfort you and help you know you would feel better

Scars come from getting hurt, but they don't hurt anymore. They are healed and they stay with us as reminders of our stories

One of the special parts of Jesus' story is that when he came back from the dead he had his scars to show his story

Jesus had been hurt and even killed because people can be mean and cruel to each other

He didn't stay that way. God brought him back alive and healed him. When he showed his friends he was alive again they recognized him because of his scars

God is with us when we are hurting. Jesus has been there too. Jesus understands us. God is there to comfort us in the pain and sadness of our lives and God will heal our hurt.