

April 19, 2009 a.m. Worship

Anita Rediger

Scarred, Wounded & *Alive!*

John 20:19-29

- Invitation to look at your hands and at the hands of those sitting next to you.
 - Our hands bear scars and wounds.
 - Blake's missing finger tip
 - Martin's misshapen thumb
 - Melissa's bagel slicing accident
 - Freshly bound wounds and scars from long are present on our hands, everyone's hands...

It's not easy to live into the reality of Easter. It takes some getting used to. Easter's impact could well get away from us if we aren't careful, if we don't really slow down and pay attention. We could well say, "Easter's over..." and find ourselves continuing on just as if Easter had never come. The account just read for us illustrates this challenge; for it was *on Easter evening*, the evening *after* the resurrection that the disciples gathered together in a locked upper room. This wasn't a joyful Easter gathering like we shared with one another. Instead, the disciples gathered behind locked doors in fear - heart pounding, sick-to-the-stomach, terrifying fear.

The proclamation that Jesus was alive hadn't changed anything for the disciples. In real time and space they were in trouble. Even if the resurrection of Jesus were true they were still afraid and for good reasons. If the resurrection had really happened there would likely be more trouble. They had just seen Jesus crucified – albeit most of them had been in hiding already by that time - and there were no illusions that they might be at risk for sharing a similar fate. If the resurrection hadn't happened they could be accused of stealing his body in an attempt to stir up the crowds. The disciples were stuck in the upper room, behind locked doors. There really wasn't any safe way out. They were stuck, paralyzed, with the door barricaded from the inside.

Into this fortified, upper room Jesus appeared to them. – in spite of the tunnel vision resulting *from* their fears, in spite of the barricades and barriers created *by* their fears, Jesus appeared to them and they knew it was he. How were the disciples able to recognize him? For we are told that they were "overjoyed" they saw him. The disciples recognized Jesus as he spoke words of "peace" **and** as he showed them the wounds and scars of his hands and side. For a moment...the disciples grasped it. Even when they were hunkered down in a mode of self-defense, Jesus appeared to them. (I wonder which is more difficult...to pass through locked doors or to appear to us when we have our defenses up?) Jesus' *persistent presence* began –again-the earthshaking transformation of their world. Oh yes, they had been his followers in the past, but death had ended all of that...(or had it??

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Resurrection... Jesus' presence changed everything in that upper room. His resurrected presence changes everything as we gather...that is, if will we allow it. ("Rags, rags...new rags for old..." Wanergin)

No, it wasn't easy for the first disciples to live into the reality of the resurrection and it's not easy for us, either. It's seems smarter, safe for us to hunker down and steel ourselves against potential onslaughts. But let's be patient with ourselves and each other, let's keep at it. Let's encourage one another; it may well take us awhile to embrace the promise of resurrection ...just like the first disciples... for only a week later, they found themselves again in the house with the doors shut.

The liturgical tradition offers us a gift in recognizing Easter as a season, not simply a one day celebration with trumpets and lilies. Today we gather in worship on the 2nd Sunday *of* Easter. We'll have 5 more Sundays in Eastertide. For 50 days we're invited to live into the reality of the resurrection – we have a season to attend to getting our bearings, to shake the disbelief from our eyes, to reframe our deadened vantage points.

We're invited to a time of amazement and ongoing celebration as we *live* into discovering ourselves a community transformed by the living, the dying and the resurrection of Jesus. We need time, we need each other, and we need the presence of the resurrected Jesus among us in order for us to live into the reality of Easter. The scarred, wounded Jesus – alive among us unlocks the door to the reality of Easter. Note these are the doors which are locked from within, not from without...the most difficult ones to get into!

It's not easy for us to live into the reality of Easter, because to live into the reality of Easter, we first must acknowledge that something has died.

This is the challenge that was already present at the empty tomb... Maybe Jesus hadn't ever been dead. There is a tomb, a body had been in it, but now the tomb is empty. Maybe Jesus hadn't really died...soooooo then... it wasn't that bad after all. He had just used the tomb as a place to rest up a bit and then had moved on. That's it!. Yes, they would meet up with Jesus again – in Galilee like he had said- and they would get back being companions with the liberating messiah. Things would get back "to normal." It would be as if nothing had ever changed. Maybe there isn't even a need for resurrection!

With a little first aide, what had only appeared to be a mortal wound could be patched up. No big deal... it wasn't that bad after all. It had only seemed like death, but it really wasn't...what a relief- there won't be any need for Easter or its invitation to rise from the dead.

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Sometimes it seems like it is easier to live dodging death – denying it ever really happens. Of course, physical death sneaks up on everyone of us – each of us knows the heartache of grief. Physical death **demands** that we acknowledge it. But there are many other “deaths” as well, which we may seek to deny or at least disregard. Isn’t death anything which would lure us toward the trap of the tomb? Isn’t it true that each of us bear wounds and scars which - without the experience of resurrection - will ultimately draw us into “the grip of the grave?” (Psalm 116)

How do we escape the trap of the tomb, the grip of the grave? How we daily live into the reality of Easter?

Let’s consider the text again. Jesus comes to the disciples speaking peace...yet at the same time he reveals to them his wounds, his scarred & wounded places. From this posture he breathes the Holy Spirit upon them and commissions them to the work of the Gospel. “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Words of sending to a group huddled together in a room with the doors locked up tight? Crazy words, it would seem, to ones “as good as dead” in their fears. The reality of Easter is that it takes awhile to fathom...it takes a while to sink in...it takes mustering courage to look at wounds and scars – our wounds and scars and the wounds and scars of those around us.

- It takes acknowledgement of our deepest, deadening pain.
- It takes a healing community – that is, it takes a community with the Spirit of Christ alive in its midst, to gently uncover wounds and scars. As we offer our wounded hands and sides to one another we are opened to speak the peace of Christ into one another’s lives.
- It takes allowing the live-giving breath of the Spirit to move among us.

Look at our wounds and scars...we all have them...

- Childhood scars
- Wounded/wounding relationships at home or in the workplace
- Uncertainties about our own self-worth
- Deep chasms of loneliness that would seem to swallow us up
- Physical concerns which would seem to consume our very sense of self
- Concerns for loved ones and their needs – emotionally, spiritually, vocationally, physically, financially

The reality of Easter is, that in spite fear - the fear of more wounds and the fear of more living limiting scars– and they will come- that Jesus appears *among* these wounds. Not just once, but over and over again speaking words of reassurance and peace, bringing the breath of the Holy Spirit to enliven our dry, dead bones and beings. (Remember the words vision given to Ezekiel). The breath of the Spirit trips the trap of the tomb. The

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grip of the grave – not just once, but again and again is loosed by the un-“dying” love of our brother, Jesus.

Living into the reality of Easter takes a lifetime. We unlock the inner doors to our hidden selves only to find ourselves with the key still in our pocket. We venture out of and then back into our tombs. One hand’s grip on the grave loosens only to discover the other holding on more tightly. We live into the reality of Easter as an act of faith – an act of faith we practice over and over again – sustained and summoned by the breath of the Spirit. By faith, we step out – scared and scarred- to share life beyond the grave. As we go, we discover that **the wounded body of Christ** waits patiently for us, welcomes us with our wounds and when we offer it to him...he breathes new life into that which is dead and dying.

The promise of resurrection is the reality of Easter. Just like the first disciples, we are both scarred and scared – that’s life – Yet, into our time and space, into our reality, Jesus comes bringing peace, breathing life as he shares with us his woundedness of the Garden, his brokenness on the cross. Our gentle brother comes visiting our hells, opening our tombs and taking from us **our** grip on the grave – because he knows full well – from personal experience their power over us.

Friends, believe the Good News. **We** are the body of Christ – scarred and wounded, but no longer confined to the tomb. We are the church, the people of the living God.

Yes, we, like Jesus, are scarred and wounded...yes, like Jesus, we are scarred, wounded **and alive!**

*God of terrifying, resurrection power, your hand shakes reality as we assume it to be.
We live as if brokenness and death have the final word.
Open our inner graves so that all that has been buried may be freed and forgiven
so that our lives may return once again to us...
so that our lives may return once again to you...
for the sake of our neighbors, for the sake of your kingdom...
through the presence of the risen Christ. AMEN*