

Sunday, April 14, 2024
Third Sunday of Easter (Year B)

Luke 24.36b-48

The Rev. Michael K. Fincher

Service Live Streamed at:

<https://www.facebook.com/stgregoryslongbeach/videos/1433933354161006>

(Sermon begins at about 19:30)

“Woundedness”

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

We are not even halfway through the season of Easter, in which we celebrate our Lord’s resurrection, and yet today we hear the last of the post-resurrection appearances for the season. While there are seven weeks in Eastertide, we cannot really spend all our time focusing on Christ’s post-resurrection appearances. There are, after all, a limited number of these appearances and they are, for the most part, all the same—although each does have its own nuances. So, at some point, we have to move on. That being the case, the Gospel readings for the remaining Sundays in Eastertide will focus on Jesus’ teachings about our relationship with God, particularly in light of the mystery of the resurrection. Which makes this Sunday’s Gospel a bridge, of sorts. A bridge between Christ’s post-resurrection appearances and what the resurrection means for us—for those of us living post-resurrection. And something of how we experience this resurrected life.

This Gospel bridge between Christ’s post-resurrection appearances and our living into what resurrection means for us, in some ways, mirrors the mystery of Christ being the bridge that connects us with God. From the very beginning, by his very existence, in his very purpose, Jesus was and is a bridge between God and his people. Jesus, the Word made flesh, God Incarnate. Jesus, fully human and fully divine. Born into our world to be the bridge whereby Creator and created can be in direct face-to-face, flesh-to-flesh relationship. Crucified and resurrected to continue to be the bridge between God and us, whereby we are provided with and assured of eternal life with God through Christ. Whereby we are provided with the means for this to occur. A bridging of flesh and spirit. Jesus, the eternal spirit of God made flesh so that we in our flesh can and will become eternal spirit through him. A bridging between human and divine. A bridging between physical and spirit.

Today’s Gospel reading explores one specific aspect of this connection, this bridging, that is Christ’s resurrection. Specifically, the physicality of the Risen Christ. The Gospels contain a total of 14 appearances of the Risen Christ between Easter morning and his ascension. Of these, only three specifically mention any physical attributes of the Risen Christ. Two of these were contained in last week’s Gospel account of Doubting Thomas—one when the Risen Lord appeared to the assembled disciples minus Thomas on Easter night, and then again when he appears to Thomas a week later. In both cases, Christ showing the physical marks of his crucifixion as proof of who he is. The only other such mention is in today’s Gospel. While the

physicality of the Risen Christ is only mentioned in these three Gospel accounts, today's passage provides us with a unique perspective of what this physicality means for us.

Now it does make sense for there to be some references to the physical nature of the resurrected Jesus. After all, no one knew what resurrection actually looked like. There were naturally questions. Was a resurrected person merely a spirit, a ghost, or was there something more substantive? The prevailing notion seemed to be the former. As we heard today, when the resurrected Christ came to the disciples, "they were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost." To ease them of their fears, Jesus says, "Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." He then shows them his wounds. Proof that he was not a ghost. But was that enough to convince the disciples? They seem to still be skeptical. So to provide definitive proof, Jesus asks them "Have you anything here to eat?" So "they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence." Definitive proof of his physicality. After all, a ghost would not be hungry and certainly would not be able to eat anything.

So now they have proof of the physical nature of the Risen Christ. But to what end? What does this tell us about the Risen One, and specifically about our relationship with him? All of this is answered by the presence of Christ's wounds. The wounds of his crucifixion: the wounds in his hands and his feet from being nailed to the cross, and the wound in his side from when the Roman soldier pierced him with a spear to make sure he was indeed dead. The number one question in all of this is why continue to have wounds in his resurrected state? Presumably, in resurrection, Christ's body could have at least been restored to its pre-crucifixion condition. And being God in the flesh, could he not have chosen a body that was completely whole and healthy, as it had been in life?

And for that matter, was a physical body even necessary? Hard to say. Although the whole Incarnation was about God coming and being among us in the flesh. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." To live as one of us. To experience life as we do. Including to experience death as we do. So it does make sense that the physicality would continue from birth, through life, into death, and beyond. But the question remains, why the wounds?

There are two answers to that question. One obvious and one not-so-obvious (although it becomes obvious once voiced). The first and easiest answer is that the ongoing presence of the wounds provided the proof that this was indeed Jesus Christ resurrected. The proof the disciples obviously needed in today's Gospel, as well is in John's account of his appearance to the disciples. And certainly the proof that Thomas needed.

But aside from being a marker of his physicality and confirmation of his identity, there is another far more significant reason for the presence of Christ's wounds. Solidarity. Back to the whole reason for the Incarnation in the first place. So that our God, through his Son as the Word made flesh could experience life as we do. Forming the foundational and experiential basis for true and authentic relationship with us—which was the primary goal of the Incarnation in the first place. That meant experiencing all that life has to offer. The good, the bad, and the ugly. That's where the wounds come in. The means of those wounds being

inflicted? The bad. The continued presence of those wounds? The ugly. And yet, an ugliness that forms the basis for true understanding, for authentic connection.

Christ's wounds are the physical remnant, the visible reminder, of what he experienced, not just in death, but also in life. Wounds that were the product of fear. Possibly of hate, but even then, a hate borne out of fear. Fear of what he represented. Fear of what he taught. Fear of change. Fear of the unknown. Fears that turned to hate, resulting in the eventual physical reaction to those fears: Jesus' betrayal, his arrest, his trial, his being sentenced to death, his torture, his crucifixion. Fear put into action. Physical action resulting in physical wounds. A visible legacy of Jesus' life and ministry, of his Passion and death. Continuing on into resurrection. The lingering wounds being a means of connection between Christ and us.

We all carry wounds. Many of those wounds being visible. Wounds that may be fresh and have yet to heal. Wounds that are old and continue to fester. Wounds that have substantially healed, yet leaving tell-tale scars. Some relatively minor, although some may be more serious. Many, if not most, are wounds that are the result of something negative. Perhaps, even traumatic. Although some wounds may be the result of a positive turn to a negative situation, such as wounds and scars from a medical procedure, even a lifesaving surgery. And even if turned positive, the underlying wounds being the vestiges of something negative.

Then there are the wounds we carry that cannot be seen. At least not physically. Emotional or spiritual wounds. Internal wounds that no one would necessarily be aware of unless revealed through behavior, or unless we choose to reveal them. Even then, because of the interior nature, never fully revealed to the outside world. Wounds that can be deeper and cause more ongoing pain than any physical wound.

Regardless of whether physical, emotional, or spiritual, our wounds have a variety of causes. Wounds from accidents. Wounds from abuse. Wounds from acts of violence. Wounds inflicted at the hands of another. Perhaps, even wounds that are self-inflicted.

Perhaps the most significant reason the Risen Christ carries the wounds of his crucifixion is to provide us with a visible sign, a visible reassurance, that we are not alone in our woundedness. That just as we have our own wounds, Christ too, has his. Wounds that he willingly took on, not just in solidarity with us and our woundedness, but also as a way of taking on, of taking away, of healing, some of our woundedness. Most significantly, that through his wounds, the wounds of our sins are taken away and healed. Sin and guilt: some of the deepest, most insidious, most painful of the wounds we carry. Taken away through the wounds of our Risen Lord.

And the wounds that his resurrection does not take away or remedy? They are still there. But we can be assured that in his woundedness, Christ is able to empathize with our woundedness. Even when no one else may be able to understand, to know how our wounds really feel, we can be assured he does. That we have someone who can and willingly does share that experience with us. One who says "I and I alone know how you feel. I and I alone share your pain and disease. I and I alone can provide you with the comfort you seek."

Whenever we feel burdened by the wounds we carry physically, emotionally, or spiritually, the Risen Christ comes to us with an invitation, just as he came to his disciples who were experiencing their own wounds: “Look at my hands and my feet: see that it is I myself.” Proof that he is with us in all we do. Even in our woundedness. Especially in our woundedness.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!