

## ***The Scars – Luke 24:36b-48***

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As we all get older, there's a pretty good chance that we have a series of scars on our bodies that reflect, first, childhoods lived without bicycle helmets, elbow and knee pads, and a host of other safety devices designed to bubble wrap kids in safety these days. Those adventures no doubt led to a couple trips to the emergency room, a few stitches, and a good story.

Things happen to us as adults too, of course. And those "things" leave scars that are not wished for but ultimately are marks of hardship, bad luck, and moments that we didn't see coming: surgeries resulting from injuries or disease, our being prone to misfortune, or run-ins with doors, pets, kitchen knives, or slippery driveways.

Or maybe the scars are less visible and yet run much deeper, the result of a deep woundedness of the soul. However we got them, scars remind us that life isn't fair and can be painful. Every time we look at a scar, we remember the story.

"In Luke's Easter story, the risen Jesus appears to his disciples, first to two of them on the journey to a village called Emmaus and then to the 11 back in Jerusalem. When Jesus appears it's a frightening scene, so much so that they can only conclude that he's a ghost. Naturally, the disciples' response is to be overcome by fear. And to calm their fears Jesus offers them his hands and feet as evidence. Why not just remind them of a story or an inside joke they had shared? Because his hands and feet bear the scars of crucifixion. For his followers, Jesus' scars are a certificate of authenticity." (Josh Scott, *Christian Century*, April 2024)

One could've assumed that Jesus' resurrection and his accompanying transformation would have included a wiping away of his scars. That the newness of life he found would be absent of the marks that indicated his suffering humanity.

But, no. The scars on his hands and feet from the nails being driven in were still there. He carried them with him in his resurrected self.

What does it mean for Jesus to be known by his scars? Each of our own scars tell a story, of course. The run-in with a cupboard we had as a kid or the bike accident, the scratch or bite of a beloved pet, or the long incision indicating the procedure we underwent to correct and make us healthier.

“Jesus’ scars also tell a story. They paint a vivid picture of a human being committed to a vision of God and God’s kingdom that is just and generous, with an embrace wide enough for anyone and everyone. They tell a story of resisting the dehumanizing forces of empire by insisting on a God who sees everyone as valuable, a God who has numbered every hair on our heads. Jesus’ scars tell a story of refusing violence in favor of peacemaking and returning love in the face of hatred. The truth is the scars by which Jesus’ disciples know him encapsulate the very essence of the life he lived that led to them in the first place.

“No doubt, his scars are reminders of immense suffering and agony. They even could be seen as the souvenirs of a failed mission; that’s surely what Good Friday felt like. Yet the risen Jesus embraces his scars and uses them to comfort his disciples and confirm his identity, and more, his story.” (Josh Scott)

It is also quite possible that Jesus’ scars remained and that he desired to show them to the disciples not only to convince them of who he was but so they also would know of his solidarity with them—that it was okay for them to carry their own scars--visibly. And that in their common scarred lives, they could have bonded fellowship with each other.

These could very well have been the thoughts of these frightened disciples that day: “We were afraid that first Sunday night, just three days after Jesus died. Really afraid. We were afraid to go outside in case someone might recognize us as Jesus’ friends and notify the authorities. ...

“We have a term for what we began to experience that night: fellowship. Fellowship is a kind of belonging that isn’t based on status, achievement, or gender, but instead is based on a deep belief that everyone matters, everyone is welcome, and everyone is loved, no conditions, no exceptions. It’s not the kind of belonging you find at the top of the ladder

among those who think they are the best, but at the bottom among all the rest, with all the other failures and losers who have either climbed the ladder and fallen, or never gotten up enough gumption to climb in the first place. “Whatever else this uprising will become, from that night we’ve known it is an uprising of fellowship, a community where anyone who wants to be part of us will be welcome. Jesus showed us his scars, and we’re starting to realize we don’t have to hide ours.

“So fellowship is for scarred people, and for scared people, and for people who want to believe but aren’t sure what or how to believe. When we come together just as we are, we begin to rise again, to believe again, to hope again, to live again.” —Brian D. McLaren, *We Make the Road by Walking: A Year-Long Quest for Spiritual Formation, Reorientation, and Activation* (Jericho Books, 2014), 173-175.

In our scars, we find our commonality and fellowship. And within that community, of which Jesus is a part, we don’t have to be ashamed or have to hide the marks that tell our life stories.

It’s one of the most impressive church buildings you could ever visit — although it has no roof, and only three of its four walls are still standing. It’s the Anglican cathedral in Coventry, England: a late-Gothic masterpiece finished in the early 1400s.

On November 14, 1940, 515 heavy bombers of the German Luftwaffe attacked the city of Coventry with high explosive and incendiary bombs. The saturation bombing created a firestorm that burned out the center of the city, including the cathedral. More than 4,300 homes were destroyed that dreadful night, and about two-thirds of the buildings in the city were damaged. The devastation was so widespread that the Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels began using the word “coventry” as a verb: to coventry a city was to destroy it utterly from the air.

After the war, a new cathedral was built, of strikingly modern architecture. It was dedicated in 1962. It was not built on the site of the old cathedral, but rather right next to it. The remaining stone walls — the Gothic stone filigree empty of the stained glass that melted during the firestorm — were allowed to remain.

Outdoors — for there is no roof, still, over that section of the building — there is an altar, located in what used to be a transept of the old church. Atop the altar is a charred wooden cross. It's a replica of a cross a construction worker built out of two blackened roof-beams he found in the rubble after the bombing. Engraved on the wall behind that altar are two words, in elegant gold lettering: "Father forgive."

The church authorities could have reconstructed the old cathedral, in all its Gothic glory. It would have taken a long time, but it could have been done. There are still expert stone carvers in the world who practice that medieval trade. Or, they could have bulldozed the sad ruin and constructed something new in its place.

What they decided to do, instead, was genius. They preserved the roofless ruin as a witness to peace, even as they constructed a new cathedral of radical 20th-century design.

The message was clear. We will not forget, but we will not let the painful memory hold us back.

Anyone who's been to that place will tell you that the combination of the two — the new cathedral rising out of the ruins of the old — is unforgettable. There are stunning works of modern art inside the new cathedral, but it's the mute witness of the old — the charred wooden cross and the words "Father forgive" — that convey the true power of the place.

In a very real sense, it's the scars that speak. (*Homiletics Online*, August 16, 2020)

It's the scars that tell our stories: The struggle, the pain, the suffering, the resilience, the endurance, the fellowship we have with others who carry their own scars, the reminders to never forget, and the call to forgive.

Jesus' scars remind us of what he did and does for us, and the kinship he has with us. And that whatever the pain the scars are a result of, it can and will be overcome.