*I MIND*

John 20:19-31

April 19, 2020

It seems like Easter is long gone, doesn’t it? – yet it‘s only a week past. Some part of that is this social distancing, and sheltering in place, where we just stay at home and one day seems like another. Used to be, we’d have meetings or appointments, or shopping for such and such on this or that day, where we’d keep track of our week in the calendar in our head at least. But now it’s all sort of the same. At least it seems that way to me.

Suzanne just this past week said that it seems like time goes slower when we’re all couped up at home. And Joel and I agreed. Has Easter really made any difference to us or to anybody else?

It wasn’t so different in Jerusalem that week. Sunday came, and with the dawn, unexpected, unbelievable news arrived that Jesus had risen from the dead. It was the same word preachers told us a week ago. But the disciples who gathered in the room had not seen it, so they closed the door and locked it.

And they waited. Some, no doubt, wondered if it wasn’t time to go home, to get back to whatever they had been doing before all of this happened. To pick up the pieces and start over. But for now, they waited, not quite sure what they were waiting for.

We know the story. Their waiting paid off. Without unlocking the door, Jesus Christ appeared in their midst, saying, “Peace be with you.” We get little evidence of their reaction, only Jesus’ simple greeting, as though they should have known He would be there.

But a bit later, something rather odd happened. Jesus—who had appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden and said, “Do not hold on to me”—this same Jesus now invited the disciples to look at His scarred hands and side. And eight days later than that, Jesus *comes in without knocking* and bids Thomas to touch Him: “Put your finger here, and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe” (Jn 20:27).

Now, all this is odd. I love the Gospel of John. It and the Gospel of Luke are my favorite books of the Bible, John coming in first by a little bit. But much as I love John, I come to this part of the story longing to ask questions little children dare to ask before they know better. Do you ever have questions about the Jesus stories that the gospels put before us? Like, “Why didn’t Mary recognize Jesus in the Garden?” (She thought He was the gardener, remember?) Nor did those disciples on the Emmaus road in Luke 24 recognize Him either.

But on the other hand, when He appeared to the disciples in that room behind the locked door, they immediately knew who He was, and were glad. Why some recognition, and not others? And by the way, can we ask this question: “How come He says to Mary “Don’t hold me” . . . . as in, ‘don’t touch me’ I think—for I have not yet ascended to the Father . . . but yet He invites Thomas to ‘put your finger here and see my hands, and place your hand in my side?”

It’s almost as if He may not have been physical to Mary, but He wants to be sure Thomas knows He IS physical. And what about His just entering into a room that has been locked against the Jews? Is this really a physical body, or is it a spiritual body Jesus has been raised in? But in Luke 24, He asks for and eats some fish with them to prove that it is “I myself . . . . A spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” So, all questions aside, I really do believe that Jesus was raised in a physical body. I just can’t explain all of what God is doing with Him, especially in and out of that Upper Room, huh?

But I do have another question about this physical body He has when He was raised: “If God raised Jesus from the dead, why didn’t God fix Him up? Why scars? Why the print of nails that you could feel with your fingers?

I’ll give the child-easy answers: “This was how the disciples knew that it was really Jesus” or “This is how we know for certain centuries later.”

Come on now. Mary knew by simply hearing Jesus say her own name out loud. The disciples surely knew when Jesus appeared in their midst without knocking, without the door being opened. “Peace be with you.” They didn’t ask, “Who are you?” So . . . why wounds in this episode?

Who knows? God knows. I can’t be sure of that any more than I can tell you how God raised Jesus from the sealed tomb. But even the child who dares to ask the question knows there is something in the scars. Something important. Just as it was important for Mary to hear her own name spoken aloud when she was convinced that her name no longer mattered. The scars are not proof, especially for those of us who have not touched them. But the scars remain a witness to the truth.

Why didn’t God fix Jesus up? God surely could have. Indeed, at times it seems that God did! Other Gospel scenes of the resurrected Christ suggest a different kind of body, a body now beyond the limitations and imperfections of earth. “Do not hold on to me,” Jesus said to Mary, maybe indicating that there was no physical substance there. But . . . it may be that it was more of a not ‘holding on’ rather than just ‘don’t touch.’ Don’t know. And in this story this morning, the Resurrected One is not bound by doors or locks, not limited by the boundaries of physical space. Yet this is no ghost! Touch my hands, my side. Touch these wounds, and peace be with you.

So touching the wounds is important, and maybe to more people than just Thomas. Can it be that the Gospel word is saying to us in our waiting, “You will not see Jesus unless you see the wounds?” That somehow we must understand that the resurrected Christ is forever the wounded Christ? Living, but never all fixed up. Not bound by death, yet scarred for eternity.

Deaf people have a sign for Jesus. Quickly they make this sign many times during worship: the middle finger of each hand is placed into the palm of the other. Jesus, the one with wounded hands. And when they touch the place, they remember. They hear the name in their own flesh.

We must touch the places where the wounds are. They’re not the only place Christ is revealed, but if we deny the wounds, we will see only a glorified Christ whose only name is victory. But the wounded Christ shows us something else: This scarred Jesus does not wait until we’re all fixed up to meet us.

Have you been betrayed by someone you loved? Betrayed by a ca

use to which you’d given your life? *“Very truly,” said Jesus, “one of* ***you*** *will betray me.”*

Have you been let down by your closest friends, by large or small promises set aside without apology? *“Could you not stay awake with me one hour?”*

Have you been afraid to go on living, but afraid also to die, uncertain that you have any sense of God’s will for your life? *“Father,”* Jesus prayed, *“if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.”*

Have you felt utterly alone, abandoned by everyone? *“My God, my God,”* Jesus cried out from the cross, *“why have* ***You*** *forsaken me?”*

Touch the palms of your hands. Jesus was wounded long before the cross, and His wounds touch the wounded places in your life – betrayals and denials, both your own, and those made against you. The nails of the manger marked the beginning, for Jesus’ birth as a human child marked the beginning of the wounds we all feel as children of the earth. Jesus was not a spiritual baby nor did He float over Galilee without touching the ground. “The Word became flesh,” wrote John.”

Touch the palms of your hands. Touch the place where the wounds are, in your own life and in the lives of others. You and I have wounds that are almost too painful to bear. Wounds that we cannot talk about, even with those we love. We will never be all fixed up. Not in this life. The wounded Christ comes to us saying, “Peace be with you.” And stop pretending.

A few years ago there was a play on Broadway that invited the audience to end our pretense. Jane Wagner wrote a play called *The Search for Intelligent Life in the Universe.* Lily Tomlin played all the parts, from Trudy the bag lady to Agnes Angst, a punk-rock teenager. Agnes is mad at the world; she dresses to show rebellion against everything. She rails in anger at her father, the biochemist experimenting with new life forms in the laboratory, and at her grandparents in their plastic covered living room.

So Agnes runs away from home – to the House of Pancakes. There, in the trash can, she finds a copy of a book by G. Gordon Liddy, of Watergate fame. In the book called *Will*, the author has made the claim that human beings have the capacity to do anything they want, to keep pushing on against all odds.

He compares this willpower to holding your hand over the flame of a candle: it hurts like everything, but the trick is to learn not to mind. As the first act of the play comes to a close, Agnes is alone on stage. She flings defiance at the whole world, then bends down to light an imaginary candle. One beam of light focuses on her hand as she compares life to the flame of the candle. She echoes Liddy: “You hold your hand over its flame, and the trick is to learn not to mind.” Then all goes dark, and from the darkness Agnes wails, “I mind. I mind.”

Touch the palms of your hands. The word is Jesus. And the word to us is “I mind.” I mind your pain and your loneliness, your abandonment and your despair. Do not pretend that it doesn’t matter; do not wait until you’re all fixed up. “Put your finger here on the wounds,” said Jesus. “Put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not doubt, but believe.” My wounded sister, my wounded brother, I mind.

Amen.