

SERMON: By His Wounds We Are Healed

TEXT: John 20: 19-31

Some years ago, on a hot summer day in south Florida, a little boy decided to go for a swim in the old swimming hole behind his house. In a hurry to get to the cool water, he ran out the back door, leaving behind shoes, socks, and shirt as he went. He dove into the water, not realizing that as he swam toward the middle of the lake, an alligator was swimming toward the shore.

Inside the house, his mother looked out the window and saw the two as they got closer and closer. In utter fear, she ran toward the water, yelling to her son as loudly as she could. Hearing her voice, the little boy became alarmed and made a U-turn to swim to his mother. But just as he reached her, the alligator reached him. From the dock, the mother grabbed her little boy by the arms just as the alligator snatched his legs. That began an incredible tug-of-war between the two. The alligator was much stronger, of course, than the mother, but she was much too passionate to let go.

A farmer driving by heard her screams, raced from his truck and shot the alligator. Remarkably, after weeks and weeks in the hospital, the little

boy survived. His legs were badly scarred by the vicious attack of the animal. And on his arms were deep scratches where his mother's fingernails dug into his flesh in her effort to hang on to the son she loved.

Later, the boy was interviewed by a newspaper reporter who asked to see his scars. The boy lifted his pant legs. And then with obvious pride, he said, "But look at my arms. I have great scars on my arms, too. That's where my mom held on to me and wouldn't let go."

It is an awful story and a wonderful story all at the same time. The most wonderful thing about it, to me, is that this little boy survived – not only physically, but emotionally and spiritually as well. Instead of seeing himself as a victim who was mutilated and scarred for life, he saw himself as the **victor**, and his scars were the signs of how much he was loved.

This story reminds me of Good Friday and Easter. There is awful and there is wonderful. In fact, they are two sides of the same coin: without the awful, the wonderful would not exist. Without Good Friday, we would have no Easter to celebrate. Because Jesus was willing to be the victim of Good Friday, we all can know the *victory* of Easter.

I find it interesting that, in John's gospel, the disciples were locked in the house on Easter evening. They had heard the news of the empty tomb – some of them had even seen it for themselves – but they were still afraid. They were probably second-guessing themselves, unsure of what to believe. Had his body been stolen? Would the Jews come after them next? Furthermore, if Jesus was alive and was coming to meet them, he would certainly be disappointed in their lack of faith.

Suddenly, the risen Jesus appeared and said to them, "Peace be with you." He was alive, and yet he still bore the scars of his murder. He showed them the wounds left from the nails that had been driven through his hands. He showed them the scar where the soldier's sword had pierced his side. Again he said, "Peace be with you."

He didn't warn them to run and hide. He didn't challenge them to avenge his death. He didn't say, "Don't let this happen to you." But while showing them the wounds he suffered, Jesus said, "Peace be with you."

By his wounds, through his wounds, he understands our suffering, and he brings us peace. Because he was victorious over death, we are no longer

victims of the evils of this world. As Isaiah prophesied about the Christ, “Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and **by his bruises we are healed.**”

Of course, we still suffer. Although the celebration of Easter continues, and the message of new life is proclaimed, we can’t always feel it. We have locked ourselves up inside the walls of fear and death. We want to believe what others have reported, but like Thomas, we are doubtful, saying, “I won’t believe it until I see it.” Was Thomas from Missouri? “Show me!”

Where is this new life Christ has promised? We want to know, if Christ has carried our diseases, then why are we still diseased? If his wounds were for our transgressions, then why are we still being wounded? If Christ has won the victory, then why are we still fighting battles? We’re good people, so why do bad things happen to us? These are good questions, and nearly all of us have probably asked them at one time or another.

First, we need to receive the peace he gives. Even though we share the “peace of Christ” with one another every Sunday, many of us don’t really know much peace in our lives. We are stressed out. We are too busy. Whether it’s work or play, we’re always wanting to do more. And we’re always trying to do better. Get a better job with a bigger salary so we can buy a bigger house and have more toys. The more we do and the better we get, the more stressed out we are. Many of us don’t sit down and relax until it becomes the doctor’s order to do so. Plus, we think we have to do it all ourselves. We think we have to control everything that comes our way. We have trouble “letting go and letting God.” But John reminds us that in the midst of our fear, our confusion, and even our stress, Christ is present, saying, “Peace be with you.”

Furthermore, we need to stop acting like victims and claim the victory that is ours when we follow Christ. Despite our illnesses and struggles, despite our pain and our wounds, part of our healing comes when we believe that ultimate healing has already been accomplished for us through Christ who was raised to bring us new life. The struggle is simply part of the journey. In fact, struggle is necessary in order for full healing to take place. The road to new life is filled with pain.

Think of the birth process. Speaking from personal experience, the pain of childbirth is one of the worst I've ever felt. And you get to the point where you think you can't endure it any longer. And then a new life comes into the world, and you realize that it was all worthwhile. You may question it from time to time, as the new life brings brand new struggles with it, but on the whole, the payoff is many times greater than the cost.

Or think about a forest fire. It will kill everything in its path, and we've seen how devastating they can be. But the new life that grows where a fire has burned everything to dust, is more lush and beautiful than ever before.

I read a story about a man who sat and watched a cocoon as it began to open and set the butterfly free. For several hours, the butterfly struggled to force its body through a small hole in the cocoon. Still it seemed to be making little progress. It appeared as if it had gotten as far as it could and it could go no further. So the man decided to help the butterfly. He took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of the cocoon. The butterfly then emerged easily. But it had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings.

The man continued to watch the butterfly, thinking that at any moment the wings would enlarge and expand to be able to support the body, which would contract in time. Neither happened. The butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It never gained the ability to fly.

What the man in his kindness and haste did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required for the butterfly to get through the tiny opening were necessary in order to force fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon.

Finally, because Christ was wounded as well, he understands our pain. He has made the trip to hell and back. He's been there and done that – and he's got the scars to prove it. He knows what you're going through, and he'll go with you. Doesn't it always make you feel better when you know that you are not alone – that others have been there, too, and survived?

The Risen Christ brings peace to us. Shalom, healing, wholeness, well-being, reconciliation. The peace that passes understanding. May we

know that peace down into the deepest depths of our souls. May we know that **BY HIS WOUNDS, WE ARE HEALED.** And may we share this Good News, to the glory of God!

AMEN.