

Davidson College Presbyterian Church
Davidson, North Carolina
Lib McGregor Simmons
Isaiah 53: 1-5; Luke 24: 36-48
“We Are the Body of Christ: Wounded and Alive”
3rd Sunday of Easter
April 19, 2015

Two Sundays ago, on Easter Sunday, we read from Mark’s account of Jesus’s resurrection. Last Sunday, the reading was from John’s resurrection narrative.

The passage we are reading today is from Luke, and it begins, “While they were talking about this...”

The “they” in the story are two followers of Jesus who were walking down the road to Emmaus on the same day that the women found the tomb to be empty. The “this” that these two followers of Jesus were talking about was the sequence of devastating events that had occurred the previous week, that is, Jesus’s arrest, his trial, his crucifixion, and, finally, the report of an empty tomb.

As the two people walked down the road, they were joined by a third person, a man, a stranger unknown to them. The man lingered with them in their raw grief. But then he spoke, and when he did, it was to lead a mini-Bible study right there on the road, a Bible study that, according to Luke, explained everything.

As I said, the man was a stranger to these two followers of Jesus. They had no idea who he was. But when they got to Emmaus and the man aimed to keep on walking, they convinced him to come home with them and have a bite of lunch before heading out again. And when this mysterious stranger picked up a loaf of bread and said the blessing, when he broke off a piece of the bread and handed it to first one of them across the table and then the other, they recognized that it was Jesus.

And just as suddenly as he had appeared to them as they were walking down the road, he was gone before he had even eaten a bite.

“Ah, we should have known!” they said. “We should have known. Our hearts were telling us. Our hearts were on fire inside of us; they were telling us that it was him.”

Within the hour, the two men were on the road to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they found Jesus’s other followers and told them what had just happened.

The story continues...

Show us your shoes!

Show us your shoes!

If you were to be in San Antonio, Texas, this week or next, you would be hearing people shout, “Show us your shoes!” This is because if you were in San Antonio this week or next, you would be in the midst of Fiesta! New Orleans natives like to think that they throw the best party in the world at Mardi Gras, but don’t expect any San Antonian, native or transplanted, to agree.

San Antonians love their two-week-long party with its cavalcade of parades on the street and on the river, during the day and at night, parades where Fiesta princesses wearing the most outlandish ball gowns you can imagine (Google “fiesta ball gowns” to be astounded out of your mind!) are entreated by the crowds lining the parade routes, “Show us your shoes!”

And of course, the princesses comply. With a coy wink and a smile, they lift their skirts to reveal bejeweled cowboy boots, bedazzled flip flops, and beribboned tennis shoes.

Like Fiesta in San Antonio, the day of Jesus’s resurrection is a day of delight and joy, Luke tells his readers in verse 41. Like Fiesta, there is food, and I don’t for a minute doubt that Jesus wolfed down that broiled fish and asked for seconds and maybe even thirds since he had stepped away from the dinner table in Emmaus before taking even a single bite from the appetizer tray which meant that he hadn’t eaten since the previous Friday. Like the Fiesta princesses who show their shoes, Jesus shows his hands and his feet.

But, of course, what Fiesta is, well, at its base, simply great fun that is ultimately make-believe. In contrast, the scene that Luke describes in our gospel lesson is very real.

The crime that had murdered Jesus on the cross had taken place only three days before, and what that meant is the wounds on Jesus’s hands and feet that he showed his followers had not yet had time to be reknit as

silvered, waxen scars or to fade into pale blemishes where the skin has closed and only distant memories of what had put them there remain. No one would have been able to look at the hands and feet of this Risen Christ and escape the realization that resurrection does not mean that the nails of oppression, terror, and injustice are a thing of the past.

Catholic theologian Gerald Darring has written that Jesus has bought our redemption with the single coin that has suffering and death on one side and resurrection on the other. (1)

Jesus says to his followers: See my hands. See my feet. See my wounds. See my body. See my life. It is just like yours. It is human flesh, wound-bearing flesh. We are one, you and I. There is no “us” and “them” between you and me. Therefore, there can be no “us” and “them” among you who are the body of Christ. Within the body of Christ, you are each other’s redeemers.

And it is when you have the faith to show and to share our wounds with one another as members of the human family that Jesus’s resurrection will become reality in our here-and-now experience and your life will be redeemed and you will become truly alive.

I was reminded of this during this past week when I was in a conversation with one of our resident theologians after, of all things, a finance committee meeting. (That’s what I love about being a dweller in church world. One minute you’re talking about paying the light bill and the next minute you are talking about how the money that you put into the offering plate, money that keeps the lights on, money that keeps the lights on so that this congregation can host nine recovery groups every week, has theological and missional consequences.) Ben Klein, the resident theologian of whom I am speaking, said, “you know, when one child whom we know dies, it breaks our hearts. It is devastating for us. We hardly stop to think of how many places there are in the world where children are dying by the hundreds every day.”

Ben was absolutely right on one point. Yes, when one child whom we know dies, it breaks our hearts. It is devastating for us. But on the other point, while it may be true on some occasions, when one is a part of the body of Christ, when one is a part of the universal, holy, catholic church, we do think about and we do pray for the children who are dying by the hundreds every day and we do give our offerings to create a world where children are not wounded and killed because of war, violence, terror, and disease.

Ben himself bore witness to this truth. When he thinks of a child who dies in this country, he DOES think of and pray for children in other parts of the world who suffer and die. And why? Because he and they together are the body of the wounded and resurrected Christ.

In recent days we have observed the anniversary of the Boston Marathon bombing. Because we mourn for those innocent people who were injured and killed, we become aware of and mourn for and pray for those who are boarding boats to escape suffering and death in northern Africa. And why? Because together we are the body of the wounded and resurrected Christ.

On Easter Sunday, I shared with those who were worshiping here my concern for first-year Trinity University students who were involved in a tragic car accident. The accident hit close to home because, one of them, Claire Alford, is a member of the church where my brother and sister-in-law are members. This, along with the relationships which our congregation has forged through our partnership with Sigona church, has deepened my prayer for the Kenyan students at the university in Garissa and my prayers for the Nigerian students who were kidnapped by Boko Haran. And why? Because together we are the body of the wounded and resurrected Christ.

The Christian life is always a wound-bearing life. It can never take on forms of spirituality that neglect the suffering of others. By God’s grace, as we show and share our wounds, we are the redeemers of each other’s suffering and witnesses of resurrection.

Alan Paton’s exquisite novel *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* gives voice to this. Robert Mansfield who is white and Emanuel Nene who is black are discussing the situation in which the school where Robert Mansfield is headmaster has been barred from competing against a school where there are students of color. Robert Mansfield has decided to take a stand against apartheid and resign his position as headmaster.

Why have you come to see me?

I’ll tell you that. I’ve come to see a man who resigns his job because he does not wish to obey an order that will prevent the children of his school from playing against the children of Mr. Nhlap’s school. I want to see what this man looks like. We are not used to seeing such people.

It is not quite true that I resigned because of that order. I resigned because I think that it is time to go out and fight everything that separates people from one another, and especially people of one colour and one race from people of another colour and race.

You are going to get wounded. Do you know that?

I expect that may happen.

They continue the conversation, and Emanuel Nene says,

I am going to get wounded also. Not only by the Government, but by my own people as well. Just like you. Some of them will say, Why don't you stay with your own people? Why get mixed up with white people, who are rich while you are poor?

Mr. Nene rose, and looked cheerfully around him.

I don't worry about the wounds. When I go up there, which is my intention, the Big Judge will say to me, Where are your wounds? And if I say I haven't any, he will say, Was there nothing to fight for? I couldn't face that question.

Mr. Nene left his aura in the headmaster's office.

Manfield who was sometimes troubled by the magnitude of his decision, felt a burst of hope for the future. He had in fact had an encounter with the light. (2)

Brothers and sisters, we are the body of Christ, bearing Christ's wounds. We are the body of Christ, bearing the light of Christ's resurrection.

1. Gerald Darring, "The Perspective of Justice," 3rd Sunday of Easter, April 19, 2015, http://liturgy.slu.edu/3EasterB041915/reflections_justice.html
2. Alan Paton, *Ah, But Your Land Is Beautiful* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981), 64-67.