

Davidson College Presbyterian Church
Davidson, North Carolina
Lib McGregor Simmons
“Rich Wounds”
John 20: 19-31
2nd Sunday of Easter
April 3, 2016

What would you do if one of your best friends texted you with the unbelievable good news that another friend—a friend who had been out on a fishing trip and the boat had been missing for days and whom everyone feared was dead to the extent that an obituary was in the works—that friend’s boat had been found, your mutual friend was alive and completely well?

What would you do?

Here is what I imagine that I would do.

First I would question my friend up one side and down the other about the veracity of her claim. Once I was convinced that she was telling the truth, I can’t imagine that I would do anything else but get to work throwing together the greatest party ever. I would take my good china down from the top shelf. I would dust off my Lenox Springdale and polish the silver. I would gather an armload of bright yellow tulips to put in a vase to provide a pop of color against the gray sadness of the preceding days. I would drape some streamers across my front porch and blow up some balloons. I would mix up margaritas for the grownups and line up pony rides for the kids. I would run down up one side of my street and down the other, knocking on my neighbors’ doors and inviting them to come and witness with their own eyes this great thing, this resurrection of my friend, that had come to pass.

One would think that the disciples would have done *something* when they got the good news of Jesus’s resurrection! A parade. Mardi Gras beads. Something. A tasteful Easter brunch at the very least.

No.

In response to the news that Jesus had been raised from the dead, the disciples dead-bolted themselves into a locked room.

John writes that they barricaded themselves behind thick walls “for fear of the Jews.”

Many scholars surmise that when John wrote that the disciples secreted themselves away because of fear of *the Jews*, this is likely to be more a description of the situation for the gospel writer and his congregation in the late first century than it was for the disciples themselves. John, scholars point out, was writing the gospel in the late first century when Christianity was beginning to separate itself from traditional Judaism. Many in his congregation were Jews themselves. However, they had come to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior and increasingly they had either stomped out of or been kicked out of the synagogue across the street, and there was a lot of tension between these two groups. This gospel writer spits out “the Jews” as an epithet quite a few times in his gospel, and Christians like you and me who live in the 21st century have to take care that we do not transport first century anti-Jewish prejudices into our reading of the text.

And besides, when fear grips people the way that fear was gripping the disciples, it often is not one reason that stirs up the fear, but a knotted-up multiplicity of reasons. And I have a sense that among the reasons that the disciples clicked the locks into place in that out of the way room on the evening of the day that Jesus was raised from the dead was because they were afraid of facing *him!*

Remember the bravado of the disciples earlier in the gospel. I’m the best. I want to sit at your right hand. Give me the place of honor in your kingdom, Jesus.

However, on that evening of the day that Jesus was raised from the dead, they could no longer pretend that they were good, better, or best.

To a person, they had failed Jesus. Denied him. Betrayed him. Failed to protect him. Abandoned him. Maybe each disciple was blaming himself...if I had just been a better disciple, this whole thing would not have happened.

My pastoral radar tells me that the disciples were deeply were ashamed, and thus they were afraid of facing Jesus.

I say that my pastoral radar tells me this, but I will tell you that my hunch arises more from personal experience than from pastoral radar. I know what it is to feel ashamed because I have failed somebody. And when I am feeling shame such as this, the last person I want to run into at the library or the drug store is the person whom I have failed.

Is it the same with you?

But the Risen Christ could not be locked out.

The Risen Christ walked right into the disciples' knotted-up multiplicity of fears, not once, but twice...the first time into the group of disciples minus Thomas and the second time into the group of disciples plus Thomas. He showed them...his wounds. Wounds in his hands. Wounds in his side. And in doing so, he acted out this intimate truth: You wounded me. You wounded me, and here I am, not loving you less, but loving you all the more. I am not abandoning my relationship with you, but putting my lips to yours in a reversal of Judas's betrayal kiss and breathing my peace into you. It is the peace of loving forgiveness. I breathe it into you as a gift. Now take this gift of forgiveness and share it with someone else.

When Jesus unbuttons his shirt and slides up his sleeves to reveal his wounds, it is good news. It is good news not only for the disciples. It is good news for the families of those killed and wounded horrifically in Lahore, Pakistan, as they gathered for their Easter picnics. It is good news for a shocked and grieving community coming to grips with the death of Janet McFadden on our own picturesque Main Street last week. It is good news for everyone who grieves and for everyone who is ashamed and for everyone who is afraid. It is good news which we celebrate at the Table of our Lord, the Risen Christ, who says, "This is my body (my wounded body) and it is for you." It is the good news in which we rejoice and of which we sing:

**Crown him the Lord of love; behold his hands and side,
rich wounds, yet visible above, in beauty glorified:
no angel in the sky can fully bear that sight,
but downward bends his burning eye at mysteries so bright.²**