

In the Name of the One, Holy, and Risen Lord: Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Amen.

Good morning, All! Here we are - on the other side of Easter. What a beautiful Holy Week, and what glorious Easter celebrations, we have had! All through Lent we have accompanied our Lord through his preparation. Holy Week brought us together through his trial, his crucifixion and death. We have prayed at his cross, waited in devastation at the tomb, and celebrated with fresh amazement his resurrection! We, as Christians two thousand years later, have the benefit of knowing how the story continues to unfold, and our gratitude and joy know really no bounds.

But today we are at the point in John’s account when we find ourselves in the evening of that awesome day of resurrection, in the Upper Room with our Lord’s disciples. Mary the Magdalene, and Peter and John, have found the tomb empty. Mary has seen and spoken with the risen Jesus, who has told her in the clearest of terms that he is risen and will soon ascend to the Father. She has shared this amazing news with the other disciples, and it is at this point that our scripture brings us to today, to that Upper Room, on Easter night. Most all of them are gathered there, still locked away in fear and confusion.

Jesus mysteriously enters, through locked doors. He speaks to them. He says, “*Peace be with you.*” Can you imagine? I can imagine: shock, amazement, wonder. I can imagine disbelief and doubt too – wishful thinking, overwrought with grief and exhaustion. These would be normal human reactions, and Jesus knew this. So Jesus showed them his wounds. And it’s at this point in our scripture that we come to one little word that never caught my attention before: the little word, “then.” Our Gospel tells us, “*After Jesus said this, he showed them his hands and his side. **Then** the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.*” Only *after* the disciples saw the wounds of our Lord did they recognize and believe him.

We think of our lesson today as being only about the one we call Doubting Thomas, about how he could not believe it was really Jesus until he not only saw the wounds, but touched them. But it was not only Thomas that doubted. All the people in that room saw Jesus mysteriously enter, and speak to them. But it wasn’t only Thomas who doubted; all of them did, until they recognized him by his wounds.

Jesus understood our humanity so well. He understood our human desire for proof. And there are few things more convincing of our experiences than our wounds. Once we survive them, they give us a credibility that nothing else can. They give us the authority to declare a deeper partnership with our fellow travelers. Our wounds earn us kinship and trust. And it is

our wounds, those black holes in our life that we would have wished with our whole hearts to have been spared – it is just those wounds which form us and actually grant us the gifts that we bear into the world.

But our culture is one of many that encourages the mythical goal of perfection, and for a person to bear any sign of vulnerability is considered a weakness, something to be ashamed of. I'm reminded of a favorite tale about the waterbearer in India.

A water-bearer carried two large clay pots on a yoke across his shoulders up the hill from the river to his master's house each day. One of these lovely pots had a crack, and would leak half its water out each day before arriving at the house. The other pot was perfect, and always delivered a full portion of water after the long walk from the river.

Finally, after years of arriving half-empty and feeling guilty, the cracked pot apologized to the water-bearer. It was miserable. "I'm so sorry that I couldn't accomplish what the perfect pot did."

The water-bearer says, "What in the world would you apologize for?"

"After all this time, I still only deliver half my load of water. I make life harder for you because of my flaw."

The man smiled and told the pot. "Have you not noticed all the colorful, beautiful flowers growing on the side of the path where I carried you? The flowers grew so lovely because of the water you leaked. There are no flowers on the perfect pot's side."

The beautiful flowers that grow as a result of our broken places are what we call compassion; empathy; love. It is this compassion that shines out of our broken places that give us the capacity to be of support and strength to others. When we bear our wounds, our cracked places, our heart shows through more – isn't this what Jesus did for us on the cross? His head, his hands, his feet, his side – it was through those terrible wounds that his heart poured out onto the whole world, blessing it for all time.

I was pondering these things last week near the end of Holy Week, when I had the heartsore honor of preparing our new Paschal Candle for the Vigil of Easter. Our tradition holds that we pierce the Paschal Candle with the red wax nails to represent the five wounds of Christ: head, feet, hands, side. I could hardly bear it; I can hardly speak it. But it helps us to remember that those awful wounds were necessary. That unspeakable death was required. It was all in the plan, and it was all for us: God's beloved creation, humankind: made in God's image, somehow ultimately beloved of God. You and me, and everyone you see. From those wounds poured out compassion like the world has never witnessed, and by them we are healed: not perfect; not whole until we are home again; but healed, and loved, and forgiven.

Our wounds are the marks of our trials, those times in our life when there was nowhere else to turn but to God. Our wounds are how God gets in: you may remember this poem by Leonard Cohen:

*“Ring the bells that still can ring;
Forget your “perfect” offering.
There is a crack in everything –
That’s how the light gets in.”*

Our wounds are the openings through which our love and compassion, our sorrow and joy, all shine out, and this is a blessing. Others who are hurting will find no solace in the company of someone who has no “war wounds,” so wear yours proudly. They’ll do all the speaking for you: just like Jesus did in that Upper Room, let them be seen. Just as he was recognized by his wounds, you’ll be recognizable by the compassion and the light that come through you - as one who knows about love and pain, and everything in between.

The point of all these openings, all these cracks and wounds, is that they help us to love more. And love is what it is ultimately all about: Jesus’ final commandment to us was this: *“I give you a new commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you.”*

So let his love shine out from you every time you trace those five terrible wounds in the sign of the cross. *Then* you’ll be recognizable as belonging to Him, offering in return the love of a grateful heart, ultimately healed and forgiven. Alleluia!

Amen.

The Rev. Julia A. Fritts, Associate Rector
St. John’s Episcopal Church, Stamford, CT