

HOLY VESSELS: RISEN!
Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch
April 4, 2021 – Easter Sunday

TEXT: John 20:11-29

Today I want to begin by teaching you all some sign language. First of all – let's learn to sign "Happy Easter".....

Now, let's try "Jesus has risen!"....

The deaf have a sign for Jesus. Quickly they make this sign many times during their worship: the middle finger of each hand is placed into the palm of the other.

And then the sign for risen is like this.....

Now let's put it all together...

Do you think you can sign it all together now: Happy Easter! Jesus has risen!

Wow! Good for you!

Now, let's get back to that sign for Jesus.

Why do you think the sign for Jesus is this.....? Yes, the nail prints in his hands! The other signs are "loves"---(hug self)..... and "me"....(point to self). Now we can do it all together: "Jesus loves me". An important message to remember!! And what an amazing gift: Jesus was wounded for me!

Today we remember and respond to the wounded Christ--wounded for you and for me. Isn't it amazing that we are the only religion in the world that has a wounded God? Our God is a God with nail prints and a spear wound in his side! The gods of other religions aren't wounded! For instance, Buddha sits happily on a pillow in a lotus position. But our God hangs on a cross and suffers pain and reaches out a scarred hand of nail prints to each and everyone of us. What does it mean to us to have a wounded God? What difference does it make in your life that Jesus was wounded for you?

I think it made a HUGE difference to those first disciples – to Mary and to Thomas, in particular. Open up your Bibles to the 20th chapter of the Gospel of John and let's listen to Tracy Jackson as she reads to us verses 11-29.

TRACY JACKSON (RECORDED) READS SCRIPTURE

Thanks Tracy!

The first time Jesus appeared to the disciples, Thomas was not present. We don't know where he was---some guess that he was out running errands--while others said he was wanting to

be alone in his grief over the death of Jesus.

Whatever the reason--somehow or another he missed the first appearance of Jesus. He missed hearing Jesus' comforting words: "Peace be with you!"

Later, Thomas was told by the other disciples that they had seen the risen Lord--- Thomas said: *"Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."*

Eight days later, when the disciples were in the room and Thomas was with them, our Lord stood in the midst of them and said again: *"Peace be with you!"* Then he said to Thomas: *"Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing."* Thomas answered and said to him: "My Lord and my God!" The sight of the scars of the wounded hands and feet and side in Jesus' body was enough to banish all doubt from Thomas' mind and melt his heart into true discipleship. Before seeing Jesus, he was scared and fearful for his life. After seeing his wounded Lord, he received a new courage and hope and was inspired with a humble sense of indebtedness of serving Jesus Christ.

Isn't it interesting, that when God raised Jesus from dead, God didn't fix him up? God left scars on the hands and the feet of Jesus. And there was a scar left on his side where the spear had been thrust. Why didn't God cover all of that up – or make those wounds disappear on His glorified body in the resurrection? Could it be that they might not have recognized Him without the scars?

The scars definitely are evidence that Jesus had suffered and died. It is proof of who He is and that the resurrection was real. Truly Jesus has conquered death. He is living, but never fixed up. Not bound by death yet scarred for eternity.

Perhaps those wounds on Jesus' feet and hands are remembrances of you and me. Of why He died...all for the love of each of us. And when He prays and intercedes for us, He has only to look at His hands and He thinks of us. He shows His hands and feet to the Father and His wounds plead for us!

Isaiah 59:15-16 says, *"I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."* Your name is there –in those nail scarred hands – and He will not forget that He died for you!

His scars tell a story as well.

Think about your scars for a moment. If I were to ask you right now to think of scar you have – you could probably tell me about how it happened – and what you were doing when it happened.

For example, I have a big scar on my right knee. Greg and I were in the Arches National Park in Utah for a vacation. I had gone to one of their public restrooms there and was carrying our son David, who was just a baby at the time. I was walking on a gravel pathway and somehow, I stumbled and started to fall. I did not want to drop our son – so I held on tight to

David and then dropped to my right knee. My knee immediately was cut up deeply and was bleeding. I probably should have gotten stitches, but we were in the mountains and had no idea where to go. So, we bandaged it up as best we could. So, I have a big scar left there – and you know every time I look at that scar – I remember how I took the fall for our son!

That is just a small example of the incredible sacrifice and love of Jesus Christ for us. You see, we are the beloved children of God for whom Jesus took the fall. Christ suffered on the cross – nails in His hands and feet and a spear in His side – enduring great pain so that we could be restored back to God. It is the greatest scar story ever told!

All throughout Lent, we have been talking about our brokenness and how the touch of Jesus can bring healing and make something beautiful.

I think the wounds of Jesus also help us know that we have a Savior who understands what it is to be broken and to suffer pain. We don't have a God who stands at a distance – a long ways away from us – but rather we have a Savior who came near and experienced pain and abandonment and suffering. So, when we suffer, we know Christ can say, "I've been there, and I have the wounds to prove it!"

Jesus took all our brokenness on Himself as He died for our sins on the cross. And the good news is that He can take that brokenness and redeem it and make something beautiful!

Some of you attended the Good Friday service – or watched it online – and you heard me and Greg and Neill talk about our brokenness – all those sins that were nailed to the cross. Sins of omission and commission and the sin of following Jesus at a distance.

And you may remember the bowl that Greg showed us ... the one he deliberately took a hammer and hit ... breaking it into several large and small pieces – demonstrating how sin can break our lives.

Well, look at the bowl now! It has been restored and redeemed! It's here on the communion table and you can take a look at it after worship ... and here is a picture on the screen of what it looks like close up.

There is a Japanese art form called Kintsugi, which is taking broken pottery and gluing it back together, using gold powder in the adhesive. Kint-Sugi ... it literally means "golden repair." The artist takes that which was broken, and rather than throwing it out, glues it back together, turning it into something beautiful and useful once again ... and in the process, the repair treats the broken pieces and cracks as part of the history of the object. Instead of hiding the flaws, Kint-Sugi artists highlight them, creating a whole new design and bringing unique beauty to the original piece. The piece of pottery actually becomes more beautiful and valuable in the restoration process because, though it was once broken, it not only has history, but a new story.

In our own brokenness, we try to hide our scars from other people because of our past brokenness, and that makes a lot of sense because we don't want others to see our flaws and short-comings, our sinfulness that breaks what God has made....

But when we give the broken pieces to God, God can take them and recreate something beautiful where we have been broken, and where we are scarred. We worship a healer, one who repairs, one who can fit the broken pieces that no longer seem to fit right into a perfect design. God works, often behind the scenes, mending, fitting together, and creating something of even greater value in our lives – more than we ever dreamed possible. God can make all things beautiful in his time – especially the broken.

You and I are never too broken to be repaired ... too damaged to be healed and restored. If we allow God to heal those broken places in our life, we will have an amazing story to tell of God's transforming power. God can make something beautiful from those scars.

The good news we have today is Jesus was wounded for you and me – and it is through His wounds that we are healed. And He is alive! And one day, when we all get to heaven, we will know it is Jesus, by His wounds.

Friends –Jesus is calling out to you with outstretched arms – with scars visible on His hands. Those scars show just how much He loves you. He invites you to place your hand in His and feel what it cost to purchase your salvation.

Will you come? Will you draw near and believe?

He's calling today – what better time is there than now to come forward as Thomas did and proclaim, "My Lord and My God – I believe!"

LET US PRAY