



TOUCH POINT

Wounded Touch – Touchpoint for April 20, 2022

John 20:19-31 (NRSV) 19 When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews.

Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

21 Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” 22 When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

24 But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

26 A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” 27 Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”

28 Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” 29 Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

There is so much going on in the gospel passage that I almost don’t even know where to begin, but let’s hope I know when to end.

So I think I’m just going to walk through this passage and give some random, and maybe not so random observations.

Observation #1

“The doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear...”

The first post Easter stories are about fear and doubt and fish for breakfast. I find that interesting. I mean, where is the Hallelujah Chorus? Where is the celebration? Christmas has heavenly choirs, a star and wise men... why not Easter? Easter is so down to earth with its fear and doubt and fish.

So why is God becoming earthly (Christmas) treated so other-worldly, while Jesus becoming other-worldly (Easter) is treated so earthly?

Maybe it’s because if you and I actually did come face to face with someone who was raised from the dead, it wouldn’t scare us to death, but rather, it would scare us to life – a new life here on earth.

Observation #2

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Jesus appears to his disciples and the first words out of his mouth are, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Now remember, these are the same people who denied, betrayed and

abandoned him. And they're being sent out to the ones who beat and tortured Jesus. And they are to act like Jesus.

My brother likes to tell the story of the first time he explained to one of his daughters about Good Friday and Easter, when she was old enough to understand. He talked about how Jesus came to share God's love and that everyone turned against him and crucified him. His daughter looked at him with great concern, consternation and sadness. She looked like she was about to cry. So my brother jumped in quickly and said, "But that's not the end of the story. Three days later God raised him from the dead so he was alive again."

His daughter furrowed her brow for a second, deep in thought, and then looked at him and said with a smile, "Did he come back and get all the bad people?"

"Did he come back and get all the bad people?" That's what we would do.

"Did he come back and get all the bad people?" Now oddly enough, the answer to that is "Yes." Jesus did come back to get all the bad people, but not in the way we would think about it. He didn't come back to get back AT the bad people. He came back to get the bad people back into his fold.

You see, God is not so much interested in retribution as restoration. God is not so much interested in retribution as resurrection, which is the greatest restoration of all.

"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

Observation #3

"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

I think the church has botched this one badly. We think it gives us the power to forgive people. We think it gives US the final say. But I don't hear it that way. When we forgive others, we live in forgiveness. When WE retain the sins of others, WE remain in that sin. It isn't the others who aren't living in forgiveness, it's US, because we have retained the sins.

I can just see all of us holier-than-thou religious types, who love holding on to the sins of others and pointing them out. I can see all of us standing at the pearly gates and St. Peter saying to us, "Wow! You've retained a lot of sin." In the meantime, the tax collectors and the prostitutes will be waltzing in ahead of us.

"If you retain the sins of any, they are retained" ... by YOU!

Observation #4

Thomas said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Easter resurrects Good Friday.

Perhaps Thomas is on to something.

The Christ that Thomas knows is the one who suffers and dies on a cross. If that is not the one who is resurrected, then Thomas will have none of it. It can't just be the body of Jesus that is raised, but the life of Jesus as well. And that is what those marks represent – Jesus' life. They are the essence of who Jesus is. And if the marks are not raised with the body, Thomas is not interested.

For Thomas, the life of Jesus has to be raised as well as the body.

You know, in our creeds we keep saying, "We believe in the resurrection of the body." Perhaps we should be saying, "We believe in the resurrection of the LIFE of Jesus" ... the WAY he lived. That might point us in a better direction. After all, Jesus didn't say, "I am the body,"... but "I am the Way and the Life."

Observation #5

Then Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side."

Jesus shows Thomas his wounds.

Wait! What? Isn't this the point where Jesus should rip Thomas a new one? Isn't this why we call this story the "Doubting Thomas" story? So we can beat up on Thomas... so we can say to everyone, "Don't be like Thomas. Don't doubt."

Nope, Jesus simply meets Thomas in his doubts. If this is what it takes for Thomas to believe, Jesus will meet him there.

A Gallup poll was taken recently – perhaps you read about it. Less than 50% of the country now says they belong to a church, synagogue, or mosque. Or religious organization.

There's a lot of bemoaning the fact that people don't want to join... "What's wrong with them?"

Now, I just happen to think that is the wrong question. I tend to think the question should be, "What's wrong with us in the church?"

You see, if people are having their doubts about the church – and who can blame them – perhaps we should see the issue in light of today's passage.

Perhaps what the people are saying to us in the church is, "Unless I touch your wounds, unless I see your scars, I won't believe."

So much of Christianity is about conquering, winning, victory. Just look around at how many churches are called 'Victory Church' or 'Champions Church.' But how many churches are called 'Wounded Church,' or 'Broken Church?'

But the Christ we say we follow, the Christ we say we serve, was one who entered into the pain and suffering of the world. The Christ we say we belong to bore the pain of the world, became the wounded of the world. And still bears the marks in the resurrection.

Perhaps what the world is waiting to see is the wounds of the world borne by us... entered into by us.

God, not as escape, but God as incarnation. Entering into the pain and suffering of the world. And as Easter people, we seek to resurrect 'Good Friday,' not do an end run around it, or escape it.

“Unless I touch your wounds, unless I see your scars, I won’t believe.”

You see, the problem may not be that people don’t want to belong to the church. The problem may just be that the church doesn’t want to belong to the Christ.

Perhaps we’ve been so busy worshipping Jesus we’ve forgotten to follow him.

Because, to show the world our wounds means we must follow Jesus into the woundedness of the world.

This is, after all, where the Christ is to be found. “I was hungry and you fed me. I was in prison and you visited me.”

The end goal then of following the Christ is not individual salvation, over and against the pagan heathens.

The end goal is a restoration of all. A bringing together of all things. To follow Jesus is to live in the truth and understanding that all belong, and all belongs. Life, death, pain, joy, suffering and health. All have been taken up into and are part of the Divine.

“Unless I touch your wounds, unless I see your scars, I won’t believe.”

This is what a doubting world is asking of us. Are we still a part of this world or have we used our Christianity as an escape, leaving the world to fend for itself?

In this meal, we have our answer. In this meal, the crucified and risen Christ connects himself to the everyday elements of bread and wine. In the everyday act of eating we encounter the Christ. In the simple act of eating, where our dependence and interdependence with the earth and all creation is acted out at its most base level, there is the Christ.

It is, as my friend Henry has so eloquently stated, “Where broken meets broken.”

“Unless I touch your wounds, unless I see your scars, I won’t believe.”

Thomas and the world seem to know what we in the church have forgotten.

It is in the touching of our wounds, in the Christ and one another, that we are made whole. That we are resurrected.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Hosanna

(Simply Taize)

Hosanna in excelsis

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

Heaven Sings With Gladness

(Taize)

Heaven sings with gladness. Earth sings out rejoicing. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Monastery Choir of St. John of San Francisco)

Benediction

Hallelujah

(George Frideric Handel)

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

For the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth

The kingdom of this world is become
the kingdom of our Lord

And of His Christ, and of His Christ
And He shall reign for ever and ever

King of kings (Forever and ever Hallelujah! Hallelujah!)
And Lord of lords (Forever and ever Hallelujah! Hallelujah!)

Forever and ever
Forever and ever
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!