

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Second Sunday of Easter - Year A

Week 6 of Quarantine

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Acts 2:1-14a, 22-32

Psalm 16

I Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

04/19/2020

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

19When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and 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." 20After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 21Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." 22When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." 24But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. 25So 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." 26A 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." 27Then 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." 28Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" 29Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." 30Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31But 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.

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Scars

Good morning! The normal sermon on this text talks about Thomas and whether or not it was bad for him to doubt, or whether he's gotten a bad rap. But none of that caught my eye. What stuck out for me was scars. And when I thought about how to start this sermon one story kept coming back to me. It's not my story, but one I found on the internet a few years ago. People who write are always looking for creative ways to challenge themselves, and so sometimes they'll answer writing prompts. Which was the case for this story. Now, I will warn you now, this sermon topic gets a little tough from this point on, so here we go. The writing prompt was put on Reddit three years ago and was this: *"You live in a world where each lie creates a scar on the liar's body. The bigger the lie, the deeper and larger the mark. One day, you meet someone that only has one scar; it is the biggest one you have ever seen."* He was a real good guy,

through and through. Never met anyone quite like him since, never really expect I will either. People like Joe don't come around often. Once in a lifetime maybe, if you're lucky. Almost everyone I've ever met had the tiny silvered paper-cuts of white-lies on their fingers. It's a price of formalities, a camouflage of sorts- as everyone has a few, some deeper cut than others over the years; opened and reopened time after time. And not just that, but the larger cuts, silvery things on forearms and shins, necks or backs. People lie, it's just the way of things. Sometimes the pain is worth the deception, the balancing scale plays out mentally before a person's mouth opens....

But then, there was instructor Joe. I had more scars than most, and that earned little trust- but if people were politely cold with me, they were visibly frigid with Joe. See, he didn't have the traditional marks on his hands, he didn't have cuts and nicks along his arms, his face or neck: At a quick glance you might have thought him the most honest man alive. In fact, at first people did. A man in his fading thirties without scars? That's like a god-damn unicorn. They're more myth and legend than person- yet there he was. Plain as day. Everyone liked Joe that first week. Everyone wanted to be on good terms with him- I mean, who wouldn't? In a world of liars and cheats, proof reminded at every twist and turn of the road, who wouldn't want someone they could trust? Well, that was before he took off his shirt in the locker-room. Before we all saw the hideous mark that covered half his back. One lie, but the most gruesome thing I've ever seen. From his shoulder blade to his ribs, it looked like a crashing comet of red and silvered white. A tiny portion of it just finally healing, a rough tear now recovered again. It was all the same lie. That's something you can just tell sometimes, just know it. Usually you can tell how many times too, but whatever the number was which he'd said that aloud, I don't know. He rarely spoke to begin with, issuing the orders with a

stern smile, instructing as all the rest did. He was positive, encouraging, truthful: But that scar was on everyone's mind. Deep, dark, and terrible: Someone who could tell a lie like that... Well, there was someone to watch out for. In the end though, it was at the range when things went well and truly sour. Live-fire runs, we'd done them a thousand times, but that day I guess someone forgot themselves. Maybe they thought too much on what and how and their brain skipped a beat, or maybe they were just careless. Regardless of the reason, a shot fired when it shouldn't have. Brass spit fire, Air swallowed metal, and lead took its first taste of iron, calcium, iron and dirt. In that order. We all stopped, eyes wide and watching that kid fall down real slow. First standing, staring with his hand pulling away- not even scared, just shocked. Red, like deep crimson soaking and spreading, he dropped down to his knees. Still, he wasn't even there yet, it hadn't quite processed. That's when Joe caught him- and all the shouting erupted. The pandemonium, the first real training turned to action kicking in. Cries for "Medic!" and "KIT! Get the kit!" as people ran for the directions they thought mattered. I was close enough to know that wasn't going to make a difference. Center of mass was what we trained for, the reason was straight and forward: Shoot to kill. Eliminate the target and move on. So I sat there, weapon heavy in my hands as I watched Joe hold this kid, blood pouring out into the dirt like a faucet, and I listened to him repeat the words that cut deep. Over, and over, and over again. "Hang on, look at me. You're gonna be alright." "You're gonna be alright."

Scars... they can be hideous things. And yet, Jesus has a resurrected body... and that body isn't "perfect" by our traditional understanding of the word. He has scars too. His injuries show. If Jesus went to a fashion shoot for the cover of Vogue, they would have to re-touch all the photos to clean up the imperfections. Which tells us a lot about

what heaven will look like, what our bodies will look like. Maybe our idea of “perfect” isn’t correct...

The scars on Jesus had me thinking about the many deformities a person could have. I have deformed pinkies, which is pretty minor, but others are born with a whole list of challenges. Or how about the scars from accidents, those who have lost a limb, or maybe been burned by fire. And how about our sisters and brothers who are paralyzed. Do the scars on Jesus mean we’ll all have those same marks in heaven?

I have a shirt that I got at the ELCA Youth Gathering that has a popular church slogan: “all are welcome.” The only problem is that a lot of the time, we Christians do a pretty poor job of making sure we live out that mantra. Just look at the design of most churches and you can see that while our sign might be inviting to the person in a wheelchair, the steps around the table for communion make it impossible for them to receive that Holy Meal.

But the scars on Jesus paint a much different picture. There, it seems, all truly are welcome. While I don’t know what heaven looks like, I have a few ideas. It’s a place where we don’t need to worry about our scars, about our supposed imperfections, because it will be a place where all can truly participate, like never before. It will be a place where God’s love is so evident, so strong, that like Thomas, we won’t be distracted by our supposed limitations, we’ll simply fall down in awe in the presence of the Almighty. Amen.