

## Scarred for Life Stewardship 1

John 20:19-31

Rev. Kimberly Heath

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Thomas has forever been known as “doubting Thomas”. It’s really not fair that he should have that label because I believe he had more faith than most of the disciples. After Peter, Thomas is probably my favourite disciple. He got the nickname of course because he wasn’t there when Jesus first appeared to his disciples who had locked themselves up in a room in fear and grief. We don’t know why Thomas wasn’t with them. I’d like to believe that he wasn’t giving in to the fear or the deep gloom that the others were wrapped in. Maybe in his grief he just wanted to be alone. Regardless of the reason, he wasn’t with the others when Jesus first appeared after the resurrection. His response to their news is well known:

*“Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”*

A week later he gets his chance. It almost seems that Jesus appeared again for Thomas’ sake. *“Put your finger here,”* says the Risen Christ, *“Do not doubt but believe.”*

It was the American preacher Dr. William Willimon who changed this passage for me. He pointed out in a brilliant sermon that the Risen Christ is recognized by the disciples and particularly by Thomas through his scars. It’s an amazing little detail. The Risen Christ had scars. You would have thought that in the resurrection everything would be perfect, but he still has scars.

Jesus didn’t just get better. It’s not like he healed quickly from the torture, the flogging and the crucifixion. This was death defeated; this was new life. It is clear that the resurrected Jesus was different from before. For one thing he doesn’t seem to have to knock on the door; he just “appears” to the disciples. In another story he is walking and talking with some disciples on the road to Emmaus but they don’t realize it’s him, until they break bread together at the end of the day. Then all of the sudden they realize who he is, and as soon as they do, he disappears.

The resurrected Jesus is different from before. But it’s also clear that Jesus is not a ghost. When he appears to the disciples in Luke’s version, he asks if they have anything to eat and they give him some broiled fish which he eats before them. I remember in the Alpha course Nicky Gumble saying he had a friend who became a Christian because of that detail. He said that the risen Lord eating broiled fish was just too strange a detail not to be true. The Risen Christ isn’t the same as before, but the Gospel stories are very clear that they are not seeing a ghost or a Spirit.

The Risen Christ doesn’t just eat broiled fish; he has scars that you can touch. Those scars are a reminder of his suffering. Those scars are the way that Thomas and the others know for sure that it’s really him.

Scars are interesting things. I still have a scar on my chin from when I was sliding on the ice when I was in grade one and a big kid sliding behind me landed on my head. I ended up needing stitches again in that same spot when I went with the Wall Street Youth Group to Landon Bay on a winter retreat and again fell sliding on some ice. You’d think those experiences would scar me for life, but I still love sliding on ice. I bet most of you have scars and I bet you could tell us exactly when and how you got them. I remember when my daughter Petra was a little younger she would always ask my mother to tell her the story of the large scar on her forearm. Somehow scars are a part of our story, a part of who we are.

But it’s not just the physical wounds that scar us. Most of us also have scars in our hearts. Scars from past hurts, from times of rejection, from when someone you loved

died, from when you did something you regret, from witnessing something you wish you hadn't. These are places in our lives that are more or less healed—they are no longer searing gaping wounds, but neither are they forgotten. We all have those scars. We've all been wounded and a little (sometimes a lot) beaten up by life. Many of us are feeling wounded today after the death of Dawna Sands. Dawna died last Monday after a very tough and brave fight with cancer. She was a true saint in our church. She loved this church and she gave so much to her church family. She spent almost all her time with Margie Mannsiechner and Gail Price in the Sunday School, loving and teaching our children about Jesus. Though the cancer took her life way too soon, she has conquered death and has risen to a new and wonderful life with Christ Jesus. But we've got another mark on our hearts that will never forget her place in our lives and in our church family. She was truly one of the saints of this church. It hurts, but I'm glad I've got that scar. I don't want to forget that part of our story.

Starting this week and through to June 5<sup>th</sup> we are entering a Stewardship Campaign called *Good to Grow*. What does that mean? It means we want to share with you the vision that God has for this church and how you can be a part of it. This church does not receive any funding from the government or from our denomination or any other organization. In fact it's just the opposite: we not only depend on you to meet our budget, we also feel called to give beyond ourselves to our national church through the Mission and Service Fund, and to outside organizations that are near to our heart like Our Kenyan Kids and Canadian Aid for Chernobyl. Our mission is funded by you.

I don't think it is news to anyone to hear that many churches today are struggling. There are many churches that have to close their doors or look at amalgamating with another congregation in order to survive.

The United Church of Canada membership dropped from 1.04 million in 1961 to 525,000 members in 2008-- a reduction of 49% or half. Overall church attendance is in steep decline, and for every one church that is doing well, there will be 6 or 7 that are struggling and 2 or 3 that are closing.

A couple of weeks ago I attended a United Church Renewal conference. A speaker asked us "If your church were to close, would it be missed in your community?" and "What would be missing"? There are a number of congregations that would have a hard time answering that question, but there is no question in my mind that there would be a great big hole in Brockville if this church were to disappear. We are not the only church, we are not 'the best' church. People seem to like to compare, people always think there is a competition, but God has given us a unique mission that is different from St. John's United and different from the Presbyterian Church and different from The Pier or any other church in town. We are a different and unique part of the body of Christ.

We have a special calling to be genuinely inclusive. This place is a refuge for ALL. This is a special place --- a place where you are welcome to come as you are. You don't need to hide your scars. This is a place where you are loved in your brokenness -- a place where people with open wounds in their heart find healing. We are not perfect. If you need a church that is perfect --- one with no visible warts or scars --- you're in the wrong place. I'm not sure you'll find one, you're probably better just to go to Starbucks where a sign says: "Your drink should be perfect, every time. If not, let us know and we'll make it right". We are not in the business of making a perfect cup of coffee (though if truth be told if there is close to perfect in this church, it just might be our coffee). This place and the people in it have a lot of rough edges. We are a motley crew. If you haven't discovered those rough edges, then join a committee. :) If you do, you'll find the rough edges, but a lot of laughter and love too. We are a funny, messed up, annoying and incredibly lovable family. The love does a lot to help to smooth the edges, but because we are called to heal very broken people and because we are all fragile and

terribly human, sometimes egos are bruised or offended. When that happens, remember that we have a special calling to be an EGR church. EGR is Extra Grace Required. We all need to treat each other with extra grace.

No, perfection is not our purpose or our business. We are in the business of giving out the love of Jesus. I think we do a pretty good job of that. I remember several years ago when we discovered that someone who attended the evening service was having a birthday. We also found out that this person had never had a birthday cake or birthday card in his life. He was not a very young man either. The pre-service planning crew glanced around the table looking at their watches and thinking the same thing. We quickly wrapped up the meeting and a few of us made a mad dash to Wal-Mart to pick up a cake, some balloons and a card which everyone at the service that night signed. That man still comes to this church. Why? He's certainly discovered our rough edges, our scars, but I believe he keeps coming back for two reasons. The first and most important is that he feels God's love in this place through you. And #2, he knows it's OK to show his scars. He is loved for who he is. Both of those things will go a long way to helping him to truly become the man he was created to be.

The Risen Christ walks on wounded feet and his beloved church serves a broken world with wounded hands. 1 Peter 2: 24 says "By his wounds you have been healed." It doesn't make a whole lot of sense, but the deep and amazing Truth is that together we will bring healing to individuals and healing to the world. Jesus is, and we his church are, scarred for Life.

Thanks be to God. Amen.