SCARRED FOR LIFE
Genesis 45:1-11, 15
(Sermon idea from Homiletics, February 2001)

Dr. Howard Batson
First Baptist Church
Amarillo, Texas
May 28, 2017

Plastic surgeons see a great many scars. We go to these human body repairmen in hopes that they can take away our scars – or at least cover them up or lessen their severity.

Plastic surgeons do see a lot of scars, but I do, too. When you make as many hospital visits as I have made as a chaplain and now a pastor, one of the first things you discover is that people have a driving desire to show you their scar after surgery. It’s not unusual for me to make a hospital visit only to find myself, moments later, looking at scars. “Pastor, they had to cut all the way from my back across the front...” And the next thing I know, they’re lifting up their gown and showing me the cut, the incision, the scar.

I think we have a desire to place our scars on display – not because scars are beautiful things that people want to see but, rather, because our scars communicate to those around us exactly what we’ve been through. If you want to really know how I feel, if you want to really understand my pain, then you need to see my scars. If you’re really going to connect with me, those scar-displayers are saying, you must see just how deeply I’ve experienced pain.

So I don’t blame you for showing your scars. It helps people understand us if they know the tragedies and the hardships of our lives, if they know our story.

I not only see scars during hospital visits, I see scars when you come to my office, as well. Oh, not fleshy scars but, rather, emotional scars – scars of the heart, scars of the head. “Pastor, if you’re really going to be able to help me you must know what pain I’ve been through.”

Scars created by sexual abuse received as a child – a rape in the past.
Scars caused by parents who played the game of favoritism between siblings.
Scars caused by mothers and fathers who were alcoholics.
Scars caused by physical beatings.
Scars caused by verbal abuse and never receiving a blessing from your father or your mother.
Scars caused by divorces of the past and disappointments and death.
Scars caused by sins long hidden, but now resurfacing again.
Scars caused by broken hearts.
Scars caused by feeling left out or never really fitting in.

There is no end to the possible causes of the scars that we display.
Covering up scars with a double coat of make up never cures anything.
You can almost see the Joseph story as a Jerry Springer show: Siblings who sell a brother into slavery. Picture the sons of Jacob on stage, a line-up of coarse and questionable characters who openly admit to selling their teenage brother Joseph to a traveling band of Ishmaelites. No doubt they’d bluster about why they did it:

“I hated him.”

“Dad loved him best.”

“He had the fancy robe, and wouldn’t get his hands dirty.”

“The kid drove me crazy with his dreams.”

“Thought he was the king of us.”

Then they explained just how they had pulled it off.

“We thought about killing him.”

“Wanted to throw dream-boy into a pit.”

“Yeah, kill him and throw him into a pit.”

“Say that the wild animals ate him.”

“But Reuben said no – said we shouldn’t kill him. So we stripped him and sold him.”


Finally, Jerry would bring out the surprise guest – their long-lost brother Joseph, who ended up as chief minister in Egypt. Jerry, of course, would be setting up a brawl between brothers. But Joseph walks humbly onto the stage to say, “I am your brother,” he’d reveal. “And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.” Joseph would promise to feed the brothers in their time of famine, and all would be amazed at his generosity.

Jerry Springer’s show would be ruined by a reunion of forgiveness.

But what about the scars? You know there would have to be scars on Joseph. All the years of hatred in his family, of jealousy, abuse, violence. You can bet there are some scars here.

Perhaps no one knows more about scars than Liana Gedz. She went into the hospital for the birth of a child who was delivered C-section. Later, she noticed that the physician who had performed the surgery – are you ready for this? – had carved his initials into her stomach. AZ.

Bizarre.
How do you get rid of a scar like that? The answer for Liana was a tummy tuck which would hide even the C-section scar. Both the AZ and the C-scar disappeared with one more surgical procedure. The surgeon, himself, was hauled into court and thrown into the slammer.

Good for him. Who ever heard of such a bizarre thing?

Truth be told, there are times when we can’t hide our scars with a tummy tuck. If a large area of skin has been lost, as with burn victims, a surgeon will have to remove the entire scar and shift a piece of healthy skin, complete with fat and blood vessels, to the injured site. And today there are advanced bandages that jumpstart the repair of injured skin, but then themselves break down – leaving behind only healed tissue. These biodegradable scaffolds improve the odds of scarless healing – bandages made of synthetic polymers, crab shells, and pig intestines.

But the truth be told, no matter how good our plastic surgeons have become or how advanced the bandages might be, injuries are everywhere, and not every scar can be treated or healed. Some five million wounds, most of them chronic, will occur this year in the United States alone. And this doesn’t even count the wounds that are psychological or emotional – wounds that ache and fester for so many years – so many years, so many years after an injury.

Think of the deep and numerous scars in the life of Joseph and his brothers. The constant taunting when he was a child. The aggravating he did. The plot to murder him. This heartless sale into slavery.

How do you heal all these wounds? A little tummy tuck is not going to do it.

The story begins when Jacob plays favorites with his boys. Joseph is his favorite. He is a teenaged smart aleck. Even his posture says, “Look at me. I’m better than you.” And if you can’t read his posture, maybe you can read the colors in his fanciful coat. His brothers dressed in drab – he’s dressed in fad.

And if the father’s favoritism didn’t make matters bad enough, the brat’s boastful dreams made things worse. He dreamt that he and his brothers were out binding sheaves in the field and, lo and behold, his sheaf stood to attention and all the other sheaves gathered around and bowed down to his. Or worse yet, he dreamt that the sun, the moon, and the stars were bowing down to him. Even his father got angry with this one. “What, shall I and your brothers and your mother actually bow ourselves down to you?”

Jacob sent Joseph’s brothers to pastor the flock at Shechem. He sent Joseph out to check on them – daddy’s little tattletale. No one had to tell them who he was. Even at a great distance you could see the prancing peacock, Joseph in his coat of colors, coming to give his brothers the inspection for father.

“Here comes the little dreamer. Let’s kill him and say a beast devoured him. Then we will see what becomes of his dreams.” They ripped off his coat and threw him into a dry well. As they
ate, enjoying their evening meal, they also enjoyed hearing Joseph beg and weep. It was hard to determine which was better.

Finally, Judah suggested that instead of killing Joseph they ought to sell him to the Ishmaelites who were passing by, on their way to peddle the balm and myrrh in Egypt. His brothers sopped his coat in the blood of a goat. “Father, we found this.” With satisfaction, they thrust forward the blood-covered coat. Now the bright colors were dulled by the deeply colored blood. “Please tell us,” as if they didn’t have the answer, “is this your son’s coat?”

“It is Joseph’s. A wild beast has torn my boy to pieces. I will go to my grave mourning for my son.”

Joseph is sold into slavery in Egypt, sold to Potiphar’s house. He began to excel in Potiphar’s house, so much so that Potiphar placed Joseph in charge of everything in his household. Joseph came into command of everything that Potiphar owned.

Joseph was nice looking. He was handsome. Right off the Egyptian GQ cover. Potiphar’s wife wondered if she still looked young enough to attract someone like Joseph. Besides, Potiphar, her husband, was so busy he hardly even notices her any more.

“Joseph, I’m available.”

“I’m not interested.”

“Joseph, I’m available.”

“But your husband has entrusted me with his whole household.”

“Joseph.”

He runs. She grabs. He flees. She screams. He goes to prison.

First it’s a pit and now it’s prison. And Joseph has lost his coat a second time.

Perhaps you remember that Joseph becomes the interpreter of dreams in the prison and finally gains such a reputation that he is asked to interpret Pharaoh’s dream about seven fat cows and seven gaunt cows and seven plump ears of grain and seven scorched ears of grain. Finally, after all the magicians of Egypt were stumped by the dream, Joseph was able to give Pharaoh the answer.

“The dreams are one and the same, Pharaoh. God is telling Pharaoh what He is about to do. The seven good cows and the seven good ears are seven years of plentiful crop yields. The seven scorched ears and the seven gaunt cows that come after them are seven years of famine. I have told Pharaoh what God is going to do. There are going to be seven years of abundance in all the land of Egypt, and after that seven years of famine with no harvest. God let you have the dream twice because he wants you to know that it is going to happen and it is going to happen very
quickly. Now Pharaoh, go find for yourself a wise and discerning man and put him over the land of Egypt and let Pharaoh appoint overseers in charge of the land, and let them collect a fifth of the produce during each of the seven good years of abundance, and when there is no harvest, there will be food for the people to eat."

“I’ve already found my man,” Pharaoh said. “Only I, in all the land of Egypt, will be more powerful than you are.”

The famine became terrible, just as Joseph predicted as he interpreted Pharaoh’s dream. His brothers, all these years later, come to Egypt looking for food. Little do they realize that the man in charge of dispensing the food is their little brother who they had, so many years before, sold into slavery. It had been so long, and his position so unlikely, that they didn’t even recognize their own brother.

Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, “Have everyone go out from me.” So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it. Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Please come closer to me.” And they came closer. And he said, “I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God, and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Look at verse 15
He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him.

Turn to Genesis 50:18-20.
Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”

Joseph and his brothers reconcile. They kiss. They weep. They talk.

But the scars that his family bears are not easily sanded away through dermabrasion or any other procedure. Joseph knows the scars won’t go away. In fact, he doesn’t pretend the scars will go away. He points to his scars and reminds his brothers that they sold him into slavery.
There is a well-known medical axiom: Once scarred, always scarred. And really, that’s true when it comes right down to it. But in spite of all his scars, Joseph is able to heal and move toward reconciliation with his brothers.

Joseph realizes that God can use his difficulties, his challenges, his pit and his prison experience for God’s own plan – God’s plan to help others.

“God sent me here to preserve your life. You had evil plans for me, but God used the evil for His own good.”

What once looked like a cruel and heartless and hateful act on the part of Joseph’s brothers now looks like a grateful, heartfelt and loving act on the part of God, who wanted Joseph to prosper and save his family from famine.

Of course, this doesn’t mean that God orchestrates tragedy and evil in our lives. The world is full of senseless violence, horrifying hatred. But what it does show us is that God somehow transforms the human evil that surrounds us into divine good. He used the slavery of Joseph to save a family, and He transformed the death of Jesus into the salvation of the world.


Jesus could have had any resurrected body he wanted, and yet he chose one identifiable mainly by scars that could be seen and touched. Remember Thomas? Jesus showed him the scars. Why?

I believe the story of Easter would be incomplete without those scars on the hands, the feet, and the side of Jesus. When human beings fantasize, we dream of pearly straight teeth and wrinkle-free skin and sexy ideal shapes. We dream of the unnatural: the perfect body. But for Jesus, being confined in a skeleton and human skin was the unnatural state. The scars are, to him, an emblem of life on our planet, a permanent reminder of those days of confinement and suffering.

I take hope in Jesus’ scars. From the perspective of heaven, they represent the most horrible event that has ever happened in the history of the universe – the crucifixion of Christ – Easter turned into a memory. Because of Easter, I can hope that the tears we shed, the blows we receive, the emotional pain, the heartache over lost friends and loved ones, all these will become memories, like Jesus’ scars. Scars never completely go away, but neither do they hurt any longer. We will have re-created bodies, a re-created heaven and earth. We will have a new start, an Easter start. (Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*)

Joseph had scars, and Jesus had scars. Scars that He showed the disciples. Scars that caused the change of all of human history.
Be careful before you ask for a scar to be removed. Joseph didn’t and Jesus didn’t. And neither should we. God can create a life in which our wound is transformed into something good, and we are propelled toward new and abundant life.

In his now-classic book *The Wounded Healer*, Henri Nouwen reflects on what it means to minister to a hurting and alienated society. He recommends prayer, not as a “decoration of life,” but as the breath of human existence. A Christian community is a healing community, says Nouwen, not because wounds are cured and pains are alleviated, but because wounds and pains become openings or occasions for a new vision.

Take a look at your hardships and your scars – how they shape who you are, how they give you an occasion for a new vision.

Joseph looked at the scar of his sale into slavery and saw that God had a saving plan for his life. Perhaps some abuse you received will enable you to serve people who have been abused. Maybe some hurt you have endured will equip you to ease the pain of another. It could be that some loss you have experienced will put you in a powerful position to assist those who are grieving.

Scars that transform.

Don’t pretend the scars aren’t there. There are scars in your life and God places those scars there so that He can transform them, use them, in the plan of His Kingdom for His good.