

SCARS
John 20:25

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There's a scene in the 1975 movie, *Jaws*, that takes place in the cabin of the creaking, old fishing boat. The grizzled old shark hunter, Quint, and the shark scientist Hooper, are drinking together when they decide to compare scars.

First, Quint asks Hooper to put a hand under his cap and feel a knot there. He explains, "That came from Rocker Nolan in a St. Patty's Day brawl in Boston." Not to be outdone, Hooper claims a bigger scar on his arm and says, "I got that beat. Moray eel! Bit right through my wet suit."

Continuing the scar one-upmanship, Quint rolls up his sleeve to show a mangled elbow, the result of an arm-wrestling contest in a San Francisco bar.

Boasting of a yet even bigger scar, Hooper pulls up his pants leg, revealing a calf scar. He brags: "Bull shark! Scraped me when I was taking samples." Quint then out does Hooper's leg scar with one of his own that he attributes to a thresher shark's tail.

They toast a drink to their impressive scars, then both men burst into laughter. Hooper says, "Okay. I've got one, the crème de la crème! Right here!" he points to his chest as he unbuttons his shirt. "Mary Ellen Moffatt: she broke my heart!" ("Known by the Scars," homileticonline.com)

In John 20, we're still on the first day of the week – the day of the resurrection of Jesus. The disciples had seen Jesus crucified, even if in fear they had stood at a distance from the cruelty of the cross. On this evening, the disciples were together, with the doors locked, bolted – for fear of the Jews, for fear that the same powers and people who had crucified Jesus, their teacher, would now crucify them, the students.

Look at verse 19.

The doors were shut. Notice why? For fear of the Jews. And even while they are huddled in fear, Jesus comes into the room and says, "Peace be with you."

What a scene. They had gone through the experience of losing their leader. They didn't really know what to do next. The disciples were dismayed. In fact, you remember Matthew's gospel put it this way: They had all, after the crucifixion, forsook Him and fled.

They really thought that the rumor of the resurrection was no more than an old wives' tale, an emotional response by women. Now they gathered not so much for the common commitment to

Christ, but, rather, with a common fear. They are all there in the Upper Room – they’re all there except Thomas. Now Thomas was one of The Twelve.

Notice verse 20.

Jesus showed them His hands and His side – He showed them His scars. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Thomas missed all the action. The other disciples declared to him, “We have seen the Lord.” But Thomas himself had seen the cross. Thomas had seen the burial. Thomas would have no part of the hoax. “Unless I shall see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger in the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” (verse 25).

Thomas is an average disciple. In the list of the twelve apostles found in Matthew, Mark, Luke and Acts, Thomas always appears in the middle of the pack – not first like Peter, but in the middle. Perhaps Thomas is absent because he has stolen away somewhere to be alone in his own grief.

We need to try, for a moment, to walk in Thomas’s shoes. While we stand on this side of Easter, we can easily look down our long noses at Doubting Thomas. But we must remember that Thomas did not have the benefit of 2,000 years of testimony to the reality of the resurrection. All he knew was that Jesus had been brutally killed. Why should he believe this news about a resurrection? If there ever was to be a resurrection, it would be on the last day. And this certainly was not the last day. Who among us would have believed it?

Notice verse 26.

A week passes. They gathered in the Upper Room again. This time Thomas is there. Thomas is there, still dwelling in his doubt. “Thomas, I want you to put your finger right here in my hand, and I want you to put your hand right here in my side.” And when Thomas saw the scars, he said, “My Lord and my God.”

This story in scripture brings to mind two things every one of us in this room shares in common – doubts and scars. We all have doubts. We all have scars. Sometimes we try to avert our doubts, and sometimes we try to hide our scars. But they are both realities. We all have our doubts. Milton Cunningham said, “When I hear someone say ‘I never had a doubt. Never in my life have I had a doubt,’ I want to pursue that and I want to ask, ‘Have you ever had a thought?’” William Barclay has said the wonderful thing about Thomas is that he faced his doubt. Once he was convinced that his doubt was not valid, he committed himself to belief and to obedience.

You notice Jesus never condemns Thomas for his doubt. He knew that once Thomas had wandered his way through the wilderness of his doubt that he would emerge a more committed disciple.

Sometimes our doubts are brought about, like Thomas’s doubt, by pain in our lives – a family illness, a terrible tragedy, the loss of a friend, a friend’s pain. We begin to ask how God can do this? Where is God? If God is good, why does life hurt so much?

The psalmist had the same doubts. He cries,
 “My God, my God, why hast Thou
 forsaken me?
Far from my deliverance are the words
 of my groaning.
Oh my God, I cry by day, but Thou dost
 not answer;
and by night, but I have no rest.
Yet thou art holy....

(Psalm 22:1-3)

It's so hard to equate these scars and the suffering with Messiah. You remember just before Jesus' teaching on suffering to the disciples. He engages them in conversation. They had witnessed some of the most impressive demonstrations of Jesus' divinity. They had seen him feed the 5,000. He'd walked across water to join the disciples aboard the ship. He had healed a Gentile girl who was demon possessed and a man who could neither speak nor hear. He had healed the blind, fully restoring his vision. On and on the list goes. They had seen the power of the Savior. With all these tremendous acts and signs of power – the disciples were sure they were on the road to success. But in reality, they were on the road to suffering.

So, when Jesus asked, “Who do people say that I am?” the disciples didn't even pause for breath before they were offering three flattering examples of what was blowing in the wind. Obviously the crowds had been talking, and Jesus' disciples had been listening. All three identities the disciples came up with – John the Baptist, Elijah, or the prophets – represented powerful, God-inspired voices. With His next question, however, Jesus puts His disciples on the spot. “But who do you say that I am?” Jesus was asking for their conclusions about what they had seen and heard.

It's outspoken Peter who is the first in the group to offer an answer – the name “Christos,” which Peter declares, means Jesus is the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel. It's a job description. “You're the one who performs miracles, sets all things right, alleviates pain and suffering. You're the one who makes feeding the family easy.” What a shocker when Jesus immediately begins to offer His disciples His own version of messiahship, to reinterpret what it means to be the Holy One of Israel – a definition that involves suffering and ultimately death, death on the cross.

Immediately Peter does not like the redefinition of discipleship. He vehemently argues with Jesus, claiming that will not be the case.

Suffering, pain, death, loneliness. All part of being Messiah, and, yes, all part of being disciple.

Just like Peter didn't want a Jesus with scars or a discipleship of doubt, we don't either. Yet discipleship involves disappointment, doubt, and scars.

Notice Jesus calls Thomas. “Thomas, come here and I want to show you something. Give me your finger. Put it in my hand. Give me your hand. Put it in my side.” The risen Christ has scars. Jesus is scarred. Think about it.

You remember in Revelation they are lamenting the fact that no one is holy and righteous and good, no one is available to open the book, to break the seals of the scroll that contains the will and the workings of God. You remember that John the Seer, verse 4 of chapter 5, begins to weep because no one is worthy to open the book. Finally, one of the elders says, “Stop weeping. There is someone who is worthy.” Notice in verse 6, the elders see a lamb standing – notice the lamb – as if slain.

Yes, even in heaven the resurrected Christ has scars. Look in verse 9.

“And they sang a new song saying, ‘Worthy art Thou to take the book and to break the seals... – why is He worthy – ...because Thou wast slain, and did purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.’”

Look at verse 12.

“...saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain...’”

Even the resurrected Christ in the scene of Revelation, of the apocalyptic genre of literature, has a slain-ness about Him, a scar. Yes, Jesus with scars.

Scars make us remember. Jesus has scars – the slain Lamb, the nail-pierced hands, the gouged side remind us of the cross. They remind us of the blood that was shed for our reconciliation. Your own scars remind you of something. They remind us of past experiences. Sometimes those scars are physical, and some of us have scars that are emotional. Some of us have scars that are spiritual. Really, sometimes the physical scars are the easiest ones to handle. It’s the emotional scars, the spiritual scars that are tough.

A great part of my ministry is spent listening to somebody tell me about their scars, their pain. Sometimes I listen to them reminisce about scars caused by days past and talk about the lingering problems that are there. Sometimes our scars remind us of past experiences. Sometimes our scars identify us, like the slain Lamb of Revelation 5 identified Him as the Christ. Do you ever watch “America’s 10 Most Wanted”? What will they say? “He has a scar on his right cheek.”

Our scars identify us. They identify us to God.

Sometimes our scars cause us to rejoice, like that one in Revelation. Milton Cunningham said he had a scar down the center of his chest. Milton decided he needed to go to the hospital for tests. While he was there at the hospital, he had a heart attack. Before he came to, they took him to surgery. He said, “Every morning I wake up and look in the mirror and I see the scar here, and I give thanks.”

We have scars like that. When we look at Jesus, we see the scars on His hand. We see the scar on His side. We want to sing Hallelujah because we know what it means, just like the elders in Revelation knew the meaning of his scars.

Jesus has scars, and we will have scars if we're going to follow Him.

In I Peter 4, the apostle says, "To the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.... if anyone suffers as a Christian (it continues) don't be ashamed, but glorify God."

What does it mean for Jesus to have scars?

I. For Jesus to have scars means He knows the path that we have walked.

Monica Furlong, in her book entitled *Our Childhood's Pattern*, writes this about Jesus.

For He is our childhood's pattern.
Day by day, like us He grew.
He was little, weak and helpless.
Tears and smiles, like us He knew.
And He feebleth for our sadness.
And he shareth in our gladness.

An emotional Jesus, breaking into a smile, bursting into tears of sorrow and chagrin – that's the Savior we serve, not the "no crying He makes" Savior portrayed in the popular Christmas carol. A Jesus with scars means that Jesus knows what it means to hurt and to sorrow. He knows what it means to hunger. He knows what it means to be tempted. And yes, He knows what it means to wish there is another way other than suffering, as He pleads in Gethsemane that God will take Him around the way of the cross.

A Jesus with scars means that God cares and God knows the hurts and the sorrows of your heart. And because of His scars, we can recognize Jesus as one of us.

In Homer's epic, *The Odyssey*, there is an episode near the end of the tale when Odysseus finally returns home after years of wandering. He is disguised as an old man; nobody recognizes him, not even his wife Penelope and their son.

That night, just before bed, Odysseus' aged nurse Eurycleia washes his feet. She thinks she's merely attending to an old stranger who's visiting for the night. But, as she begins to wash him, the old nurse recognizes a scar on the hero's thigh: the same scar she remembers from his youth. At that moment, she realizes who he is. She doesn't recognize him until she sees his scar.

The scars do not lie. ("Known by the Scars," homileticsonline.com)

II. A Jesus with scars means there is no way around the cross.

A Jesus with scars meant there was no other plan of salvation except for God's only Son suffering on our behalf. The only way to salvation is through the Lamb that was slain.

The old pulpit story circulates. A customer went into a jewelry store to buy a cross necklace. The clerk asked, “Do you want to see a plain one, or do you want to look at the one with the little man on it?” Do you want an empty or a loaded cross?

Yes, there is no way around the cross. It was a loaded cross, a cross with the Son of God on it. And the scars of Jesus tell us that the cross was real. It tells us that Peter is wrong when he swears the Lord will never suffer that way.

III. A Jesus with scars means we’re going to suffer too.

When one of our girls was in elementary school, she went over one evening to the house of a playmate. Both the mom and the dad were physicians. Through no one’s fault, while visiting their home, my daughter took a tumble, hit the corner of the fireplace, and was left with a little gash on her face. The friend’s parents called, and I rushed right over to decide what to do. The physician parents explained that at that late hour, I would need to take her to the ER to be stitched up. Or, if I preferred, the surgeon among them could just stitch her up right then and there.

I didn’t want to be rude, but the doctor was not a plastic surgeon. Since my little girl’s little face was on the line, I uttered an uninformed, but sincere concern: “This is my baby girl’s face. If you feel like stitching her up is in your realm of expertise, let’s go for it. But if you think I need to take her to the ER for other expertise, I don’t mind heading that way. I just want the best result for her.” The parents processed my ignorance with grace. The husband spoke up, saying, “If you take her to the ER, she’ll be sewed up by some resident who may be on his third case. My wife is known for many things, among them the minimal scars she leaves after surgery.” I realized I was just being a dad, folded my cards, and said, “I’m grateful. Thank you.” Right there in their living room, I watched a very skilled surgeon sew up my daughter.

C. Everett Koop, who was once America’s Surgeon General, said that he estimates he performed about 50,000 operations. Patients came to see C. Everett Koop from all over the world, and one of the things that endeared him to the parents of his patients was the way his incisions healed. He said, “No one likes a big scar, but they are especially upsetting to mothers when they appear on their children.” (In my case, I would say fathers, too.) “So I set out early to make my scars small, as short and as thin as possible. These ‘invisible’ scars became my trademark.” He said he accomplished the nearly scarless repairs by sewing the stitches inside the skin, but not through it. And the knots were tied at the bottom.” (“The Church of Beautiful Feet,” homileticsonline.com)

Yes, no one really likes scars. But if we’re going to follow Jesus there are going to be bruises, nicks and knocks, scars, the whole lot.

Sometimes we are selective when we try to understand what it means to follow Jesus. But if we’re going to be followers of the chief one that suffered, you can bet your life we’re going to suffer too. Sometimes we’re hard of hearing when Christ’s voice calls us to stay in our suffering when we really want to stay in success and power, when it calls us to bear a loaded cross when

it's easier to go farther with a plain one, when we really want to go up the ladder of success instead of the way of suffering.

Suffering makes disciples. I don't want it for me, and I don't want it for you. But I know it is the anvil which God uses to shape us.

Paul has a strange phrase. "God's strength is made perfect in weakness." I don't know where you are today, what suffering you are in the midst of and what suffering is around the next corner. I don't know. But God knows, and Jesus knows. And Jesus has His own scars. And I thank God for His scars – scars that mean there is redemption, scars that mean the Lamb has been slain, scars that mean He knows our suffering, scars that mean we are most shaped by the challenges, the difficulties of sufferings and the hardships of life.

A Jesus with scars. A Thomas who doubts. We can relate to both of them.

I'm sure that Jesus could have had any type of resurrected body He wanted. And yet, He chose one identifiable mainly by scars that could be seen and touched.

There are many ways in which 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 ideal body shapes. Jesus chose a body with scars.

We can 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 – Easter turned into a memory. Because of Easter, we 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*)