

**God's Wounds
(John 20:1-18)**

4/16/23
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Resurrection vs Life's Horrors

I'm going to ask a question and then give an answer that makes sense to me. The question is, "Why is the power of Christ and the resurrection so important? And my answer is that it has to be, because some of the things that happen in this world are so terrible and horrifying that we need a power greater than ourselves in order to go on.

This Sunday's reading, on the first Sunday after Easter, goes straight to that point, by putting those horrors in life in a direct face-off with the resurrection when the Resurrected Christ tells Thomas to explore the wounds on his body.

Circling the Wagons

At the beginning of this reading, Jesus's followers are in a grim situation. The Resurrection hasn't really sunk in as a reality and they are still reeling from the horror of seeing their beloved teacher spit on and tortured to death on a cross before a heartless crowd. And they are afraid that they will be next. So they are hiding indoors and they are so

afraid that they have bolted the doors. It's a total circling of the wagons and shutting out of the world. The earth that they once walked upon in relative freedom and love, has become a world that appears to now be under a sinister reign of violence and evil.

Does this sound familiar? What happened to the days when kids used to run around outside and play all over the neighborhood until Mom or Dad called them home for dinner? What happened to the days when the worst thing that could happen at school was that you might get a D or an F on a test or some boy or girl you liked might not like you back. There is so much anger and hatred in the air in today's world and we too wonder whether we or someone we love will be next. And in this atmosphere, it is tempting to circle the wagons and lie low.

Facing the Wounds

When the Risen Christ invites Thomas to put his finger into his wounds in order to see that it is him and that he is truly alive; he is also showing us that our participation in his resurrection is not an escape from the terrible woundings that happen in life. He is showing us that we will recognize him and be able to confess him with true understanding, as we explore and relate to the very suffering from which we wish to flee. We meet the Risen Christ when we confront the

wounds of the world, wounds that God suffers as the wounds on his own body.

Gun Violence sans Politics

I'm speaking generally, but I also feel the need to be specific. I don't want to be specific, because the wound I am going to touch is so troubling. It has recently been announced that gunshot wounds are now the leading cause of death for children in this country. I spent some time looking at the figures and we are way off the charts compared to the other 64 highest income countries, when it comes to death from handguns and the gap keeps widening.

And we know that part of the reason this is happening is because politics and money are preventing us from addressing the problem in a reasonable and unified way. The majority of people, even most gun owners in this country want common sense gun regulations and yet our political parties are unable to do what needs to be done.

I want you to know that I am vigorously against ministers being mouthpieces for either of the major political parties. And so I am speaking to you now as a follower of Jesus and specifically without referring to any political party. My commitment is to never try to tell you who you should vote for or how you should vote, even though I

think it matters a lot. But what I will do is suggest to you that Jesus does not want us to walk away from this wound on his body. He calls us to reach out and explore it, however awkward or inappropriate it may seem, to recognize how he is present in it and then follow his leading.

Denial and Reality

For the most part, I would argue that we refuse to touch this wound.

We refuse to acknowledge and address how devastating and unacceptable is the reality that lies behind the shocking statistics.

Instead, we have normalized what should not be normalized. We have turned a reality that is deeply shameful into something we are willing to live with.

Imagine that you are the talking to the mother of one of the children killed by an AR 15 this year and she asked you what your position on gun control is? If we are able to answer at all, my guess is that most of us would give an answer that reflects where we are on the political spectrum. We might say that we need common sense legislation or more access to mental health or we need to protect the 2nd Amendment.

When we talk about the situation through the lens of our politics, we are in the realm of concepts and strategies, where our emotions can be held in check and we don't have to face the reality.

But what if the mother invited us to come and see the body of her child for ourselves and we had to see that child in a coffin and see what an AR 15 has done to this beautiful and sacred child and so many other children? An AR 15 round doesn't just go in and out in a straight trajectory. It is a tumbling round that is designed to cause maximum damage. What would you say then? What would be your response at seeing the reality apart from all the words that we use to cover it up? Or could you even bring yourself to see for yourself?

As I was writing these words, I decided that I needed to put myself to the test and see whether I myself actually have that courage to touch this wound. I googled the words, "What does an AR15 do to a child's body?" and typed in "images." Then I steeled myself to see what I knew would be a nightmare I could not unsee. I scrolled down the page and to my relief, there were no such pictures, only pictures of AR15 rifles and dummies and graphs. I scrolled quickly through several pages and did not go back to look again.

Of course, I understand why there were no pictures to see on-line. It is because it is a horror so disturbing and a deed so evil and unspeakable, that we shield ourselves from seeing it. It is why I hesitated to preach on it. And yet, by not being willing to touch and see, we allow ourselves not to feel and because we don't want to feel, we leave the door open for the unspeakable to continue to happen.

But Jesus is the Savior of every little child. He sees it all and through the power of his resurrected presence, he wants to ensure that every grown up will see and make sure that every little child grows up to have a full and joyful life.

What is the reaction of a person who puts his fingers into that wound and sees? I think I can answer that question for myself, but I can't answer it for you. I can only say that that is the place where Thomas met God face to face and became a true believer and suggest that we all follow his instruction and touch and see for ourselves. (That's my politics).

One thing I can tell you with certainty is this. No argument can be made for shooting another person on the basis of the words or actions of Jesus himself. There simply is no place in the Bible where he endorses

killing another person. There are all kinds of viewpoints on the use of deadly force and we are free to weigh and consider them. But what we cannot do as honest Christians is point to Jesus himself as the one who justifies it. That would be putting words in his mouth that are not there.

What Jesus does do is counsel us to react to the wounds on his body and the turmoil in life, first by drawing on his peace and then living out of that peace. “Put away your sword, for those who live by the sword will die by the sword,” are his words in the very moment when violence would have best served his own interest.

Friends, this is the last thing I want to talk about on the Sunday after Easter and probably the last thing you want to be reminded of. But this story immediately follows Easter for a reason. And that is to bring our experience of the resurrection face to face with the wounds of the world, so that we may discover that the resurrection is the answer to the very things we most fear and wish to hide from.

It is because Christ who has borne those wounds and lives and makes his presence known to us in the world’s suffering, that we have the power to go out there and live as free people, to walk outside and laugh and be joyful and not be cowed into hiding in fear, even when the kind of evil we are talking about is present in the world.

So that, even though the Gospel today bids us to deal with such a troubling subject, we should keep in mind that the final emphasis is on the best news we could ever hear; that Christ is Risen and gives us the victory over even our most unspeakable fears. That is also the message in the crown of thorns which was adorned at the Sunrise Service last week. We acknowledge the barbarity of those sharp and cruel thorns, but see also the bright flowers with which they are intertwined. Both are contained in that sacred halo!

Our lives don't have to be controlled by our fears. We can live in freedom and joy, responding to violence, not in kind, but in the Peace of the Risen Christ. He is alive among us and that means, no matter what happens, the love of God will win the day. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!