

**Put Your Finger in His Side
(John 20:19-31)**

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Rev. James Koyama

This morning's Gospel is one that you will be familiar with, because it is the assigned reading for the first Sunday after Easter every year. And it is repeated so often, because it adds so much to our understanding of Jesus's resurrection and what it means for us.

And perhaps the most intriguing moment comes when Jesus invites Thomas to put his fingers into his wounds. It is also a disturbing moment, when you think about it, because putting a finger in someone else's wound seems like a very intrusive and insensitive thing to do; an uncomfortable invasion of privacy.

Most people would be very hesitant to touch another person's wounds, even if they were invited to do so. You would certainly be worried about causing the other person to jump in pain or that you might get the wound dirty. And if the other person's wounds are emotional or spiritual, it would seem doubly intrusive. How presumptuous and nosey to be inserting ourselves so boldly into someone else's business!

What makes this moment intriguing is that Jesus encourages Thomas to do just that; to put his finger into his wounds and explore them. Why would he invite Thomas to do something so seemingly invasive and inappropriate? And furthermore, how is it that Jesus's invitation leads Thomas to suddenly recognize him as his God?

There is a straightforward literal answer to these questions and a deeper answer. First the straightforward answer. If Thomas recognizes that the wounds on Jesus's body now are the same wounds that were inflicted on Jesus as he died on the cross, he will see that this is one and the same person. He will see this as proof that Jesus has been raised from the dead, and as a result, he will confess that the one who stands before him is his God.

But Jesus is doing much more than helping Thomas to make a logical connection. By directing Thomas to explore his wounds, he is revealing his inner being, the nature of his Spirit. God reveals God's inner self to us by inviting us into an intimate encounter with life's wounds, his wounds, the wounds of others and the wounds that we ourselves bear.

Somehow, by following Jesus's example of caring for others and witnessing to their suffering, we encounter the one who saves us in all his beauty and graciousness. We encounter the one who we suddenly recognize as the God of our lives.

Practicing our Faith

One of Jesus's acts of caring in this morning's story that we could easily miss is his decision to appear twice. The first time he appears Thomas is unfortunately missing. Somehow, he misses this critical moment when Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit onto all the other disciples. And the beautiful thing is that Jesus comes back a second time, just for him.

This is how the Good Shepherd feels about his sheep. If he only counts 99 out of a hundred entering the fold at night, he goes out looking for that one until he finds it. None are to be abandoned and left out in the cold. Likewise, Jesus comes back for Thomas, so that Thomas will also experience his resurrected presence. And it's how we should feel about each other too. When the Risen Christ becomes alive in us, we look out for the people on the edges, who might get lost.

Uncomfortable moment comes before a saving moment

I'd like to come back to that uncomfortable moment when Jesus invites Thomas to probe his wound. Because I think this moment helps us think about how it is that sometimes people do get lost. It helps us think about what is involved in being Good Shepherds to each other.

Generally speaking, I think that we are a people who are very respectful of each other's privacy. The idea of pushing our way into someone else's business is something we consider rude and inconsiderate. Perhaps we also see it as inviting too much intimacy and so we avoid it.

And we feel even more reluctant to intrude when people are struggling with personal issues, illness, grief, anger, or financial problems. We see it as an invasion of privacy and we tell ourselves that these things other people are going through are none of our business; that it would be almost voyeuristic to make the details of someone else's suffering a matter of our own interest. And so we keep our distance and give others their privacy, even when it seems to us that someone is at great risk of getting lost.

What I find interesting is that, in our Gospel story, Jesus invites Thomas to poke around in his wounds in spite of the awkwardness of doing so. And I think we can understand this to mean that he is inviting us to question our reluctance to insert ourselves into the lives of others. Sometimes we need another person to come in; to see us in our suffering and maybe even give us a push in the right direction. At the very least, Jesus seems to be calling our hesitancy into question.

The story also calls into question our own reluctance to expose our own wounds before others. If Jesus invited Thomas to explore his own wounds in a way that revealed his true identity, then why are we so careful to conceal our own wounds from others?

I think that there are a lot of people who fall through the cracks because we are too hesitant to take the initiative and make a call, knock on a door, and sometimes push the boundaries a bit on being willing to hear and explore the suffering of another or revealing our wounds and weaknesses. We are all Pastors in this church (another word for shepherds) and Pastoral Care constantly presents us with situations where you find yourself wondering whether you are being too bold or not bold enough in a given situation.

And when we are faced with this dilemma, I think this passage invites us to consider the option of being more bold, because, it is in these moments of vulnerability, when we reveal ourselves to each other, that the Risen Christ reveals himself to us.

And so it must also be that when we go in the opposite direction and avoid all intimacy, or when we present ourselves to others as though we are without wounds, the opposite occurs and the Risen Christ remains hidden.

In conclusion, when Jesus invites Thomas to put his finger into his wound, I take it as a prompt to us to consider being more bold. When you ask, “How are you doing?” and someone else says “I’m Fine!” But the way, they said it doesn’t sound fine at all. Let’s not be too quick to jump to the conclusion that honoring each other’s privacy is the foremost concern. Perhaps, if we are bold and inquire further, on the other side of a moment’s awkwardness, there is the possibility of sharing an encounter with the Risen Christ. Maybe sometimes the fear of awkward moments is all that lies between us and our salvation.