

Easter II (A)
Acts 2.22-32/Psalm 16/I Peter 1.3-9/John 20.19-31
St. Paul's Church, Halifax
30 March 2008

The Risen Wounded Christ

~Paul H. Friesen~

Well, this is the Sunday after Easter. We call it, these days, the Second Sunday of Easter.

It used to be called the 'Octave' day of Easter. And that is because in an older European world today was the last day of an eight day public celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ—a celebration that went from Sunday to Sunday.

Of course we still can say 'Alleluia! The Lord is risen' today, on the Second Sunday of Easter. But we really can't have an octave of public Easter celebrations today in Canada. So a fair question is: What kind of a resurrection week have we had as we've gone about our business?

If you're at all like me, you've experienced a mixture of things—extra time in the kitchen, holiday celebrations with others, and a shorter week to get done all the things you've put over till 'After Easter'—['A.E.'] Priests fall into this trap every year; maybe you do too!

But has Easter—the joy of the resurrection—infiltrated your life these past few days? To be honest, it's awfully easy to forget—to slip into old routines, or if that turns

out to be difficult, to spend some energy trying to get things 'back to normal'—to 'get over' the disruption.

But like you might have done, I caught myself thinking about some of the homilies and meditations I heard here on Thursday or Friday or Saturday during Holy Week.

Or perhaps you had some personal spiritual memories surface because of Holy Week. I did, when I read over the Psalm for today. The words in *Psalm* 16.11—'In your presence is the fullness of joy; in your hands are pleasure for evermore'—were engraved on my stepmother's memorial stone at my father's request, at the place she was buried on the eve of Easter, thirteen years ago. This week is a week for memories of other Easters, for many people.

But what I would particularly like to think about today is the meaning of the resurrection in the coming days as we go about our business as Christians, doing all the things all other mortals do. What did St. Peter mean in his Epistle when he said: 'By his great mercy [God] has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead'?

I think some help is offered to us in today's Gospel, in which the wounds of the resurrected Jesus are described not once, or even twice, but three times. If we can understand, just a little, the meaning of the resurrected body, we can live, at least a little differently, as the body of Christ, the name given to the church many times in the New Testament.

The story in the Gospel opens on the evening of resurrection Sunday and closes the following Sunday—this first Easter octave opens in fear, and closes in joy.

Some of the women have met the risen Jesus, a few of the disciples have seen the empty tomb, and there is a lot of confusion, and doubt, and nervousness. Are they meant to be next, the disciples worry, to be arrested and tried like Jesus by the same unholy alliance of religious and political leaders? You can almost feel their desperation to ‘get over’ the trauma of Holy Week.

And suddenly, Jesus is with them, in spite of the fear that led them to bolt the doors and huddle together. And he says, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.’

St. Augustine said, ‘The disciples recognize him only when [Jesus] shows them his wounds.’¹

Often when this Scripture passage is read, we gravitate to the absent apostle, Thomas, who wouldn’t believe in the resurrected Christ until he had seen him the following Sunday. Thomas, the doubter, went from frightened disciple to fearless Apostle, and by tradition took the Gospel to India, where the oldest church still bears his name—the *Mar Toma*, Holy Thomas Church. This is a true, and wonderful, memory.

But Augustine is right, all the disciples needed to encounter the resurrected Jesus, as they had known him before the crucifixion. And they need to meet the still wounded but resurrected Jesus, and hear him say

¹ In his *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 111-124, trans. John W. Rettig (Washington: Catholic University Press of America, 1995), p.60.

‘Peace’—‘Shalom’. Violence and the grave have been conquered. The deadly human cycle of sin had been overcome.

Augustine continues: ‘For nails had pierced [Christ’s] side, a spear had opened his side. And here the traces of the wounds were preserved for healing the hearts of [all] doubters.’² What is that Isaiah said, and we sing? ‘By his stripes [wounds] we are healed.’³

The wounds of Jesus are the sure and certain signs of his love for humanity, for us. Why else would we eat bread and drink wine and call it the ‘body and blood’ of Christ given to us, and do it whenever we meet? Why else have we done this from the very beginning?

The wounds of Jesus are what assure the disciples that he is the very same one who led them, and still does. Once again, it’s not how an ancient publicist would have imagined this great moment. There is no ‘air-brushing’ or ‘photo-shopping’ (as we say it) of this picture. The wounds didn’t go away.

And he breathes on them and again says, ‘Peace be with you.’ And in Jesus’ next words the wavering, frightened, unqualified, inconsistent disciples become Apostles. Jesus said, “‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’” The word ‘Apostle’ is a simple translation of the word meaning ‘sent one’.

The wounded but risen Jesus sends them. Not the blonde, Swedish weight-lifter Jesus you sometimes see in religious art! And the wounded but risen Jesus sends

² *Ibid.*

³ *Isaiah* 53. 5. All biblical quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version* unless noted.

wounded, but resurrected disciples. And he sends you and me and St. Paul's Church the same way to proclaim 'Peace'.

The newly made Apostles were to suffer more. It's how they've come down to us. You can see some of their early wounds in the glass of this church.

St. Peter said in his Epistle to his congregations, a decade or two later: 'In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour.'

St. Athanasius read it this way: 'They grew and were made better, shining like gold that has been refined in a fire.'⁴

They were transformed by the resurrection. Their trials were turned from life-threatening to life-changing. But they were still known by their wounds.

They learned to preach 'Peace'. What did 'Peace' mean? What does it mean? Jesus did more and said more in this first resurrection encounter with the disciples. 'When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them.'

This was the message of the wounded but risen Christ, and the wounded but risen church.

⁴ *Festal Letters X*, in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scriptures: New Testament XI*, ed. Gerald Bray (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p.?

Last evening I sat with my older daughter and heard the story of the *Mokkatam* Garbage Village in the outskirts of Cairo, told by Becky Atallah, a Canadian who has worked for many years with a Coptic Orthodox priest. There is so much in the story. But as I heard it I thought about how these 'Garbage People' were like the wounds in the body of Christ, wounds in the Church. They still bear these wounds, they still sort Cairo's garbage, but they live as the resurrected Christ, a revived community.

The Garbage People were about the lowest group in Cairo 30 years ago. In a Moslem country they were seen as Christians (and may in fact have been descended from them) for they kept pigs and fed them from organic refuse in the same buildings in which they slept and ate and recycled garbage—and drank heavily and used drugs and remained illiterate and tragically sick.

Through a persistent garbage boy who led a reluctant Christian into his despised community, Christ rose among them. Their community was transformed. But above all, they knew that the wounds of the resurrected Jesus were the love of Jesus for them. They learned the power of forgiven sin.

And as Jesus breathed on them, they felt sent—to bring the wounded, but risen Christ to other Garbage Villages and to the whole city. In the desolate rock above their village they have carved out churches, the biggest seats 15,000, the largest church in the Middle East. It has become in fact a Cathedral for the city, with (as Becky Atallah described it) ragged garbage boys, transformed sinners, and high-heeled, gold wearing ladies from the city, all worshipping the risen Lord.

We all have our stories, we all have our wounds. The Easter season is our opportunity not to 'get over' Holy Week, nor to 'get over' our own tragic wounds, or to 'get over' the wounds of this parish.

It is a time to recognize the wounds in our bodies and in the body of the church, and in this city, and in the body of our society and in our world. It is the time to know the forgiveness of sin and welcome the wounded, risen Christ into our midst.

It is the time to know each other as well as Christ by our wounds, and to see them transformed by power of our Creator, our redeemer, our 'sanctifier'. It is the time to open our selves to the work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And in the mercy of God, this is beginning, and will continue in the Eucharist, and in prayer, and wherever we go this week.

Amen.