

Second Sunday of Easter (B/RCL)  
1 John 1.1-2.2  
April 19, 2009  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan

Here's a riddle from my *Celtic Daily Prayer* book for the Second Weekend of Easter:

*Question:* What are the only man-made things in heaven?

*Answer:* The wounds in the hands, feet and side of Jesus. (p. 684)

In heaven, we and our loved ones will be **whole**, no matter what illness or injury may have ended our earthly life. Not so with Jesus: He will always bear the marks of His crucifixion, as clearly as the week after He died and rose, when He invited Thomas to probe the nailholes with his fingers and ease his hand into the side sliced open by the centurion's lance.

Why **is** that? Why didn't God the Father make our Lord's scars disappear when He raised Him from the dead? Is the sight of them a silent accusation, a continual reminder of our sin, an eternal demand, "Look what you did to My Son!"??

Well, what did Jesus say to His friends when He appeared to them the evening of His resurrection, His first contact since most of them had left Him alone to be crucified? Did He sarcastically say, "Thanks a lot, guys...."? No. He said, "Peace be with you." And the next week, when Thomas was with them, what did Jesus say? "Peace be with you." He met Thomas where he was at –

"You need to see to believe? Don't just see, touch!" "**Do not doubt, but believe.**" (John 20.27)

In everything Jesus says and does, He shows the Father to us. Jesus' patience with our doubts is **the Father's** patience. Jesus' forgiveness of our sins is **the Father's forgiveness**. Jesus' stretching out His arms on the cross and saying, "I love you this much!" is **the Father stretching out His arms** and saying, "**I** love you this much!" What does the author of First John say in today's epistle?

This is the message that we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. (1 John 1.6)

This is not a God who leaves nail and spear marks as the reminder, “Look what you did to My Son!” This is the God who allows the scars to remain as an everlasting sign of His love for sinners. In the exultet, the high hymn of praise sung by the cantor at the Easter Vigil, we hear this testimony to the Father’s love:

“Oh, how wonderful the condescension of your loving kindness!  
Oh, how inestimable the goodness of your love,  
that to redeem a slave you delivered up your Son!”

[The slave is us....]

The heart of the first letter of St. John is the incarnation, the gift of the Word made flesh, God-become-man, for our salvation, our healing, our forgiveness! First John is a love letter about the love letter we received in the person of Jesus Christ! It reports first-hand receipt of the Good News:

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what **we have heard**, what **we have seen with our eyes**, what **we have looked at and touched with our hands**, concerning the word of life.... (1 John 1.1)

It’s like Thomas’ friends saying to him, when he resurfaced after his absence that first Easter night, “Take our word for it! We have seen the Lord!” The author of First John says to **us**, “Take my word for it! The word of life is real! It is life-giving! It is the source of our liberation from sin! It is the death of death!”

This is the message that we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

This Father doesn’t have the Son display the scars of crucifixion to the other children to say, “Look like what you have done to My Son!” Those scars are eternally visible to remind us, “I love you this much.” The scars left by nail and spear remind us both of the **cost** of our sin and the **consequence** of His love. God-willing, we’ll never forget either.

The author of First John calls Jesus our:

“advocate with the Father... the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not... ours only but also... the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2.1-2)

The point of our Lord’s suffering and death is forgiveness of our sins, atonement, at-one-ment, communion with God and with one another, the life and light and joy that proceed from our proximity to God, our abiding in God, as branches abide in the Vine.

The pain of Good Friday is that our sin put Jesus on the cross. The joy of Easter is that His death and resurrection won our salvation. Even in our darker moments, when Easter joy seems far removed, the sight of Jesus’ wounds, our communion with His suffering, and His communion with ours, brings comfort, hope and strength. Near the end of World War I a man named Edward Shillito wrote a poem called “Jesus of the Scars.”

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now;  
Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars;  
We must have sight of thorn pricks on Thy brow;  
We must have Thee, O Jesus of the scars.  
(*Celtic Daily Prayer*, p. 684)

In C.S. Lewis’ *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the lion Aslan is the Christ figure, who (in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) was sacrificed on a stone altar to free Narnia from an ancient curse. In *The Silver Chair*, a volume in the series, an important character, Prince Caspian, is found dead in a stream.

Even the Lion wept: great Lion-tears, each tear more precious than the Earth would be if it was a single solid diamond.... (p. 251)

In the midst of His grief, Aslan directs one of the human children, Eustace, to pluck a thorn from a thicket and bring it back to Him.

Eustace obeyed. The thorn was a foot long and sharp as a rapier.  
“Drive it into my paw, Son of Adam,” said Aslan, holding up his right fore-paw and spreading out the great pad toward Eustace.  
“Must I?” said Eustace.  
“Yes,” said Aslan.  
Then Eustace set his teeth and drove the thorn into the Lion’s pad. And there came a great drop of blood, redder than all redness that you have ever seen or imagined. And it splashed into the stream over the dead body of the King. At the same moment the doleful music stopped. And

the dead King began to be changed. His white beard turned to gray, and from gray to yellow, and got shorter and vanished altogether; and his sunken cheeks grew round and fresh, and the wrinkles were smoothed, and his eyes opened, and his eyes and lips both laughed, and suddenly he leaped up and stood before them – a very young man, or a boy... And he rushed to Aslan and flung his arms as far as they would go round the huge neck; and he gave Aslan the strong kisses of a King, and Aslan gave him the wild kisses of a Lion. (p. 252)

Today the blood of Christ raises us from the depth of our sins to life, light, love and joy; someday it will raise us from our physical death to unending life. As we are reminded in the Suffering Servant Song in Isaiah assigned for Good Friday:

...he was wounded for our transgressions,  
 crushed for our iniquities;  
 upon him was the punishment that made us whole,  
 and by his bruises we are healed.  
 (Isaiah 53.5)

Some sanctuaries hold statues of the resurrected Christ on the cross, dressed in His priestly robes; but next time you see one, look closely! The wounds of love will still be visible on our Lord's hands, feet and side. The scars show the ghastly cost of our sin and the saving consequence of His love. They are the only man-made things in heaven.

Amen.

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham