

# Scars

August 17, 2025

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ Online Ministry. This week's message is titled, "Scars." Thank you to Ed, Ashley, and everybody else involved in the service. The scripture reading is John 20, one to 18.

Happy birthday this week to Ruth, and happy anniversary to Lynn and Dave, and to Kathy and Earl.

## Scripture reading

### John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

## Sermon

### Scars

Well, good morning. It is good to see you. It is a delight to be here. The year was 1919. Four years of horrific war centered in Europe but expanding across the world had just ended. So everything was fine now, right? Back to business as usual. But it wasn't fine. The old usual was gone. Too many tables had empty chairs where husbands and brothers and fathers would never sit again. Too many men who did come back home came back changed, suffering from memories of what they'd seen, what they'd done, what had been done to them. And in this quiet

horror that followed the terrible explosions of war, a British pastor, Edward Shillito, reflected on how the Christian message, how the person of Jesus himself, mattered to a scarred and wounded world. And he wrote this poem, this prayer.

"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. The heavens frighten us. They are too calm. In all the universe we have no place. Our wounds are hurting us. Where's the balm? Lord Jesus, by thy scars we claim thy grace. If when the doors are shut, thou draw us near. Only reveal those hands, that side of thine. We know today what wounds are, have no fear. Show us thy scars. We know the counter sign. The other gods were strong, but thou was weak. They rode, but thou didst stumble to a throne. And to our wounds, only God's wounds can speak. And not a god has wounds, but thou alone."

Today I want to suggest that the Christian life requires us to pay attention to scars. We'll look at Jesus' scars, what they meant to the first disciples and what they mean to disciples today. We'll look at our own scars and think about how we handle them. And we'll think about how we respond to the scars of others.

One spring morning, about 2,000 years ago, a Roman soldier with a hammer and nail knelt above a criminal, stretched out on a cross, condemned to die. And he prodded that criminal's arm to find the right place to drive that nail, that spike in, in such a way that it would hold for hours at least, and days if necessary. And then he did it to the other arm and then to his feet. And in nailing Jesus of Nazareth to that cross, that soldier did something that no human had ever done before or would do again: He marked the human flesh of our God in a way that will persist through all eternity. For as the poem observes, and much more importantly as John writes in his gospel, we do not confess that Jesus had scars, but that he has scars.

Scars. They tend to be unique. Probably more noteworthy to find scars that are similar than scars that are different. I remember at the age of about five, meeting dear Verna Hotchkiss, who had on her leg a scar that looked exactly like the scar on my mom's leg. Never seen two scars alike before and haven't since. That was my mom's scar. Practically, scars get used in investigation to find, to find people who need found to identify criminals. But the uniqueness of scars runs much deeper than that. What a scar represents, what it stands witness to, also tends to be unique. Scars are evidence of a story and not usually a happy one. Scars are evidence of harm that's been done. They stand witness to survival.

And surviving is definitely what we see Jesus' disciples doing in John 20. The horrific betrayal and torture and death of their teacher on Friday had surely scarred them. And now even worse, Mary Magdalene had found the tomb empty, which Peter and John had gone to confirm. And then Mary said she'd spoken to Jesus. But who could believe that? Pain and grief make us do strange things. They all too easily confuse our thinking. The disciples had no proof, had no reliable evidence that Jesus wasn't dead somehow. And they had a whole lot of reason to believe that he was. If there was anything the Roman Empire was good at, it was bringing death. So the disciples locked themselves together in a room. For all they know, the authorities are after them too. And they sit there and wait, sharing their hurt, sharing their grief. And suddenly Jesus appears. Locked doors don't seem to be a problem to the risen Lord.

He appears right there with them just as if he was never gone. He's the Jesus they have known and loved and lived with for three years. He's their teacher, their Lord, their friend, restored right there. And he pronounces peace upon them. But what could possibly bring peace for people whose hurt is so great? It's true. They can see their dead friend isn't dead. The marks of crucifixion are proof that he died, but scars are proof that he lived. Jesus has just suffered a three-day case of death and got better. But getting better doesn't undo hurt.

Jesus is alive, and that's the most incredible news possible. But he was still betrayed. He still suffered in some of the worst ways imaginable. He still died. And even in the midst of this glorious joy, even in a world where Jesus is alive, and maybe, just maybe, things will be okay. Even in a world where the disciples have been empowered by the Holy Spirit in a way that Old Testament saints could only dream of, they will always live now with that experience of

horror and loss. Like their Lord, the disciples now have scars. Scars on the inside, on their hearts. But now, through Jesus, along with their scars, they also have hope. All of them except Thomas.

Thomas had not been there. And his friends told him they'd seen Jesus, told him Jesus was alive, told him there was no reason for hope, but Thomas wasn't buying it. Thomas knew the Lord was dead despite whatever delusion had seized his friends. There was a lot of biology. The ancient world didn't understand well, but they sure knew what dead was. And having been told by his friends that they had seen the risen Lord, John's gospel goes on from where our reading ended, to tell us, Thomas said to them, "If I don't see the mark of the nails in his hands, even put my finger into the mark of the nails and put my hand in his side. I will certainly never believe." A week later, his disciples were indoors again and Thomas was with them. And even though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and look at my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Don't be faithless, but believe." Thomas responded to him, "My Lord and my God."

Thomas creates for the other disciples what should be by any mortal analysis and ironclad impossibility. He will not believe that Jesus lives until he sees the marks that killed him. Only Jesus could weave his way through a paradox like that, walking through and I mean through the door to show the marks of death in his living flesh. And once again to pronounce peace upon his followers in the midst of their hurt. We are often rather hard on Thomas. Thomas is the one who pulled back from fellowship and the support of the rest of the group. Thomas is the one who doubted the apostles' reports of having seen Jesus. Thomas is the second-rate guy who barely squeaks through as an apostle, somehow lesser than the rest of us whose faith is distinct from evidence. But this story should make us stop and ask what is our response to scars? And first, what is our response to Jesus' scars? Because although Jesus invites Thomas to touch his scars, it's not clear from the text that Thomas actually does. What happens is much more significant. The scars of Jesus immediately drive Thomas to worship.

Do we respond to Jesus' scars so well? Are we maybe sometimes a bit embarrassed by them? Living in a modern world where such unspeakable violence can hardly be something we find meaning in. Do they make us uncomfortable, sad, or guilty, or insecure? Do Jesus' scars make us more certain of our guilt and inadequacies than we are of God's love? Or do we have a well-oriented heart that like Thomas is ready not only to believe but to worship?

What's our response to our own scars? Not so much the scars we can see as the ones on the inside. Do we try to ignore them? Do we find them inconvenient? Maybe we're embarrassed by our scars and what they do to us. Our reactions to difficult situations, past experiences that trigger unwanted feelings, memories that continue to ache or even harass. I think if we're honest, the only thing we hate more than being weak is looking weak to others. And I think that's just as true for Christians as it is for everybody else. We would like to be rid of our hurts. We want to be better, we want to be useful, and we want to get to define what useful looks like. But what if our scars and our weaknesses persist? What if healing never ends this side of glory?

Can we, with the Apostle Paul, hear Jesus say, "My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness." Can we trust that while Jesus hates all of the sin and suffering and brokenness of the world that has harmed us, also by his power he can cherish our stories, hold our lives in his gentle hands, and treat our scars as a feature and not a flaw of his plan?

So let's be careful how we handle our own scars because the next question we have to ask is, what is our response to the scars of others? Maybe you're surprised I didn't start here. Shouldn't we think of others first? But I think coming to terms with our own scars is necessary before we look at what we do with the scars of others. How we treat others very often is a result of how we've been treated and what we believe about ourselves. It can be difficult to be sensitive to the hurts of others and to be patient with them. People are messy and complicated and inconsistent and terribly and wonderfully human.

Almost every person we know surprises us with their moments of magnificence and their moments of face-planting failure. And I would say when it comes to people who have big wounds and big scars, people who've survived any manner of hurts and abuse and trauma, these extremes can often become even wider. People who have immense zeal for God and good instincts with others, but who can easily be caught in an emotional spin. People whose questions have to be answered over and over, sometimes because their hurts have simply made it hard for them to process the answers. Sometimes because they lose convictions all too easily in the answers. How are we going to walk with such people? Are we going to walk with such people?

When I was in Bible college, I took a class on discipleship and one of the books we read said it was very important that the best disciplers should work on selecting and working with the the people with the most leadership potential so that ministers continue to make ministers. Back then, some 15 years ago, something about that bothered me. But I've matured since then and I look back on that suggestion now and it absolutely infuriates me. Save your so-called best people for the people who seem best in your eyes? That's not how the good shepherd picks the sheep. Who need him? Not how Jesus picked the 12. Who are we to know what kind of fruit patient tending could bear? We risk treating people like resources, like things. We risk treating people, in fact, like Judas treated the woman who anointed Jesus. All these resources could be put to better use. Who's better? Whose measuring stick are we holding?

Sometimes we'll raise up leaders. Sometimes we'll help shape gifting towards ministry, equip and encourage leadership, provide resources in our specialties and according to our gifts, and that's great. And sometimes we'll make someone a taco to make sure they've eaten that day. And sometimes we'll tell someone they're not failing the Lord because of a snap decision they made in a moment of crisis. And sometimes we'll explain to someone for the 378th time that they're loved, that their story matters, that they're a blessing to the church, that we're proud of them, that their faith is an example to us. Because scars can continue to hurt. Wounds can reopen. Insecurities resurface all too easily. But God calls us to be like Jesus, faithful and gentle as we minister to others.

Isaiah prophesied of our Lord that he wouldn't crush a bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering whip. Are we prepared for that to be our job description? Are we prepared to be tender servants who straighten trampled grass and rekindle smoldering embers? That's what a lot of Christian life looks like. It looks like cherishing people and attending to their scars.

So let's come back to Jesus' scars for just a minute. Because if how we treat others is how we've treated the Lord, then maybe it's worth asking once again how do we respond to Jesus' scars on his people? The scars of the least of these, my brothers and sisters. How many times has the church's mishandling or worse, inflicting of people's deep hurts caused the body of the Lord to depart from his church? I am convinced that a major mark of church health is how we attend to the scars of others. So I asked some people a while back, wounded people, scarred people, why they held on to their confidence in God's goodness through experience, particularly of hurt within a church context. And here's what they said,

"Christ held on to me in the depths of my hurt. I held on to my faith because people are messy, but God is good. For me, Jesus is absolutely undeniable, and I know he's heartbroken by what I went through too. He's not the one hurting me. He's the one who will tell many people who are harming others I never knew you. Even as a survivor of trauma from both family and church members, I never once considered walking away from the only one who gave me stability, peace, and hope."

Beautiful words, challenging words, the kind of insights that come through faith that has been tested. And most of all, the common thread is that the person of Jesus is what they held on to.

Christians cannot endure trials and hardship and abuse without truly knowing deeply and experientially the God who suffers with them, the wounded God, Jesus of the scars. Our spotless lamb, the King of Kings and thrown above the heavens, rules in majesty with his scars, and he always will. But someday, our scars will be healed. Our hurts somehow shall be unmade, entirely undone by the scars of Jesus. These brothers and sisters whose words I

just read knew that their scars were safe in Jesus' hands. And if we are Jesus' people, then they'll be safe in our hands, safe among people who are not ashamed of them, who aren't impatient with them, who don't explain away their hurt, but rather who care for them and point them toward the God who will heal us even more completely than he healed himself.

The other gods were strong, but thou wast weak. They rode, but thou didst stumble to a throne. And to our wounds only God's wounds can speak, and not of God has wounds, but thou alone. Amen.

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