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Easter 2

Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us pray...May the words of my mouth and meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, today's gospel reading is about scars.

And probably every one of us has a scar or two, or even more on our bodies.

We may have a scar from a surgery.

We might have a scar from an injury we suffered.

PAUSE

And scars are interesting for a couple of reasons.

Scars are proof that something happened to us.

Scars make something real, they are evidence of an event.

And with that in mind, I can't tell you how many times as a pastor, I have visited someone after a surgery and the person I am visiting feels compelled to show me their scar, regardless of whether I want to see it or not.

But, it is very important for some individuals to show their scars.

Because, again, scars are evidence of an event. They are proof of some thing, that some event, that some incident took place.

So that is the first thing about scars.

And a second thing about scars relates to the first.

Scars tell a story.

I have scar on my forehead that I got many, many years ago, when I was in middle school.

It is not the most of edifying of stories. It is not a story that makes me look very good. Because the scar is the result of my stupidity.

But back in middle school I was at the bus stop with my other schoolmates, waiting for the bus.

And while we were waiting we decided to start up a game of tag.

Well, at some point in the game, I was “it.” And I was tasked with having to tag someone, so that I wouldn’t be “it” anymore.

Well, the bus stop, where we were playing this game, was at the nearby elementary school, and we gathered to wait for the bus by the entrance of the school.

And the entrance to the school had an awning, a canopy that was a permanent, solid structure, not like a canvas covering or anything.

And this awning was held up by metal posts, rectangular posts.

Well, it so happened that during the game of tag, in my over zealous effort to tag someone who was trying to dodge me around one of these metal posts, I lunged at them and hit my head on the edge of the post and cut my head open.

And I needed stitches and the experience left a scar on my forehead.

Like I said, not one of my more glorious moments.

So scars, yes, are evidence of an event, and scars tell a story. We can also think of that scene from the movie *Jaws* when Quint and Hooper are exchanging stories about their scars.

And scars also then help identify us.

Indeed, we know, that sometimes it is necessary to identify deceased persons by distinguishing marks on the body, scars for instance.

And interestingly enough, when we talk about scars, we also need to recognize that scars are not just something human beings experience.

The landscape around us, communities even, suffer events that leave scars, and those scars are proof of such events, and those scars tell a story.

Think of the scar that was left in New York City after 9/11. There is now a memorial there that tells of the story of what happened at that site.

The same can be said at the 9/11 memorial site in Shanksville, Pa.

Or think of the devastating tornadoes that ripped through the south lately leaving utter destruction in their wake.

There are scars, paths of destruction, in many communities that resulted from those storms.

So, scars don't just appear on our bodies, they appear on the landscape and in communities.

PAUSE

And again, I bring all this up because today our gospel reading is all about scars.

In this reading, Jesus appears to his disciples after he has been raised from the dead.

And what does he do.

First he says, "Peace be with you."

He probably greets the disciples this way, because remember his disciples had denied him, and they had abandoned him when Jesus had been arrested.

And so, Jesus reassures his disciples by offering peace to his disciples.

He doesn't upbraid them, he doesn't lay into them, for their fear and rejection.

Instead, Jesus offers peace.

And then Jesus proceeds to show them his wounds, his scars from the crucifixion.

And those scars are proof that that crucifixion did indeed happen to the man standing before them.

Those scars tell the story of Jesus' suffering and death.

And so those scars identify the man in front of them as Jesus.

PAUSE

But aside from Jesus revealing his wounds to his disciples to prove what happened...

Aside from Jesus showing his scars to tell the story that indeed he, Jesus, was crucified and died and now has been raised...

Aside from Jesus identifying himself by his scars...

Jesus likely is also saying to his disciples something about servanthood, he is likely saying something about what ministry to other people looks like.

For remember, where are the disciples in this story?

They are in a locked room, squirreled away for fear that what had happened to Jesus could also happen to them.

And so, what do these scars of Jesus convey, but vulnerability.

And so here is something else about scars—they reveal our vulnerability, they reveal our hurts, our personal wounds.

And thus, Jesus, in revealing his scars is saying to his disciples, Jesus is saying...ministry is about vulnerability.

Ministry is about vulnerability.

And what does it mean to be vulnerable?

It means that one must be willing to take risks.

One must be willing to put one's self out there.

One must be willing to give of themselves.

One must be willing to enter into the pain of another, and even reveal one's own pain.

Ministry is not about hiding behind a closed door.

Ministry is not about taking refuge from the world.

Ministry is about a leap of faith, that is, vulnerability.

PAUSE

Now, this text is interesting, in that even after Jesus has revealed himself to his disciples, he visits his disciples a second time, a week later.

And where are the disciples the second time Jesus appears?

They are still in the same room apparently, locked behind a closed door.

Obviously, Jesus' message didn't sink in.

And even after Jesus visits the disciples again and reveals his scars again, the disciples still don't seem to get it.

They still don't understand the message that ministry is about vulnerability.

They still don't get it, because when Jesus visits the disciples yet again, they are at least out of the room now, but they are down by the Sea of Tiberias, the Sea of Galilee.

And what are they doing, but fishing. This takes place in John's Gospel after this text.

Yes, the disciples apparently decided to return to their former lives as fisherman—so much for fishing for people.

And we can almost hear the thinking of the disciples.

“Fishing is safe, fishing is what we know. We will go back to the life we have known and all will be well.”

Nope. That's not going to work. Ministry is about vulnerability.

PAUSE

Yes, scars tell stories. Scars remind us, scars are evidence, that something has happened.

And scars also identify us. And scars reveal our vulnerability.

PAUSE

And the single most important scar by which each of us has been marked is the scar of our baptism.

And it is not even a scar we can see. But God sees it.

When an individual is baptized, the pastor makes the sign of the cross on the forehead of that individual.

The pastor traces the sign of the cross on us and says, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

And that is our identifying marker as a Christian, as one who is called into servanthood, one who is called to ministry in the space of vulnerability.

And when I speak of vulnerability, I am not suggesting that we are to be haphazard with our lives.

I am not saying that we freely put our lives into jeopardy. That is not what I am getting at.

But, vulnerability means that first we recognize that often the person we are ministering to, is a vulnerable person, that the other person may be experiencing food insecurity, that other person may be emotionally vulnerable, that other person may be experiencing a life crisis in which they feel helpless and scared.

Vulnerability in ministry first and foremost means that we need to recognize where the other person is, that they very likely feel vulnerable, not safe, not secure.

Jesus knew this when he appears before his disciples in that locked room.

The disciples no doubt, no doubt felt vulnerable—they were fearing for their lives.

And so, what good would it have done for Jesus to have reprimanded them for having denied and abandoned him?

And so, again, what does Jesus do, but Jesus say to them, “Peace be with you.”

And second, vulnerability in ministry means that sometimes, many times, we will have to make ourselves vulnerable, that we will have to take some risk when we care for and serve others.

Often times that risk is just being willing to engage another person in conversation, to be with another person in their time of need, to comfort them with our presence.

That is all that is needed oftentimes, but even that can be hard for many of us.

Just being with another person can make us feel vulnerable.

It might make us feel uncomfortable, because maybe we think, “What am I supposed to say in that moment? What am I supposed to do when I am there with that other person? Do I have to pray with them? Do I have to speak some religious word to comfort them?”

To which I would say, “90% of ministry is showing up and being with another person.”

Woody Allen said it this way, “90% of life is just showing up,” although I don’t think he was talking about ministry, unless he was talking about general ministry, that is living according to our responsibilities.

90% of life is just showing up. So, if we can just be present with other people who are experiencing a sense of vulnerability...

If we can just show up, well then, hey, that’s already 90%.

That’s already an A.

PAUSE

So, that is the message I would have us glean from this gospel passage today about scars.

Scars are powerful. They convey a lot to us. They remind us of a past event, a wound we suffered.

They tell a story. They identify us. And they connote vulnerability.

And the baptismal scar we wear on our foreheads reminds each of us that Jesus became vulnerable for us, dying on the cross for us, that we might have the certain hope of new life, and so then we are called to enter that vulnerable space with others to bring hope as well.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.