



By His Wounds We Are Reconciled



A Sermon By
Ms. Anna Broadbent

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Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

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The Third Sunday of Easter
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A couple of weeks ago, my Dean at Virginia Theological Seminary, Ian Markham, said, “Welcome to the season of Easter, the most difficult liturgical season for Christians.” Dean Markham said these words as he was introducing our first of many speakers during a two week commemoration of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. What he was acknowledging was that we had celebrated Easter Sunday four days previously and we were about to settle into an intentional space of discussion dedicated to the life and work Dr. King as well as current struggles and needs for continued efforts for racial equality, reconciliation and justice. He was reminding us that we are truly Easter people, people of reconciliation and of resurrection, even though we are living in a world that does not always feel reconciled.

The more I ponder Dean Markham’s words, the more I agree with him. We’ve come into this Easter Season after 40 days in Lent – yes lent can be a space for challenge, preparation and intense spiritual growth – but in a lot of ways it is easy. During lent we, much like the disciples follow Jesus’ lead. We walk with Jesus through his preparation for his death and his passion – his death and resurrection. We’ve been pulled along by the excitement, sorrow and drama of this great story. Now it seems as if the story has found its happy ending – Jesus has risen and he’s even having a shoreline cookout with his friends.

Now we all know that this is not true and that the story of God at work in the world is not over in the slightest, but it is the part in which the reigns get handed over to Jesus’ disciples and to us. It is our job to continue the work that Christ started in this world. This is why being a people of Easter is so hard, because we carry so much responsibility. It is now our job to continue the work that Jesus started in the world and that is a lot. As our presiding Bishop Curry says, “This is the Jesus Movement” and we are called to help bring about The Beloved Community – that is the Kingdom of God.

This is certainly a huge responsibility, but thank God we do not have to do it alone. We have many supports. First, remember last week in John’s gospel Jesus breathed on the disciples before sending them out to do the work they were given to do? We are blessed to have the exact same gift of the Holy Spirit. We are never alone in this work. Second, we have an amazing community of those who hold the same responsibility, here at Grace Church. We have people here that can support us and lift us up when we struggle with this responsibility. Lastly, we have Jesus’ life to act as a blueprint for how our lives should look and what it takes to bring about the Blessed Community.

In today’s Gospel we have another story of Jesus appearing to his disciples after his resurrection, this time from Luke. There are definitely similarities between this story and the one from last week. The most prominent being the recognition and physical engagement with Jesus’ scars – with his wounds. This, right here, is a big lesson about what it means to live a reconciled life – in the resurrected life of Christ; we still carry the wounds of our past and the wounds of history. The fact that Jesus still carried the remains of his wounds into his resurrection is powerful. One it helps to remind us that we can be whole no matter what kinds of physical or emotional scars we may carry. Two, it teaches us that history is not forgotten simply because reconciliation has occurred. Jesus’ scars were not erased in his resurrection and neither are ours.

In each of the resurrection stories we have read the past two Sundays a part of Jesus’ interactions with his disciples has involved an invitation for the disciples to touch the wounds in Jesus’ hands, feet and side – this seems to be a part of reconciliation – Jesus showing his disciples his wounds and inviting them to touch them. While there is no text specifically outlining the interactions between the risen Lord and Peter, I wonder about this. What would it have been like for Peter, who denied Jesus three times, to see Jesus in flesh and blood? I can imagine Peter’s own disbelief and fear – then finally reaching out his

hand to touch Jesus' scars. I can only imagine that tears instantaneously feel down Peter's cheeks. Jesus had already pardoned Peter and the other disciples in each of the stories by saying "Peace Be with You" and yet, Peter and the others still had to reach out and touch the wounds that they had, in some ways, helped to inflict. Here, some level of healing could not occur until the wounds were shown, acknowledged and touched.

This right here is what it means to live a life of reconciliation and resurrection – We are deeply and intimately called to explore the wounds that our world carries and to touch them and to weep over them and to pardon them. These wounds could be sins we've inflicted upon one another in relationship and they can be large collective sins that have been inflicted throughout generations. This process takes deep vulnerability on both sides – and we have to acknowledge that we all have been on both sides. We've been the sinner and we've been the wounded. One party must be vulnerable enough to let down their guard and show their scars to another and the other must let down their pride, reach out and touch a wound that they have helped to create. That touch, right there, has the potential for true reconciliation.

I think that a problem that we have, particularly in this country, is that we want to have reconciliation without the recognition of woundedness. We try to skip a head, away from the painful parts of history – which will never work. Whether it be a wound in a marriage, between a mother and daughter or the wounds of slavery and oppression that permeate the fabric of our country. Until wounds are acknowledged and touched we will never be able to move forward – we will never be reconciled and we will not be living into our lives as Easter People. Once again, I say, Thank God that we do not have to do this alone. Thank God that the Holy Spirit is present with us as we engage this tremendously difficult work as Easter people and Thank God that we have an amazing place such as this to support us and to help us when we miss step in this work, because that will happen.

This work is not meant to be taken lightly and should be done in a deep context of prayer and mutuality. Sadly, on this earth, I do not believe that we can all be reconciled with one another. In many cases it is not safe nor healthy to show our wounds to the person or system that inflicted – nor may we be privileged to acknowledge every wound we've inflicted but the hope is that someone can acknowledge them and that a recognition of a wound caused can be uttered – even if it is not done in relationship.

Today I ask that you delicately take a first step in this work of reconciliation. I encourage you to take a brief moment and invite the Holy Spirit to join you in identifying one wound you have that you would like to have seen and to identify one wound you have caused that you would like to work towards being able to touch and to ask for forgiveness. As Jesus said... "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ... Please do not be frightened to truly be Easter People. Just as Jesus' resurrected body was needed for reconciliation and the sending of his disciples so are our bodies necessary for this work of building the Beloved Community – and once again, thank God we don't have to do it alone.