

SCARS TELL PART OF OUR STORY

Every scar tells a tale. One of mine tells of a run-in with a stucco garage while on my bicycle as a child, another a gravel-doomed foot race with our young son as an adult. None of my scars were obvious until last year, when skin cancer surgery left an unwelcome souvenir smack-dab in the middle of my face. With an altered smile, I give thanks that the cancer is gone, and count the episode a mere blip in my blessedly long life story. What stories do your scars tell? Perhaps they record biographical blips, perhaps major life dramas.

No scars attest to more drama than those in Jesus' hands and side, the enduring evidence of his crucifixion left by the nails and spear. Let's think about those scars, even as we bask in the joy of Jesus' resurrection, celebrated once more last Sunday.

From biblical accounts, we know that when Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, his human body was glorified. It was unlike anything anyone had ever seen. He was the same, only different. He was recognizable, yet not always (Luke 24:13-15; John 20:14-16). He was no apparition, because he still enjoyed a good meal, yet He could also somehow just appear inside a locked room (John 21:15; Acts 10:40-41; John 20:19).

In all this, his glorified body prefigures the glorified bodies we will have when we, too, are resurrected (Philippians 3:20-21). Yet, in all its mysterious glory, Jesus' body still bore the scars of crucifixion in his hands and side. Why? Why were they not erased?

Importantly, his scars proved his identity. To this day, scars are often the starting place for a pathologist wanting to make a positive

identification of a body. Jesus' scars conformed that He was, indeed, the crucified Savior, yet fully alive once more.

We see this revealed in an episode with Thomas, a member of Jesus' band of 12 that accompanied Him during his missional ministry. Thomas is remembered for his unabashed honesty, as in the time Jesus told his disciples that He was going to prepare an eternal place for his followers, adding, "And you know the way to where I am going." Thomas, not afraid to admit when things didn't add up for him, candidly said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (John 14:3–5).

And we see this transparency in Thomas again after Jesus' resurrection (John 20:24–29). The other disciples had already seen the risen Lord, but Thomas had not, and he said, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into his side, I will never believe." He has been maligned for this, in my opinion, as "Doubting Thomas." Was it unreasonable to want proof of such an incredible claim?

Jesus did not seem to think so. Eight days later, He again miraculously entered a locked room and stood among the disciples. This time Thomas was with them, and Jesus invited him to "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Now fully convinced, Thomas responded boldly, "My Lord and my God!"

We cannot touch Jesus' scars, but we have the New Testament to document the truth of Jesus' resurrection; and, as Jesus said to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29).

Significantly, this is the final episode of John's gospel, leading to his impassioned summation: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the

presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30–31). Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, died for us and rose again; his scars prove it; and with his wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:5).

With love in the Lord,
The Rev. Christine Maddux