Shortly after I had carpal tunnel surgery on my right hand, someone – I think it was Carter Holliday – looked at the red, jagged scar on my palm and said something like, “Wow, that's a lot to go through to identify with Jesus.” What I didn't say was, “It will be even more impressive when I have my left hand done.” Of course, there were much more mundane reasons for having the surgery, like pain and weakness in my wrist and hand. Besides, if I ever had any illusions about being anything like Jesus, if any of us ever did, those illusions would disappear immediately, as soon as we did something to prove how very clumsily human we are.

I thought about Carter's comment this week when I read John's account of Jesus appearing to his disciples in a home where the men were hiding, afraid that the same people who killed Jesus would come for them next. Though the doors in the house were locked, Jesus entered the house and stood among his followers. Mary Magdalene had told them that she had seen the Lord, alive after three days in the tomb. Maybe the disciples believed her, believed that she had seen *something*, but it's one thing to hear of someone else seeing the Lord and it's another thing entirely seeing him for yourself.

“Peace to you,” Jesus said, then he showed his disciples his hands and side, still bearing the red and bloody scars of where he had hung on the cross and where a soldier had pierced him with a sword. This had to be Jesus, the risen Jesus the two women named Mary had seen. The disciples were dumbstruck as they stood there and said nothing, so Jesus repeated his greeting, “Peace to you. Just as the Father sent me, I send you.” Then Jesus took a deep breath and breathed into them. “Receive the Holy Spirit,” he said. He spoke to them about forgiving the sins of others so that they are gone for good. Still the disciples were speechless. If you were there, what would you say to such an apparition, one that was too strange to be true and too true not to believe?

As luck would have it, or as God would, Thomas was not with the disciples when Jesus first came to them. Thomas was always the hardest to convince of anything, so when the others told him, “We saw the Master,” he said he would have none of it unless he saw Jesus' wounds and touched them for himself. So, about a week later, Jesus came back and Jesus invited Thomas to do that very thing. That's what it took for Thomas to be on board with the others.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could see Jesus in the flesh, too? We might not do something as gory as sticking our fingers in Jesus' wounds, but just seeing the scars might make it easier to believe. It must not have made sense to Thomas and his friends and it doesn't make sense to me, but Jesus says that those who believe in his resurrection without seeing it with their own eyes have even *more* blessings than those first disciples. Maybe it's because when Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit into us, it kindles a fire of faith that is in itself a gift of the risen Christ. Maybe it's because we have to suspend our need for flesh and blood proof in order for faith to work in us. Maybe it's something else that is hard to put into words. This I do believe: that the fullness of God's love is given to us in God's son, who lived among people very much like us. That love comes to completion in the death and resurrection of Jesus, whose new life gives us new life and the world hope. The scars on our hands and bodies do not make us more like Jesus. His scars show us how he has suffered for us, how he suffers for us every day.

I have more scars than this one on my body: physical scars from childhood accidents and adult medical care. We all have them and sometimes explain them to others as a hisory of how we came to be at this point in our lives. “This is from when I fell off my bike,” or “this is from that car accident,” or “this is from when I had my appendix removed.” We all bear scars that no one else can see, illnesses we take medications for or weakness from a chronic illness. And then there are the emotional and spiritual scars, those that can be the hardest to reveal, that private suffering we wouldn't dare reveal to another. Pain from being rejected by another, from being ostracised for looking different or thinking differently, from suffering trauma or loving someone we are told we shouldn't. If we were to draw all these scars out on a map of ourselves, we would see the chaos we often feel inside.

Those who were threatened by, who hated Jesus, left him scarred and broken, dead and buried. But death has no power over Jesus and his love. God raised Jesus from the dead not just to prove that, but to pour love into each and every one of us, every single day. For it is through our scars that Jesus enters us and makes us whole. All those places we try to hide from others? Jesus sees them plain as day and reacts not with revulsion but with tender love and compassion, entering every crack and crevice in our skin and in our souls, to soothe and heal and revive us. Jesus breathes peace into us, hope into our lungs, the Holy Spirit into our lives. Jesus touches our scars with his scarred hands, for he feels the pain of being human, of living in a world that can cause us more pain than peace. And Jesus touches all the broken and shattered parts of our world, too. Where we make war, Jesus wages peace. Where we separate one from the other, Jesus unites. Where we sow seeds of suspicion and hate and rejection and distrust, Jesus brings a harvest of forgiveness and gives us strength for the journey of healing.

“Peace to you.” When Jesus touches our scars, we become part of his resurrection. Today, when someone shakes your hand and says “Peace be with you,” know that Christ is present to heal your wounds and calm your fears, to give you new life. Then say words of peace to another, and feel the Spirit breathed into you tell the good news:

“I have seen the Lord!”

Amen.

*Easter 2A*

*April 23, 2017*

*Floyd-Willis Lutheran Parish*

*John 20:19-31*