

In the 1970's, Santa Cruz, California, was a very different sort of place. There were great numbers of hippies – or has-been hippies – who lived there. The Summer of Love had long since faded into a psychedelic sunset. The 'flower children' who'd once inhabited 'crash pads' now held down regular jobs. Many of these has-been hippies had moved out to Santa Cruz because the rents were cheaper.

This population of former flower children had a certain impact when their children hit the public schools. One of the things the teachers found difficult was the names of the kindergarten students. Those classes had their share of Michaels and Lisas and Margarets, but there was also Sunbeam, Time Warp and Meadow. One teacher thought she'd seen about everything when it came to names, until the first day of school came round, and she met a boy named Fruit Stand.

The teacher felt sorry for little Fruit Stand, having to go through life with a name like that, but she decided there was nothing else to do but make the best of it. All through that first day it was: "Fruit Stand, can you bring me the chalk?" and "Fruit Stand, are you ready for your nap?" But this little boy seemed oddly distant. He participated in all the classroom activities, but he didn't seem very happy. Finally, at the end of the day, it was time for the children to go to their buses. "Fruit Stand, do you know the name of your bus stop?" the teacher asked. No answer. That wasn't so strange, the teacher thought, because the boy hadn't said much all day. One of those shy kids.

But no matter. The teacher had a trick up her sleeve. All the parents had been told ahead of time to write the names of their children's bus stops on the reverse side of their name tags. The teacher simply turned over the boy's tag. And there, neatly printed in block letters, was the word 'Anthony.' (From HOMILETICS ONLINE, Oct 18, 2020)

OK, some gospel background. This week, we have Luke's version of the Easter evening encounter between Jesus and the disciples. Last week, John's version was cryptic and mystical – Jesus exhaling the Spirit upon His disciples. Luke's Jesus makes appearances at 2 different meals on Easter – a bit like the newly married couple having to attend 2 Easter dinners in order to satisfy both sets of parents. Also very Lukan in view because we remember that the whole gospel is set around 10 meals. And here we see a very cholesterol conscious Jesus – no fish and chips for Him -- He eats BAKED fish with His disciples to prove that His resurrected form is still human flesh.

Jesus comes suddenly among them with the same greeting as in John's version last week: "BOO!" Well, that's what I bet He was TEMPTED to say! No, the text reports that He said "Peace be with you," but the disciples are "terrified and afraid" (v. 36). They don't launch into a chorus of alleluias. They conclude that what stood before them, what walked with Cleopas and friend, was a ghost.

Scholars pretty much agree that the resurrection of a single individual in the midst of history was an unprecedented notion in the Judaism of the day. It's no wonder that the disciples were startled with doubts rising in their hearts; it is surprising that Jesus even asked: "Why are you troubled?" "Because you scared us half to death!" At the time, many believed that there would come a resurrection at the end of time – God's vindication for their faithfulness, but this immediate resurrection of Jesus left them completely thunderstruck.

So before Christians could go around convincing others that Jesus had been resurrected in the flesh, Jesus had first to convince His own disciples that He was not a ghost. But He makes His arguments by showing them His hands and feet, marked still by nails and also made whole again. "Look at my hands and my feet,"

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He says, "It's really me! Touch me and see, for a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones like you see I have." (Lk 24:39)

And then Jesus does the next most embodied thing He can do. He asks them for something to eat. Luke does not record for us the disciples' responses, but it's easy to imagine their fearful and perplexed murmuring simmering into awe and wonder. Ever since I saw the Harry Potter films, I think of how the ghosts simply passed THROUGH the food, and LONGED to be able to actually eat it. The disciples might not understand the 'how' of the resurrection, but they had no counterargument regarding the 'what:' Jesus Christ alive again, in the flesh, eating leftover fish. They had seen His 'absolutely and totally dead' limp form removed from the cross, but now He was alive – in fact, looking more alive than anyone else they had ever seen. (adapted from PULPIT RESOURCE, Willimon, p. 9-10, April-June 2021)

Second, the scars of Jesus are always part of the resurrection accounts. They are important both theologically and spiritually. They make it clear that it is the same person standing before them who was pierced by nail and spear just a few days earlier. And spiritually, for us as human beings, we know that there is something deeply compelling about the scars that we all carry on our bodies. We often try to hide our scars, are embarrassed by them, and would love for them to disappear. But wounds and scars that have come about from love are something to be revered and honored. I think of the scars women receive giving birth via Caesarean section, the limbs of soldiers lost in battle. I remember the first time I drove to the VA hospital in Fayetteville, being stunned by the sign: "Here the cost of freedom is seen in the flesh."

Fr. Gregory Boyle is a Jesuit priest who has spent decades ministering in the toughest neighborhoods in Los Angeles. He is the founder of Home Boy Industries, which provides jobs and counseling to young men who have been released from prison. In an interview, Boyle told the story of Jose, a young man from the streets.

When Jose was 6 years old, his mother told him to kill himself because no one wanted him. I can't even imagine a mother saying such a thing. When he was 9, she abandoned him at an orphanage. His grandmother assumed custody of Jose, but she beat him brutally. It's no wonder that when Jose grew up, he turned to drugs and gangs.

Jose ended up in prison, which turned out to be the best thing that could have happened to him because it was there that he heard the message of Jesus. Through a prison ministry, he learned that Jesus came to die for us on the cross to take away our sins and give us new life.

As Jose told Fr. Boyle about his background, he showed him some of his scars, the scars left behind by his childhood beatings and his drug use and rough living. Since he found Jesus, Jose was no longer ashamed of his scars. As he said, "How could I help other wounded people if I did not make friends of my wounds?"

The risen Jesus showed the disciples His scars because He was going to send them out to do the work the Father had sent Him to do – to save wounded people. And they couldn't save wounded people unless they could see and touch and make friends with Jesus' wounds. Only then could they proclaim with confidence the limitless love of God.

Many people desperately want to believe, but something holds them back. Maybe if they could see His scars, it would make a difference. Why? Several reasons. My third point.

Some people have difficulty believing that God really cares about hurting people that much – that He would give His life for them. A Savior with scars in His hands and feet and side? Some of us are more comfortable with an impersonal God who is the Prime Mover, the Source of Being, a Source of life and power

but not of personality. The idea of God with nail prints in His hands and feet and side because of His great love for us is an idea we are not quite ready for.

Professor Maria Teresa Davila put it this way: Jesus' resurrected body shows His disciples that the triumph of life over death is 'not a victory without cost.' God's love for us required that He humble Himself, give up His power and authority, take on human form, and suffer humiliation and injustice and persecution and torture and death to save us. As Davila writes, "Victory didn't erase the scars. He continued to carry on His very skin the evidence of a life lived in radical commitment to God's love and justice."

The other piece to this is that many people have difficulty believing that life really goes on beyond the tomb. It seems too good to believe that there is a world beyond this one – another existence in which that which dies here is resurrected to new life there. Yet this conviction is at the heart of our faith.

It is difficult for most of us to face the thought of dying. If you think you have, then I ask -- do you have a will? And if so, is it up-to-date? And did you leave anything to the parish that will bury you? But I digress.....

In the Cartoon, "FAMILY CIRCUS" the family is evidently returning from a funeral. The mother says to the children in the back seat: "Well, yes – we'll see Granddad someday when we go to heaven." With that, the smallest child in the family says, "Could I just wait in the car?"

We can understand that sentiment. None of us wants to die. But that's life. No one gets to wait in the car. We will all die. Thankfully, that's not our final destiny. We were created for life, not death. God did not bring us into being for this world only. Christ showed us that death is no longer our enemy. Death has been conquered. Because Christ lives, we too, shall live. We no longer need to fear death. Without the Easter faith -- not only death but life itself is ultimately meaningless. What value is there in a love that ends with a grave?

So what if there really is a God who is intimately concerned with our lives? What does it mean if this life really is but a prelude to everlasting life? And what difference would it make to our life to see the hands and feet and side of the risen Christ? Would it cause us to take more seriously our walk with the bony Man of Galilee? Would it have some effect on the goals we have set for our life? After all, if life is truly eternal, some of our goals are going to seem awfully shallow and short-sighted.

The resurrected Jesus crashes through all of our earthly barriers. He shows us His hands and feet so that we may know that there is more to life than death. Those who live their lives in the light of eternity never run out of a purpose for life.

"See my hands and my feet...." God really does love us that much. To death. Amen. (last two sections adapted from DYNAMIC PREACHING, p. 78-81)