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Easter 2C
Peace, Seattle
April 7, 2013
John 20:19-31

HE SHOWED THEM HIS WOUNDS

I'll call her "Georgia," the woman who came by the church last week looking for some help. It wasn't the first time I'd met her, or the first time she had a request to make. But it had been a good long while—two years or so—since we'd last met, and she didn't look so good.

Several years back, Georgia was heading south on I-5, when she ran out of gas near Olympia. She managed to get part way down the exit ramp before her car coasted to a stop. It was dusk when she got out of her car and began walking to the nearest gas station.

The last thing she remembered was spying a station across the road, and taking a step to cross the street. The next thing she knew, she was waking up in an Olympia hospital with scrapes and bruises and a broken femur, getting prepped for surgery.

I met Georgia for the first time not long after she'd gotten out of the hospital and had made her way back to Seattle. She had two older children living with her, and a younger daughter in elementary school, and the broken leg had turned her world upside down.

I helped her out with some groceries through our Agape Fund, and that was that.

Now she was back again, with the same crutches, and a look of fear in her eyes. She was living out of her car with her three kids. Her 22 year old son—who, until a few weeks ago had been earning enough to help the family get by—had been laid off and they'd lost their housing.

Unable herself to work since the accident several years before, she informed me she was facing yet another surgery on the same leg—the fourth one—which, in spite of all the procedures, had refused to heal. This time the surgeon was going to take some bone from her hip and wrap it around the break area in hopes that it would stimulate the growth of new bone tissue and would help the broken area to heal.

The constant pain she'd been living with had taken its toll on her, and her doctor had avoided giving her a prescription for heavier duty painkillers because of their addictive qualities.

She would be going back to Olympia to the same hospital where the other surgeries had been performed. **Georgia was scared. She was working without a net.** She had no idea whether the surgery would work this time or not, she didn't know how long she would be in the hospital, she wondered who would bring her 12 year old daughter to school every day and bring her home at night. How food would make it to the table. She was desperate.

I HAVE A REQUEST TO MAKE—AND PLEASE DON'T SAY NO, she said.

She'd found a room that a friend was willing to rent to her, that could accommodate the four of them. Could I help her out? Thanks to your recent midweek Lenten offerings, my answer was YES.

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Georgia was so relieved…and grateful. I HAVE ANOTHER REQUEST, she said. I WANT YOU TO PRAY WITH ME. WOULD YOU PRAY WITH ME?

OF COURSE, I said, AND I HAVE SOMETHING ELSE I WANT TO GIVE YOU…
I showed her our prayer shawls and had her choose her favorite color.

LOTS OF PRAYERS ARE KNITTED INTO THIS SHAWL, I said. YOU CAN BRING THIS TO THE HOSPITAL WITH YOU. Then, draping it around her shoulders, we prayed.

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Our gospel story today is a familiar one to us. We hear it every year on the first Sunday after Easter.

After the joy and celebration of Christ's resurrection, it serves as a kind of REALITY CHECK. It records Jesus' first appearance to the apostles after his resurrection, and we get the feeling that his resurrection won't bring any instant changes into the lives of his disciple community.

We remember how the doors where they gathered were locked and the windows bolted shut, out of fear. We remember Thomas, of course, and the story of how he came to be called a "doubter."

We remember how Mary had come from the tomb early that morning to deliver the news I HAVE SEEN THE LORD, and how Peter and another disciple had run to the tomb and seen the grave clothes lying there by themselves.

Surely they had shared their experience with their companions. And yet, here they all were, later that same evening, huddled behind closed doors, frightened out of their wits.

John hints that their fear has to do with an expectation that they were next in line for arrest and crucifixion. But I wonder if at least some of their fear doesn't have as its object **Jesus himself**.

After all, nearly all of his inner circle had deserted him.
- Peter, "the Rock," had crumbled after Jesus was arrested.
- The one who blustered: I WILL LAY DOWN MY LIFE FOR YOU, denied he ever knew him.
- And even though Peter saw the deserted grave, we wonder what was going on inside his head.

I can imagine him with the others thinking, after Mary's report, WHAT WILL I DO IF HE SHOWS UP? HOW CAN I FACE HIM—I WHO RAN FROM HIM WHEN HE NEEDED ME MOST? WHAT WILL I SAY?

The sun is setting, darkness is approaching, and fears begin to crowd in on them from all sides. Into the midst of that fear, Jesus comes and stands among them. PEACE BE WITH YOU, he says.

He must have seen the fear in their eyes, the color drain from their faces, the shocked, baffled looks. **PEACE BE WITH YOU, he says. And then he shows them his hands and his side.**

Notice: there are no words of judgment—not a one. He doesn't try to talk them out of their fear nor does he say anything to suggest they ought to "suck it up," swallow their fear, and pull themselves together. **Instead, he brings them peace and shows them his wounds.**

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> "Our human condition," writes Jose´ Luis Descalzo, "is to be maimed; nobody lives for very long without losing some dream or other. There are times when it seems as if fate is being especially cruel; today we lose a hand, tomorrow a hope, the next day one of the mainstays on which our very existence depended, or seemed to."[1]

For some of us the maiming life brings is more visible. This, quite literally, was Georgia's story. But she is not the only one forced to reach out for an elusive healing with out a hand to hold. What the gospel tells us is that there is another hand—a wounded hand—reaching back toward our own.

If it is true that our human condition is to be maimed, when Christ shows us his wounds, it's as if he is saying to us:

YOUR INJURIES—WHATEVER THEIR ORIGIN AND WHEREVER THEY RESIDE IN YOU;
YOUR FEARS, YOUR MAIMINGS, HAVE BEEN TRANSFORMED NOW, BY THESE WOUNDS.

And in seeing those places where the nails pierced his hands and the spear pierced his side, our eyes are opened, and we recognize him as our Lord and rejoice.

To be known by one's wounds, to be identified by ones wounds—in the world's way of reckoning—is to set oneself up for failure. Who in their right mind wants to do that?

And yet, that's what the risen Christ does. He shows us his wounds. And this revelation becomes for the disciples, for us, not simply the source of his identity, but also the resource for our transformation; for our own resurrection.

PETER, in the lesson from ACTS today gives us a preview of where this story is going. WHAT HAPPENED TO PETER? HE WAS A TOTAL FAILURE! Yet here he is standing before his accusers—the same ones who brought Jesus to trial—and he's standing there without fear.

He's a different man. Something happened in his encounter with the Lord, something shifted inside him. The self-imposed chains began to fall away.

Paul says,

THE MESSAGE ABOUT THE CROSS IS FOOLISHNESS TO THOSE WHO ARE PERISHING,
BUT TO US WHO ARE BEING SAVED IT IS THE POWER OF GOD.
GOD CHOSE WHAT IS FOOLISH IN THE WORLD TO SHAME THE WISE;
GOD CHOSE WHAT IS WEAK IN THE WORLD TO SHAME THE STRONG;
GOD CHOSE WHAT IS LOW AND DESPISED IN THE WORLD, THINGS THAT ARE NOT,
TO REDUCE TO NOTHING THINGS THAT ARE... (1 Cor.1:18, 27)

Is there a weak point in your life? Christ can make it into a source of strength.

Are there wounds in your life which go unhealed? Turn them over to him and Christ promises to transform them into a source of healing for others.

Look for him among the scars and maimings of your own life. For that is where he will be waiting for you. Waiting to breathe his Spirit upon you. Eager to turn sorrow to joy and weakness to strength. Amen.

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[1] Jose´ Luis Martin Descalzo, *Reasons for Hope.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007) p. 86.