

Unless I See

John 20: 19-31

April 16, 2023

2000 years before we first heard the phrase “fear of missing out,” also known as “fomo,” Thomas became the poster boy for someone who has missed out. His friends were all there for the biggest reveal in history: Jesus was crucified, died, and appeared to the disciples....with the exception of Thomas—who missed it.

Perhaps you’ve been there. You’ve missed out. Somehow, you find yourself on the outside looking in. Something that everyone else seems to have experienced or seen or gotten, you’ve missed out on, and you feel left out. There’s a sense of isolation and loneliness in that.

That’s Thomas’ experience. That’s his perspective, and it’s very different than that of the other disciples. This is the first thing that I notice happening here: There is room for those who’ve missed out. There’s room for those who feel left out or on the outside looking in. There’s room here for a variety of experiences and perspectives to be given voice here at the dawning of the church. This is something we seem to have a hard time with today. We can’t quite abide giving people whose experiences and perspectives are very different from ours a place at the table. We would do well to remember that *all* of the disciples were given a place at the Lord’s table.

Jesus validates Thomas’ divergent experience and his subsequently different set of needs. Jesus meets Thomas where he is. It would seem that the wounds of loss and disillusionment suffered by Thomas can only be healed by Jesus meeting Thomas precisely where he is.

This is a running theme throughout Scripture. The Lord comes to us as we are—afraid, hiding behind locked doors, unable to believe, in conditions of all shapes and sizes. Despite these seemingly insurmountable obstacles, Jesus nevertheless shows up. Jesus shows up for the group, and he shows up for the outlier who needs extra time and extra help.

And so, I wonder how do we allow for this kind of divergence in the spaces and places that we inhabit? How do we make space for people who feel left out for one reason or another? Jesus shows us how, and it’s precisely in showing up in a way uniquely suited to Thomas’ struggle that he shows us what it looks like to show up for those who also have unique struggles. We’re called to meet people where they are, not where we’d like them to be. Not where we think they should be, but exactly where they are.

So then, let’s look at what happens when Jesus meets Thomas where he is. The first thing that he does is he shows Thomas his wounds. Yes, Jesus is alive, but he still bears the scars of his death. Even the risen Christ bares the wounds, the marks of his crucifixion. *We can’t miss this:* What was done to Jesus then, what we do to each other now, has eternal consequences. How we treat each other now matters eternally. When the Word became flesh, God united himself with all of us. God knows all our pain, our injury, everything that we inflict upon and suffer at the hands of each other.

And somehow, it is by his wounds we are healed. Henry Nouwen gave us a beautiful name for this, calling Jesus “the wounded healer.” Jesus

shows up for his struggling friend, and in doing so Jesus shares and shows him his wounds. This is a profound act of vulnerability. In this act of vulnerability, Jesus paves the way for Thomas to be healed of his grief and to be healed of his isolation from his friends.

Nouwen says that Jesus continues to heal in this way as we allow our own wounds to be sources of healing for others. For example, those who have suffered the wound of loneliness, offering “hospitality can convert that wound into a source of healing.” Our wounds can act as “teachers of [our] own and [our] neighbor’s condition...not as a stifling form of self-complaint but as a recognition of God’s saving promises.” Jesus came to fulfill God’s promise to set the captives free, and he does so by virtue of the very wounds that would seem to do us in. The Apostle Paul puts it this way: “Where we are weak, there we are strong.”

In God’s hands, our wounds are transformed into sources of healing. We see this reflected in the hopeful words of Job heard in our Old Testament passage earlier. Job’s words flow from an experience of unimaginable pain and suffering, and these same words have comforted countless others who have suffered down through the ages. Consider the musical depths of someone like Bach, depths which flow in no small measure from the deep well of pain and loss that he experienced in his life. When artists share some measure of their wounds, they touch some part of our wounds, providing a healing sense of connection. As this happens, we may find ourselves connected with the wounds of the risen Christ, who transforms those wounds into sources of healing through his resurrection.

But one doesn’t need to be an artist to do this. The Apostle Paul charges the church in this way. He says that God “consoles us in our affliction so that we may be able to console those who are in *any affliction* with the consolation by which we have been consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant in us, so also are the consolations abundant through Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:4-5).

This is Christ’s mission for us, the mission that he sends his disciples on, the job he sends them out to do on that first Easter Sunday, the job that we are still sent out to do. They—like him, like us—are sent to be wounded healers. The disciples, huddled and afraid, all alone and doubting, are consoled by the presence of Christ, who sends them out to share that same consolation with others. “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Blessings like this are not meant to be hoarded; they’re meant to be shared. Where you’ve experienced loneliness, *express hospitality*, knowing that your wounds may become a source of healing for others who are also lonely. Where you’ve experienced grief, *express comfort and compassion*, knowing that your wounds may become a source of healing for others who are in grief. Our wounds give us eyes to see the wounds of others and become a source of connection and deep healing. We are not meant to hide behind locked doors, to pretend and cover up our brokenness. We are meant to allow the Lord, who is also wounded, to transform our wounds into a source of healing for others.

What would happen if we risked *that* kind of vulnerability? Perhaps we, too, would see that as we risk sharing our wounds, we are in the company of a wounded Savior. We would see that it is by *his* wounds that we are *all* healed.

Thanks be to God.