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Sermon on John 20:19-29
April 28, 2019
Second Sunday of Easter

Proud moment in ministry . . . My very first summer as an associate pastor, I took my youth group to a conference at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colorado. One afternoon, during free time, we went on a hike up to Emerald Lake in Rocky Mountain National Park. I had about sixteen kids that year, and four other adults to help supervise. When you're taking that many people hiking along a mountain trail, you start to spread out a bit. As we neared our destination, one of the youth somehow tripped or stumbled, and managed to cut his knee. As luck would have it, I was the closest adult. I looked at his knee and it was bleeding, but it wasn't a serious cut—more of a scrape. But it did need to be covered up.

Now, the adult with the first aid kit was still a ways behind. I hadn't yet learned that EVERY adult should probably carry a first aid kit if you take a bunch of teenagers into the mountains for any reason whatsoever. This youth's knee needed covering, so I rummaged around in my backpack to see what I could find.

I did not have any bandaids. Or gauze. But I did have something clean and absorbent with me. It was one of those items you would find in the "Feminine Needs" aisle at the grocery store. It was individually wrapped, so it was sterile, and it was really the perfect shape and size to cover this young man's wounded knee.

And I didn't have any tape with me, but I did have a lovely pink bandanna. I used my pink bandanna to tie this feminine item around the young man's knee, and voila! He was good to go.

Now, after watching what I did to their friend's knee, none of the kids in that youth group ever came to me for assistance with a cut or scrape ever again. But they did occasionally let me help them with wounds of stress, rejection, loneliness and grief. Tending wounds is a big part of ministry, so thank goodness that all the members of a Presbyterian Church are considered ministers, not just the clergy, because there's a lot of hurt out there. (And by the way, if you're wondering what wound I treated the most, number one by far was the fear of disappointing their parents, a problem I think has only gotten worse since my youth ministry days.)

Speaking of wounds, did you notice the sequence of events in today's Gospel reading? Did you pick up on that? The disciples are in a locked room when Jesus appears to them on Easter night. He stands there and says, "Peace be with you." Then he shows them his hands, into which someone had driven nails just three days earlier, and his side, which a soldier had pierced with a spear, to make sure Jesus was really dead. THEN, and only then, did the disciples rejoice when they saw the Lord.

Now, in the passage leading up to this one, Mary Magdalene hadn't recognized Jesus right away either, but she did as soon as she heard him say her name. With the disciples, they needed to see his wounds.

Let's recall together the wounds of Christ. Before sentencing him to die, Pilate first had Jesus flogged. This was one of the most feared punishments a person could receive in those times. I read a description of a typical whip that would have been used—it had three tails to it, and each of them would have a little metal ball or a sheep's bone at the end of it, in order to inflict as much pain as possible on the recipient. Jesus would have been a mess after being flogged. The skin of his back would have been ripped open in multiple places. He would be dehydrated and weak from loss of blood and probably some vomiting.

Crucifixion meant nails pounded into Jesus' hands and his feet. It means he slowly suffocated over a period of hours, while still bearing the pain of the wounds on his back, and his hands, and his feet. I'm thinking at that point the crown of thorns was the least of his issues. And in addition to all that, he was stripped naked. Most artistic renderings of Jesus on the cross respectfully add a loincloth, because while we can somewhat handle looking at Jesus being crucified, we cannot handle looking at a Jesus who is being crucified, and naked. It's too much. And yet that only serves to highlight how humiliating crucifixion was . . .

Which is the whole point of crucifixion. It was the most shameful death a person could have. The whole point was to slowly and publicly torture the person to death with all their most private parts hanging out there, in order to send a message to everybody else.

So Jesus was not only physically tortured, but psychologically traumatized as well (starting all the way back in the Garden of Gethsemane the night he was arrested, as he knew what he faced, and begged his heavenly father to take this cup away from him, if there were any other way).

After his resurrection, Jesus was fully alive, and so transformed that he could enter a locked room. And yet, he STILL HAD HIS WOUNDS. The disciples didn't believe their eyes until they saw Jesus' wounds. Thomas refused to believe until he could see and touch Jesus' wounds. The wounds had become part of Jesus' identity. Christ would not be Christ, without his wounds.

We would not be who we are, either, without our wounds. The resurrection teaches us that God doesn't erase or eliminate our wounds, but heals and transforms them. The hope and the promise of the resurrection is that God takes every wound, even the ones we have inflicted on ourselves and on the ones we love, and God transforms them. Now, that doesn't mean we should

seek out things that hurt us. It doesn't justify hurting others. It doesn't mean that we get to use our wounds as an excuse or as a currency to get our way, as some people do. But as Julian of Norwich once said, "Before God, our wounds are our glory." As Richard Rohr puts it, the risen Christ "is the pledge and guarantee of what God will do with all our crucifixions. . . it is no longer an absurd or tragic universe. *Our hurts now become the home for our greatest hopes.*"

I don't know if I've shared my sermon-writing method with you before, but my habit is to study and scribble for a while, then get up and clean something. It clears my brain without distracting me from what I'm pondering. So yesterday, I got up and emptied out the medicine cabinet in the bathroom so I could Windex the glass shelves and get everything nice and sparkly, and I took down the toothbrush holder, which is made out of some kind of hammered metal, and turned it over to clean it, and I saw this label on the bottom: "Designed by skilled artisans for a more pleasant home. The natural beauty of this item is enhanced by irregularities introduced by the unique handcrafted process." Gosh, that's a mouthful for a toothbrush holder, but it got me thinking, and it reminded of similar labels that come with leather handbags or furniture, that the imperfections are signs of genuine leather, and make the item beautiful and unique. And of course, there's a big difference between losing a limb or an eye on the battlefield and the slight imperfections of a leather handbag, but you get the idea. God makes all things new, and heals all our wounds and diseases, but the beauty that emerges from our wounds stays forever.

I'd like to invite you to reflect for a moment on your wounds. Perhaps you already have a resurrection story to tell about some of them, about the terrible thing that happened, that made no sense and wasn't fair and shredded up your soul, and now you can look back and see how you would not be the person you are today without that wound. Or, maybe your wounds are keeping you awake at night, and you need some care, and if that's you, Pat or I would love to visit with

you and walk with you personally, or help connect you with one of our Stephen Ministers.

Whatever wounds you bear today, whatever they are, however you got them, I invite you to picture them in your mind's eye, and to visualize the light and love of God pouring into them, because that is what is happening right now and will continue to happen.

Remember that resurrection isn't just about people, but about all creation. As Psalm 150 says so beautifully, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." People, animals, trees, sky, the ground itself. Their wounds, too, touched and transformed. The whales who keep washing up on shore, with stomachs full of pounds and pounds of plastic, especially plastic garbage bags. The elderly dogs and cats that nobody wants to adopt. The bumblebees dying from our overuse of pesticides. Christ is Alive. He is Risen. WE are all included. Thanks be to God.