

The Second Sunday of Easter
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Acts 2:42-47

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

He showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples—instead of calling an ambulance or passing out at the sight of this gory specimen—were glad when they saw the Lord. This is a weird response. Even more weird is Thomas's desire to stick his fingers into the wounds, where the nails once tore through tendon and ligament, where the spear entered the body envelope of his Lord and God.

Weird, and yet, totally understandable. If I was in that room when Jesus came back from the dead, holes in his hands and feet and side, I would want to probe them too. I wouldn't be able to look away. It's like a train wreck, a friend's new piercing in an unfortunate location, a comically extravagant engagement ring.

We have always found this image compelling, and made much of the fact that Jesus bore the marks of his passion, even in his resurrection:

They recognised him not at first, but then they noticed his scars and knew and were glad. And if Christ is recognized by the damage he sustained in this world, perhaps we too are formed by the slings and arrows we have survived in this vale of soul-making. Maybe our traumas make us who we are, for better or worse.

Christ is risen, scarred still; perhaps he also ascends thus wounded, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, in the bosom of God, in the life of the Trinity, disfigured. There are wounds in God. And if so, disfigurement and disability are given dignity. Our superficial cosmetic preferences are thus challenged, as is our fetishisation of functionality, of utility.

And yet these interpretations seem too heavy-handed, over-extrapolated.

It seems condescending to be told that suffering builds character. It fails to do justice to the actual horrors of the world. Suffering breaks people as least as often as it builds us up. It should not be glibly romanticised.

And, of course, the wounded Christ is not in any sense *disabled*, though he is disfigured. I suppose they amount to the same thing in our world, with its obsessions. All the same, on his pierced feet he walked;

with his torn hands, he took fish and bread, and fed his disciples.

We are understandably eager to make something of this icon, but it resists neat theologising.

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Perhaps we are going about this the wrong way, then. I have been asking what the wounds of the risen Christ mean for the psychology of trauma and the politics of disability. But maybe these are too specific, or maybe not specific enough. What do these wounds mean *today*? By which I don't mean the year 2017, but the second Sunday of Easter.

These scars tell us that Christ's risen body is that same body, hung on a tree just days ago, beaten and naked; it has not been replaced, but transfigured. We too, on this side of the empty tomb, are the same crooks and cowards who hung him there, who denied him, who fled in the darkness, but, by the grace of God, transformed. Whatever the world to come is like, it is the same world as this one, which crucified its Lord, but renewed. There is, in other words, no escapism in Christianity, only redemption.

These wounds also reveal *our* woundedness, because Christ's risen body is also our bodies: after all, his humanity is our humanity, and humanity is irreducibly embodied. Let's return to the idea, briefly entertained earlier, that the disciples saw—really *saw*—their Lord only when he showed them his hands and side. His wounds were the particularities of his body that enabled recognition: that is, it is not a *male* body or a *Jewish* body that they saw, but a *wounded* one. This is important because it provides us a point of identification beyond his creatureliness and humanity.

In Christ's woundedness, we not only *recognise* ourselves, but are confronted with a truer image of ourselves. The risen Christ shows us who we are, relieves us of our delusions of grandeur and myths of self-sufficiency that tempt us to divide the world between our self-made, able-bodied selves and the poor souls who need our help, whether they deserve it or not. We are—the wounded Christ shows us—all of us, wounded.

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There is much about the biblical narratives of the resurrection that beggar belief, particularly in our modern times. Chief among them is that description in the second chapter of the book of Acts, describing what sounds like the formation of a socialist utopia in the light of the resurrection: *they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need*. This is, as we know in our day and age, impossible; we know better, in a world where austerity applies asymmetrically to the poor, where the rich, in our growing richer, have all but guaranteed that the poor will be with us always.

On the other hand, this is a perfectly sensible way to arrange a society that has been touched by Christ's wounds. The recognition that we are all, in diverse ways, disfigured—whether by our privilege or our poverty—is precisely the equalising basis for such an economy of sharing, of gift. It is not that the resurrection entails socialism; that too would be wishful over-extrapolation, at least on my part. But it does entail an interrogation of our starting points.

If we are all wounded, our concern for others whose wounds may differ from ours comes first from this solidarity, and not from a pedestal of our own wishful

devising. We are not to begin with assumptions about *inequality* that lead us into habits of dividing people into strong and weak, deserving and unworthy, givers and takers. We are, all of us, takers; everything is gift.

Perhaps this description of the world rings false: no more credible that the testimony of grieving women, hysterically claiming that their teacher had returned from the dead. I would not be surprised, so ingrained is the orthodoxy of our current political economy. But of course we do take; we who are able-bodied and skilled and diligent and, let's face it, wealthy.

We take from our genetic lottery, and the accidents of ancestral history and regional microclimate. We take whenever we exploit these randomly allocated advantages, to drive ever widening wedges between ourselves and others. Make no mistake: the gifts we can afford to give are so much blood money. This is a consequence, not of our individual moral characters, but of the systems in which we live and breathe and have our beings. We are as much unwitting victims as we are perpetrators of the tragedy of social injustice.

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And yet: redemption, renewal, transformation; in a word, resurrection. The risen Christ redeems all that he has assumed, wounds and all.

These resurrection wounds are not for hiding, for denying. They are for showing and touching, for bringing peace. And so it is that our wounds—even the wounds of our privilege—are our crosses to bear, redeemed to be our gifts, our imperishable and unfading inheritance, not to hoard, but to share.

Wounded, he says peace be with you; not payback, not please leave me alone, but peace. Wounded, he comes and breathes upon us his most holy spirit, and we who do not see—cannot see, for the sheer glory of the thing—nevertheless find our soul's salvation in his wounds that are, by the grace of God, our wounds too. He comes back to us, with the damage we have inflicted upon him, not only to forgive us, but to invite us and empower us and send us to forgive others. Not just to love us with this unutterable love, but to call us and exalt us, in our woundedness, to love others. Even to break bread together, and to share all with all.