

THE HEALING MARKS OF JESUS



Reflections on the Power
of the Risen Christ

MICHAEL HOY



DEDICATION

To my mom, my brother-in-law, my dear friends and mentors Bob and Ed, and so many saints who have come to trust the hands, feet and side of Jesus and confess, “My Lord and my God!”

INTRODUCTION

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

JOHN 20:19-29



good theology of the cross does not deny the resurrection but takes the power of the resurrection as strength and encouragement to pick up the cross again.

Even though this story is from the resurrection narrative of John’s Gospel, it hearkens back to Jesus’ own cross and

the very real scars he bore. Excuse me, the very real scars that he bears. Bears *still*, as John depicts it, even in his resurrected body. They have not disappeared perhaps from our sight (as John says about those who believe without seeing) and surely not from his resurrected bodily presence. They are the enduring marks of the crucified one, now risen from the dead. They are meant to encourage us, as they encouraged Thomas and the disciples, leading them/us to the confession: “My Lord and my God!”

In the six themes that follow, I hope to lift up the redemptive power of Jesus’ scars for our life—physical, emotional, spiritual and societal. Some of these units are confession, especially those that speak of denial and blame. Some of the later units faithfully embrace the wholeness that comes through and from the scars of Jesus. Indeed, the themes themselves mirror patterns that were clarified by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross in her work with dying patients. But a theology of the cross was not in her text, at least not explicitly. It is here.

DENIAL: “The doors of the house ... were locked for fear.” JOHN 20:19
“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” MATTHEW 27:46

BLAMING: “Unless I see ... I will not believe.” JOHN 20:25
“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” MATTHEW 7:1-2

OWNING: “Put your finger here.” JOHN 20:27
“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” MATTHEW 16:24

HOPING: “Do not doubt but believe.” JOHN 20:27
“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” MATTHEW 26:28-29

HEALING: “My Lord and my God.” JOHN 20:28
“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” LUKE 23:34

SHARING: “Blessed are those who have not seen.” JOHN 20:29
“Peace be with you.” JOHN 20:19



Theme 1

Denial

DEVOTION 1

EVENING SCARS

When it was evening on that day ... JOHN 20:19

What is it about nightfall that the events of the day—or many days past—come back to us? What is it about these happenings that we cannot so easily dismiss or move beyond? The first disciples remembered how Jesus was arrested, tried, beaten and crucified unto death. The funeral was over. They remembered his dead body laid in the tomb and thought it was still there, but it wasn't. Would those who crucified him seek out them next or seek to hold them accountable for his body's disappearance? These were their evening scars.

What are our evening scars? What are the thoughts that haunt us and makes us toss and turn at night? We often seek to deny them, to put them out of our mind. But have we considered looking at them directly; confessing what it is about them that really troubles us; praying that God will help us in this hour? It was the evening of Easter that the disciples first celebrated in the breaking of bread. God will be present with forgiveness and peace, even as we struggle.

Lord, as we reflect under the burdens of our worries, be with us to comfort us, and give us strength and courage for the facing of all our days and nights. Amen.

DEVOTION 2

LOCKED OUT, LOCKED IN

The doors of the house ... were locked ... JOHN 20:19

We do not generally lock doors to keep ourselves in but to keep others out. There are many in our world whom we have locked out because

we find them unimportant, uninteresting or offensive to us. We have preconceived notions that they are not to be trusted and convince ourselves so. All of this in the name of “being safe”—and who doesn’t want to be safe? But it is also a clever disguise and denial of our true feelings toward others.

What we are unaware of in all of this is how much we have also become locked in to just ourselves. Our hearts become hardened not only to others, but also to God—whose creatures we and all others are. Brothers and sisters are crying for our help, but that thought never enters our mind as we turn the bolt. It would be damning were it not that all barriers—even the barriers of our isolated hearts—are no final obstacle to our risen Lord. Watch for the Stranger!

Lord, we have denied all those who bear the scars of a suffering and neglected humanity. Lead us to welcome the stranger in our midst. Amen.

DEVOTION 3

FEAR

... for fear of the Jews ... JOHN 20:19

We like to put names on the things we fear. We like to blame them for our troubles. We might even make expressions under our breath or out loud that are insensitive to the race, gender, orientation or views of others. We’ve never really taken the time to get to know them. We may even be going along with the crowd, like those who cried out for our Lord’s crucifixion. And worst of all, we may even think we are justified in being this way.

But we aren’t. We are just dwelling in fear. And truth is, we may have something truly more fearful that we have never really entertained—the fear of death, even death deserved for all our sins, and for the people we have hurt in thought, word and deed. That would be finally frightful were it not for the word that Jesus speaks: “Peace be with you.” Then he shows his scars to free us from the scars of all our fears and death itself.

Lord, forgive us not only for our being fearful but also for acting in our fear. Free us to be not afraid. Amen.



ABANDONED

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? MATTHEW 27:46

The worst nightmare to a young child is being abandoned by his or her parents. It can also be a burden to those whose parents or partner have died or left them later in life. It can be a significant burden for those who have been shut out, shut up behind prison doors or shut in to nursing homes. Being abandoned is never pleasant. We may try to put up a stiff upper lip, but the nagging despair of forsakenness is still with us in our minds, hearts and bodies.

Jesus faced the harshest scar when he was dying on the cross. He had already been abandoned by those who wanted him crucified. He had already been betrayed and abandoned by his disciples. But now he was abandoned by his Father, the very One whose mission he was seeking to fulfill. There was no answer from the heavens. But one thing was certain. Jesus was and is still with all of us in every moment of time when we are abandoned—even when the truth of our abandonment is exposed. But as people of the promise, we also know that this will not be the last word.

Lord, when we are left behind by all others, we pray for the faith to trust that you will never leave us. Amen.

DESPAIR

We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. LUKE 24:21

On the day of Easter, two companions are making a journey away from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus. It is a sad journey, evidenced in the tone of their thoughts and conversation. They spoke of the things that had taken place in these days. But it is all framed in despair: “we *had* hoped...” They did not hope now, now that Jesus was dead. All of this is brought into the light of day by the Stranger who walks with them.

Sometimes we, too, are caught in the sad stories in our reflection of

the things that have happened. We may want to move away from them, but the sadness and despair are constant companions. And we may fail to see or to admit how deeply we are affected by it all. But we do not make our journeys alone. The Stranger, who hears the story of our lives, joins our lives with his. And when our hearts are burning with his promise, we go back to share the joy.

Lord, when we despair, walk with us. And as you share in our lives, so help us to share in yours! Amen.

Theme 2

Blaming

DEVOTION 6

DOUBT

Unless I see the mark of the nails ... I will not believe. JOHN 20:25

It had been a week. Thomas was not with the disciples the first night of Easter. Where was he? Seeking an isolated shelter, away from the community of those whom Jesus had called?

More importantly, where was he now? When the others told him, “We have seen the Lord,” Thomas is unfazed and unmoved. He wants to examine the evidence himself with his own eyes and his own hands. Do his own doubts lead us to doubt also, to close the doors of our hearts again?

We all have doubts. Our faith and our trust can waver and even fail us. But Jesus will still be there for us, seeing us with loving eyes even when we have gone astray, waiting for us with open arms. And as we come to trust him again, we hear his word of “peace,” and he gives us his scars from the cross as our very own to trust that no scars can keep the doors of our hearts closed forever.



Lord, when we doubt, do not give up on us, but give us instead your very body and your victory over death. Amen.

DEVOTION 7

FINDING FAULT

Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? MATTHEW 7:3

Blaming never starts by pointing the finger at ourselves. We see the thing that others do as wrong, and we are quick to pounce on it. But we never take the time to reflect, let alone confess, how our own wrongs and failings are only magnified in this moment of blame. Ultimately, we may even come to laying blame at God's doorstep: "It's all your fault!" That's where Adam and Eve finally sought an answer to their own transgression.

Jesus' ultimate counter to this is not simply to note, justly, the hypocrisy of those who seek to fault others. It ultimately comes to an end by God taking the blame to the cross. The hands, feet and side will be pierced, and the thorns of his crown make their way into his skull. But there will be no faulting in his voice, and his blood will be for us and for all the end of all faults.

Lord Jesus, bearer of our sins, forgive us for the deep faults of our lives, and spare us from any blame. Amen.

DEVOTION 8

FAMILY SQUABBLES

Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? LUKE 10:40

Families are meant to care for one another and support one another. But family arguments can start at an early age between siblings and may even surface at the most inopportune of times—like when a loved one dies, and all that can be considered is who gets what and who deserves the most. We want special favors, like Martha who wants Jesus



In these 40 devotions for the Easter season (from Easter Sunday through Ascension Day) or for a season of grief after a loved one has died, author Michael Hoy focuses on the marks of his hands, feet and side that the risen Christ revealed to his disciples after the resurrection. These marks are symbols of the redemptive power to bring wholeness and healing to the very real physical, emotional, spiritual and societal wounds present in our lives as Easter people. These enduring marks of the crucified and risen Christ serve to encourage and strengthen us as we move forward in our faith, away from his death and the painful loss of loved ones and toward the perfect glory yet to be revealed in heaven.

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