

## **"THE WOUNDED GOD"**

Preached at Community United Methodist Church, Romulus MI

on Sunday, 19 April 2009

by Rev. Mark A. Miller

Scripture: John 20:19-29

When I moved to a rural township west of Ann Arbor I had to get used to a lot of things we just never see in the city or the suburbs. Cows, for one. The smell of cows, for another. Travelers on the road unique to a rural area like tractors hauling all manner of strange looking equipment from field to field (I learned very early not to follow too close behind the manure spreader). Unique road hazards such as a flock of sheep.

Of all the new experiences living that came with living in the boonies, the most difficult to get used to was the quiet, the silence, especially at night. Growing up in the middle of suburbia on the east side of Cleveland, I was used to a constant ambient din of cars and planes, police cars and fire trucks, and a myriad of other city noises. But in the country, absent of all that background sound, it gets disconcertingly quiet. It's something I like to call "screaming silence" - a quiet that monopolizes one's attention, so quiet that the mind has to anxiously make its own noise to fill in the acoustic emptiness.

It's that kind of disconcerting and uncomfortable silence that I experience when I think about what Jesus' disciples may have experienced the day of Jesus' resurrection. We easily forget how it must have been in those hours after finding Jesus' tomb empty, hours holed up in a room with a locked door afraid of the same people who had killed Jesus just a few days earlier. It was quiet - the preaching, teaching, and miracle working was over. Without their Master, those disciples probably didn't know what to do. It would have been a screaming silence.

It was probably difficult for some to believe, but even for those disciples who had some grasp of what Jesus' resurrection meant - how much history had just changed - they had to deal with being left behind, with no longer knowing who they were to be and what they were to do. It would be a while yet before they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, an event that they, as yet, had no idea was coming. It would be a while yet before they were charged with a purposeful mission of evangelism, something that they, as yet, had no notion would happen.

Jesus had overcome the world leaving his disciples stuck in it. Christ's victory promised great things for the end of the age ... but what about now. It was a lonely, silent, and anxious time.

I imagine that the disciples were too edgy to just sit still and had to do something to fend off stir-craziness. There's Philip doing a crossword puzzle (or is it Sudoku?). Sitting next to him is Thaddaeus reading the Jerusalem Times (they actually delivered newspapers in those days). Matthew, never having lost his business acumen, is a few feet away with his Wall Street Journal. Bartholomew, Simon, and the James we never hear about are deep in some conversation in one corner while Peter, Andrew, James, and John are hot into a game of Euchre in another corner.

Then, without so much as an angelic trumpet fanfare, let alone a knock – not even the sound of footsteps – Jesus appeared. Appeared and immediately said, “Peace be with you.” Even though it was a typical Jewish greeting, every disciples' heart must have skipped a beat with the surprise of someone new in the room and that someone being Jesus. It must have been like seeing a herd of deer staring into the headlights, everyone wide-eyed as if they saw a ghost. Jesus then showed them his hands and then hiked up his robe to show them his side. That broke the tension and the disciples were relieved and glad to see Jesus. I can just imagine Peter, with a silly grin on his face, asking Jesus, “Why aren't you dead?!? ... Oh, yeah, you told us you were going to rise from the dead. Sorry. Stupid question.”

There is so much going on in this story – the disciples hiding out for fear of persecution, Jesus' miraculous appearance in the center of their locked room, the proof that Jesus was alive, his sending of the disciples to do his ministry, and later on, the meeting between Jesus and a skeptical Thomas. All of these things are worth speaking about. But I'd like to share a few thoughts with you about something I hadn't noticed before; something so obvious that I've been blind to it ... until now.

I had been circling around today's Scripture passage for a few days when, at Bible Study this week, we had a difficult time getting to the Bible by getting past a long discussion of our various aches, pains, and ills. When I then recalled for a moment hurts and frustrations others have mentioned about a wide variety of things over the

last few years, I felt reaffirmed in my opinion that we are a wounded people and that the woundedness we experience is what so often shapes us as persons.

And then it hit me: Jesus showed his disciples his hands and his side. He showed them his wounds. The Son of God who put down death itself and won the big victory over evil showed his disciples his wounds.

Think about it for a moment – The Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, our Savior, our Lord, fully human, fully God, showed his disciples that he was still wounded. Jesus the Christ was still – is still – wounded. He still bears the scars of the nails and the spear. He still bears that corruption that comes from being a victim of violence.

When I realized this, I wondered why. Jesus could have resurrected his body in any condition he wanted without wounds, scars, or even razor stubble. I'm sure it helped his disciples to know that it really was him to see his wounds but others had recognized him without needing such proof: Mary just outside the tomb on Resurrection Day and the two travelers to Emmaus who recognized Jesus over the breaking of bread, to name a few. Simple "Who are you?" identification was not the whole point of Jesus retaining his wounds.

I believe that Jesus has done something more profound, more valuable, and more gracious by rising with his wounds.

It wasn't enough for God to come to earth as the baby Jesus, born in the flesh to identify with our humanity. When we see Jesus' wounds God is showing us how he identifies with the weakest and most broken parts of us. By keeping his wounds, Jesus remains intimately in touch with that part of us that makes us most human, most vulnerable, and most messed-up: our woundedness. He not only suffered wounds to save us but keeps his wounds to overcome for us every day the power our woundedness would have over us. Just as resurrecting in his body redeems our bodies as good creations in the image of God, Jesus' resurrected body with its wounds redeems us when we are wounded, taking away the power those wounds have over us. Jesus keeps his wounds so to offer us release from the tyranny of our woundedness.

By showing us his wounded hands and side, Jesus says to us that our woundedness is part of who we are but it is not the part that defines us, characterizes us, or labels and identifies us. For just as the wounded Jesus is still King of kings and Lord of lords, we, no matter how broken we are, are beloved children of God. Indeed,

by taking on those wounds, Christ/God overcomes them and drains them of any power over us.

It's a little strange to take in, this notion of a wounded Christ – a wounded God, because we tend to be in denial about our woundedness because to be wounded is to be weakened and less than we think we should be. But woundedness is a significant part of life.

Are you, or have you been, sick, disabled, growing frustratingly weak with age? Then you are wounded of body. But in the wounded Christ our woundedness is redeemed and we can overcome damage our broken bodies might do to our souls. We come to know that we are beautiful, valuable, and with purpose for God no matter what our condition.

Are you a victim of prejudice, injustice, or oppression of any kind, even the oppression of the pink slip or foreclosure notification? Then you are wounded. But in the wounded Christ our woundedness is redeemed and we can overcome the anger, hatred, and bitterness making it possible to seek a just peace and not simply meet violence with violence through revenge. In the wounded Christ, we can move on with life because the wounds we receive from unjust, uncaring, and even abusive systems and organizations and powers ... those wounds have no hold over us and do not define who we are.

Have you ever been hurt by disappointment, betrayal, or any of a thousand ways we hurt each other, either intentionally or by accident? Then you are wounded. But in the wounded Christ our woundedness is redeemed and we can overcome the hurt, allowing for the possibility of love and forgiveness and reconciliation. Our relationships can be redeemed so that they are no longer broken by the hurt that has occurred but built up by the strength of love that overcomes that hurt through forgiveness.

Next to dying on the cross for us, maybe the strongest thing Jesus has done is to keep his wounds, for in doing so God has reached down deep into what we are and what our lives are so often about. In keeping his wounds, Jesus meets us where we are. He shows us his hands and his side and we know just by looking at him that those wounds have no power over him. And because of this, we know that in Christ our wounds have no power over us either. In Christ, our wounds do not tell us who we are.

They do not shape our relationships. They do not separate us from the love of God nor do they have to separate us from each other.

In Christ, we need not grieve our woundedness because it is part of who we are, for in the victorious, resurrected Christ our woundedness has been overcome.

Now that's a great Easter present, Praise God!

Amen!