

A Sermon
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Grace Baptist Church
Bryans Road, Maryland
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Blessed by Wounded Hands

Luke 24:36-53

A few years ago, a Korean television show used virtual reality to reunite a mother with her deceased seven-year-old daughter. The mother put on a VR headset and was transported into a garden where she was met by her daughter. The two of them were able to touch and play, and even hold conversation with one another. "I missed mom a lot," said the little girl, to which mom answered, "I missed you, too." The daughter was also able to reassure her mother that she was no longer in pain. "Mommy, you can see that I'm not hurting anymore, right?"

At first, the mother was hesitant to touch the digital child, until the little girl insisted she hold her hand, which the mother did with tears streaming down her face. All the while, the little girl's father, brother and sister were also crying as they watched the event from the audience. At the end of the experience, the little girl said that she was tired and laid down to sleep, and her mother said goodbye. The whole simulation was an experiment in bringing the dead back to life digitally and "reuniting" them with loved ones.¹

In today's Scripture passage from Luke, Jesus and his disciples are reunited with one another, without the aid of virtual reality. The room where his disciples have gathered is buzzing with conversation about reports of Jesus' self-manifestations, when suddenly, the risen Lord himself shows up. At first, his followers aren't sure who he is. They're frightened, thinking that he's a ghost. In other words, they think they're encountering the dead, not the living. But this is no bodiless spirit haunting a band of disciples who were left behind. This is no fuzzy, nebulous soul popping up at different times and places in and around Jerusalem. No, this is the very Jesus himself who was crucified, whom God rescued bodily from the grave. This Jesus is right there among them, from the top of his head to the tips of his toes.

This is why Jesus spends so much time showing them his body. He tells them to look and touch. He doesn't say, "Hands off. No touching. Just trust me, okay. Take my word for it. It's really me." No, Jesus actually offers himself to be handled. "Look at my hands and my feet. . . . Touch me and see" (v. 39). According to Luke, he "showed them his hands and feet" (v. 40). He showed them.

But they still struggled with disbelief. Not primarily because of doubt and skepticism, but mainly because of amazement. Perhaps the sense of joy, the sense that it really could be true, that he really was alive, was just too much for the disciples. Preacher Thomas Long tells about a friend whose son was a great fan of Captain Kangaroo and Mister Rogers. The boy watched both of their television shows faithfully. One day it was announced that Mister Rogers would be paying a visit to the Captain Kangaroo show. Naturally, the boy was ecstatic. Both of his heroes, together on the same show! Every morning he would ask, "Is it today that Mister Rogers will be on Captain Kangaroo?" Finally the great day arrived, and the whole family gathered around the television. There they were, Mister Rogers and Captain Kangaroo together. After watching for a minute, the boy, surprisingly, got up and

left the room. Puzzled, his father followed him and asked, "What is it, son? Is anything wrong?" And the boy replied, "It's too good. It's just too good."²

Maybe Jesus' disciples felt like it was just too good to be true. Maybe it was all just too much for them. But notice that Jesus doesn't give up. He takes it to the next level by asking them for some food. What better way to prove that he's no phantom than to have a bite to eat. After all, a ghost wouldn't need to be concerned about nutrition, about chewing and swallowing, or about a healthy digestive system. But an embodied Jesus would. So they gave him a piece of fish and he ate it right there in front of them.

So much for their ghost theory. It really is Jesus, bodily risen, right there in the room with them. This whole scene is starting to feel like a reunion. Jesus and his disciples back together again. Seems like old times. Or is it new times? After all, Jesus is very different now. He's in his resurrected, transformed state. He's like a preview of the world to come, roaming about in this present world. He's like a piece of the future, occupying space here in the present.

And yet, he's also the same Jesus they knew before his crucifixion and resurrection. The main way they know this is by his physicality. Notice that in order to confirm Jesus identity, the disciples don't have to ask for his date of birth or the last four digits of his Social Security number. They don't have to quiz him on his mother's maiden name, his high school mascot, or the name of his favorite teacher. They don't have to ask him to verify his user ID and password. No, the way the disciples confirm his identity, the way they know that it's really him, is through seeing and touching, which would have included his woundedness.

The question of why Jesus' redeemed and glorified body still bore the nail marks, or other forms of scarring, has generated plenty of thought. Author Philip Yancey gives us this perspective: "He could have had a perfect body, or no body, when he returned to splendor in heaven. Instead, he kept a remembrance of his visit to earth, and for a keepsake of his time here, he chose scars. The pain of humanity became the pain of God." Pain that was suffered and endured out of love for humankind, love for each of us, love for his whole creation. As preacher Fleming Rutledge says, "The wounds of the Redeemer will always be there, for all eternity, as the sign of the price he paid—'Love divine, all loves excelling.'"³

There's a story told about an incident that occurred in England during the early days of the Salvation Army. A man with a charismatic personality and a magnetic speaking ability was traveling around the countryside declaring himself to be Jesus Christ returned to earth. He claimed to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, and perform other miracles. In the process, he managed to gather an impressive following of believers and curiosity-seekers.

One evening while he was lecturing in a great hall in London, the sound of music emerged in the distance, and gradually grew louder and closer. It was a Salvation Army band approaching the hall. Eventually, the little group of musicians entered the hall, tubas and trumpets blaring, and marched right down the center aisle to the speaker's rostrum. The Salvation Army captain motioned to the musicians, and the music ceased. Then he turned to the speaker and asked, "Are you really the Christ? Tell us plainly." "Yes," replied the speaker. "I am the Christ returned to earth." Looking at him steadily, the captain said, "Very well, then, show us your hands." At that point the band began to play again: "I shall know him, I shall know him, by the print of the nails in his hands!"⁴

There's another old hymn titled, "The Nail-Scarred Hand." The third verse says: "Would you follow the will of the risen Lord? / Place your hand in the nail-scarred hand; / Would you live

in the light of his blessed Word? / Place your hand in the nail-scarred hand." Risen Lord; Nail-scarred hand. Those two aren't contradictory. They go together. They're inseparable. Jesus' wounds are always part of who he is, why he came, and what he's done for us.

It's tempting to think that the glory of the resurrection would erase all the horror and memory of the crucifixion. But it didn't. From the earliest days of the Christian testimony in this world, the cross was still there. It became the central symbol of the church, the focal image in Christian work, worship, and witness. We can't say, "Well, now that Christ is risen, let's just forget all that stuff about sacrifice and blood and suffering for our sins. It has now been overturned by the fact that Jesus is alive." No, the events of Easter don't wipe out the events of Good Friday. The two are forever melded together. They're two parts of God's one act of love and mission.

Alyce McKenzie tells about a time when she was a little girl, about four years old, at church with her parents. She says:

It was a dark paneled church, built in the early twentieth century. On the back wall was a huge, 2 pane stained glass window. The left hand pane pictured Jesus kneeling in the Garden of Gethsemane, his face anguished, a red blood-tear on his cheek. On sunny Sunday mornings, the sun would turn that tear into a glittering ruby. The right hand pane pictured Jesus ascending, his face serene and radiant, his hands at his sides, a faint, pin sized dot on each outstretched palm, his feet off the ground as he rose. Many questions ran through my four year old mind, among them , "Who cries red tears?" and "Why isn't he wearing shoes?"

I would stand on the pew, in my frilly church dress, my hands resting on the pew looking at the window, staring, first at one side, then the other, for as much of the sermon as my mother would allow. Until she tugged on the hem of my dress and whispered "What are you looking at? Sit down, and pay attention."

Finally one day I was able to put my confusion into words, "Why won't that happy man help that sad man?"

She answered me as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. She said, "They're the same man."⁵

The fact that the suffering Jesus and the risen, ascended Jesus are one and the same is crucial. It has huge implications for how we understand our own lives as disciples of our Lord. In particular, it helps determine the nature of our mission, as individuals and as the church. Remember that though our Scripture passage brings Luke's Gospel to a close, it's not really the end. It's actually the beginning of the next phase of the story, as Jesus' followers, then and now, are commissioned for witness in the world. I like the way that one commentator puts it when he says, "Jesus had ministered to them to prepare them for this time. Now it is nearly time to go. Training camp is just about over; a long season of ministry lies ahead."⁶

From there, it doesn't take Luke very long to describe Jesus' departure. Jesus gathers his disciples, blesses them, and leaves. He doesn't just bless them with words. He blesses them with uplifted hands. I believe it's important that one of the last things Jesus' followers saw were those wounded hands, those nail-scarred hands, blessing them for what was ahead.

For disciples of Jesus, what's ahead will always involve not escaping from this scarred world, but entering into the world's wounds, whether the wounds of disease, death, violence, injustice, poverty, natural disasters, or other forms suffering. The fact that the risen, ascended Jesus still bears the marks of his own suffering is a reminder that he will always

be the one who bore the cross. It's a reminder of the price of our forgiveness. It's a reminder of the cost of our salvation, and the cost of following our Lord, who shared in our experience so that we may share in his glory.

We follow a Lord who, even in his re-created body, still knows life in this present world, who still remembers his own time of suffering and brokenness. And we follow him trusting that he, in his redeeming love, can take our own brokenness, our own woundedness, our own scars, and use them to work for good, to show his saving power to others, and to bless them with his presence.

¹ Stacy Liberatore, "Korean TV show uses virtual reality to 'reunite' sorrow stricken mother with her seven-year-old daughter who died in 2016." Daily Mail. February 10, 2020. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-7988645/TV-uses-virtual-reality-reunite-mother-7-year-old-daughter-died-2016.html> (May 8, 2024).

² Thomas G. Long, "Empty Tomb, Empty Talk," *The Christian Century* (April 4, 2001) 11.

³ Yancey and Rutledge are quoted in Peter Wehner, "Why Is Jesus Still Wounded After His Resurrection? Ethics and Public Policy Center. Originally published in *The New York Times*. April 3, 2021. <https://eppc.org/publication/why-is-jesus-still-wounded-after-his-resurrection/> (May 8, 2024).

⁴ George Everett Ross, in Leonard Sweet, *Strong in the Broken Places*, 39-40. From Thomas G. Long, *Hebrews. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997) n.pag.

⁵ Alyce McKenzie, "He Ascended into Heaven. . ." Patheos. May 15, 2012. Accessed May 23, 2013 <<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/knackfornoticing/2012/05/he-ascended-into-heaven/>>.

⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, 3 (Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 1994) 386.