

It's All in The Scars

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Pasadena, California

John 20:

[19] On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

[20] When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

[21] Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."

[22] And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

[23] If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

[24] Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came.

[25] So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."

[26] Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you."

[27] Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing."

[28] Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

[29] Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

[30] Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;

[31] but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

One Saturday morning when my family and I lived in Riverside I went out to mow the lawn. The lawn mower blade was dull so I took it off and sharpened it. As I was putting the blade back on and tightening it, the wrench slipped and my right hand was thrown into the newly sharpened blade. The

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cut was deep and the blood immediate. Elsie drove me to the emergency room. As the doctor cleaned the wound and began sewing me up, somehow we got to talking about our mutual hobbies of genealogy and Civil War history. And lo and behold, he revealed that he was the great grandson of Ebenezer Seward, brother to William Henry Seward, President Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of State.

That's the story I'll tell you if you ask me about the scar at the base of my right thumb.

If you ask me about the scars on my right leg below the knee, I'll tell you about what happened to me on our farm on hog-killing day when I was five and accidentally plunged my leg into scalding hot lard.

If you ask me about the scar on the side of my left knee, I'll tell you about playing blackjack with a friend one day when I was 11 and how the knife I meant to throw into the ground went into my leg instead.

If you ask me about some of my other scars, I might tell you about them and I might not. Not all scars, we well know, are on the body. Some are on the heart. Some are on the soul. We can't talk of them or show them to just anyone. Only to those who are closest, whom we trust to not judge us, but to understand.

If you want to know the meaning of life, the Christian life, you must remember: It's all in the scars!

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Vonette Bright is the co-founder of Campus Crusade for Christ International. She's the author of the famous inspirational story that's still making the rounds of email forwarding: Alligator Scars

Some years ago on a hot summer day in south Florida, a little boy decided to go for a swim in the old swimming hole behind his house. He flew into the water, not realizing that as he swam toward the middle of the lake, an alligator was swimming toward the shore. His mother in the house was looking out the window and saw the two as they got closer and closer together. In utter fear, she ran toward the water, yelling to her son as loudly as she could.

Hearing her voice, the little boy became alarmed and made a U-turn to swim to his mother. It was too late. Just as he reached her, the alligator reached him. From the dock, the mother grabbed her little boy by the arms just as the alligator snatched his legs. That began an incredible tug-of-war between the two. The alligator was much stronger than the mother, but the mother was much too passionate to let go. A farmer happened to drive by, heard her screams, raced from his truck, took aim and shot the alligator. Remarkably, after weeks and weeks in the hospital, the little boy survived. His legs were

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extremely scarred by the vicious attack of the animal and, on his arms, were deep scratches where his mother's fingernails dug into his flesh in her effort to hang on to the son she loved. The newspaper reporter who interviewed the boy after the trauma asked if he would show him his scars. The boy lifted his pant legs. And then, with obvious pride, he said to the reporter, "But look at my arms. I have great scars on my arms, too. I have them because my mom wouldn't let go."

You and I can identify with that little boy. We have scars, too. No, not from an alligator, or anything quite so dramatic. But the scars of a painful past. Some of those scars are unsightly and have caused us deep regret. But, some wounds, my friend, are because God has refused to let go. In the midst of your struggle, He's been there holding on to you. The Scripture teaches that God loves you. He wants to protect you and provide for you in every way.

But sometimes we foolishly or unknowingly wade into dangerous situations. The swimming hole of life is filled with peril - and we forget that enemies wait to attack. That's when the tug-o-war begins - and if you have the scars of His love on your arms be very, very grateful. He did not - and will not - let you go.

This is why John tells us the story of today's Gospel. God loved us so much he decided not to let go of us. Jesus could have let the cup pass and avoided the pain and the suffering. He could have exited the scene without any scars. Instead, he chose to hold on.

Listen to how my friend Barbara Lundblad looks at the scars of Jesus and what they mean for you and me:

"I come to this part of the story longing to ask questions children dare to ask before they know better. If God raised Jesus from the dead, why didn't God fix him up? Why does Jesus have scars so deep you could feel the print of the nails?

"What is this story saying?... We won't see Jesus unless we see his wounds. The resurrected Christ is forever the wounded Christ—living, but never all fixed up; not bound by death, yet scarred for eternity. . . .

"We must touch the places where the wounds are. This isn't the only place where Jesus Christ is revealed, but if we deny the wounds, we will see only a glorified Christ who can go through locked doors, whose only name is victory. The wounded Christ shows us something else: this scarred Jesus meets us before we're all fixed up."¹

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Barbara K. Lundblad, *Transforming the Stone*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2001, pp. 45-46.

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You and I have plenty of scars. Scars from betrayal. Scars from broken promises. Scars that come from being afraid of going on living. Scars from uncertainty related to the meaning of life. Scars from feeling utterly alone. Each of these were wounds Jesus himself sustained before he died.

It's all in the scars! Jesus' scars mean he was wounded for us. Like him, we have scars. And we will never be all fixed up, not in this life.

As we are gathered here this morning behind closed doors, with all our fears and all our scars and all our open wounds that still have to heal into scars, the Resurrected Christ comes to us, showing us his hands and his side, and says to each of us and to all of us, "Peace be with you." You are mine. I love you more than you can ever know. I will never let you go.

Jesus knows your pain, your fear, your confusion, your loneliness. Jesus knows your unhappiness. Jesus knows your guilt. Jesus knows your anxieties and your anger. He knows your pain, whatever it is. You don't have to pretend it doesn't hurt. You don't have to pretend it doesn't matter.

It's all in the scars! Put out your hands and touch the scars of the Lord's hands. He will never ever let you go!

AMEN

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