

# St James United Church

Message for April 16, 2023

Second Sunday of Easter

“Wondrous and Wounded”

- Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft



Readings: Jn. 20:19-29; 1 Pt. 1:3-9; Excerpt from Jim Devlin, *Leonard Cohen: In His Own Words*

What a wondrous encounter that must have been! A group of Jesus’ disciples were together in their grief and fear, and there he was, alive in a way only God understands, their teacher, killed by the authorities yet somehow greeting them with Shalom, with prayers for reconnection and peace. What a wondrous encounter for us too because he is still here with resurrection promise, inviting us, as I shared last week, to return to a mythical Eden and the spiritual values shared in stories about it, to relationships of trust and care with God and each other, made possible as the Risen One not only prays for peace but breathes it upon us, like God animating the first human.

It's a wondrous encounter, and yet in it is a detail that I find myself experiencing differently than in years past. Jesus, transformed into the spiritual body that tradition teaches us we'll all have at the last day, shows the disciples his hands and side, then eight days later, invites Thomas to touch his wounds. I used to think Thomas’ statement about wanting to touch the nail holes was about his doubt Jesus had been raised, but I wonder now if Thomas refused to believe it was truly Jesus unless his physical appearance aligned with his teaching. You see, Jesus lived with compassion and so, as Leonard Cohen observed, he welcomed into his chosen family all who were rejected by others. Well in that time, his wounds would have been judged as signs of rejection. Wouldn't it be inconsistent then for him to suddenly be without such physical marks in his risen state? Thomas was right to assume it wouldn't be Jesus then.

This line of reasoning made even more sense as I thought more deeply why Thomas was not there when Jesus first appeared. I used to judge his absence, as if Thomas was more afraid of the authorities somehow than the rest of the disciples, laying low in case the police raided their hiding place. But Thomas, in the lead up to Lazarus being raised, was willing to go with Jesus even if it meant he might die with him. What if he was out in the community to share in their collective grief? We tend to write off all Jerusalem, accusing the people as a whole of turning on Jesus after a week, but that says more about generations of Christians than them. John's gospel makes clear it was a crowd of political leaders and police calling for his death, leaving most people in the city grieving the one they'd waved palms branches to as they cried “Save us! “Hosanna!” Rather than judge Thomas as doubtful or afraid, perhaps he is bravest of them all and quickest to understand that we are called to respond with compassion as Jesus did.

Like Thomas we too are called to show love and compassion wherever we are, reaching out in our neighbourhoods to share grief rather than to draw back in fear. To do so is to make present

Jesus' resurrection, be his living body, continuing to live out of his generosity. This is important for us to do because the return to Eden hinted at in resurrection appearances happening the first day of the week has not suddenly arrived but is a process. As Peter noted, we're in a time of waiting as we live in the hope of resurrection while also endure the inevitability of suffering, making it perhaps the seventh day of creation rather than the first while we experience the emotional hurt of a broken relationship, the social anguish of being stigmatised by others, the physical pain of an illness or injury. Salvation is about healing, a coming to wholeness. And this is possible when we share compassion, as we offer one another supportive solidarity and so nurture a world of acceptance and care, of trust and understanding.

In this we are nurturing a collective salvation, but at the same time compassion needs to begin with ourselves. Perhaps this too is why Thomas wasn't with the other disciples. He needed to sit with his own hurt. As we do this, we need to be gentle rather than judgemental, accepting our scars and stretchmarks, our less than perfect qualities, honour the stories of our lives. We can't erase what's happened, be it emotional, social, physical, all of the above. Nor should we because those experiences shaped us into us. Sadly, we often judge ourselves harshly, even for things over which we had no control, and from that, project judgement on others. But is that what we want? Or does treating others as we wish to be treated not suggest we should extend the acceptance we wish we'd received. We're called to extend compassion and generous love despite the rhetoric from fellow Christians we hear on the news, especially south of the border.

To conclude, I'd like to reflect on how this ties into Jesus continuing to be wounded though risen. As I shared at the beginning, in traditional teaching we'll all one day have a resurrected body like his. So, what will that look like? From the viewpoint of what I've shared, I hope I will still have 20/200 vision rather than 20/20. Having one good eye is how I see and so makes me me. What of an older person? Will they suddenly be 20? Will someone who is autistic no longer be neurodiverse? To suggest this not only forgets how Jesus still had nail holes in his transformed body, but makes out that there's a "normative" person that is created in God's image and likeness and the rest of us are measured against them. This is the judgmental thinking that Jesus spent his whole ministry challenging, his solidarity with those rejected being what led him to the cross and so his wounds. Thus a friend with cerebral palsy will still have one arm smaller and weaker than the other. It's who he is. Or another friend who identifies as a transman and was so proud when he had his top surgery, will have the scars which celebrate him finally feeling like himself. This is what makes sense to me if we are to follow the compassionate path of Jesus. To him we are wondrous with our wounds not in spite of them. Would that we see ourselves and others like Jesus does.

Beloved, I truly believe this is a significant way for us to live resurrection. May we be more like Thomas, willing to touch the wounds of others, our own too, rather than wish them away. When we do, we will extend compassion and so experience salvation, a healing of hearts from which comes the peace that Jesus prays for us, the reconnecting gift of the garden at the heart of Easter. What a wondrous gift that is. Amen.