

## Jesus' scars

[Acts 5.27-32](#)

[Revelation 1.4-8](#)

[John 20.19-31](#)

How does Jesus make himself known to people? It seems it varies. Last week, it was when Jesus called Mary's name that she recognised him. On Wednesday we looked at the road to Emmaus. For those two believers, it was when Jesus broke the bread that they recognised him. Today, it is when he shows the disciples his scars that they recognise him.

The scars we carry are a part of the story of our lives. I have a couple of scars. I have a scar on my neck which tells the story of a brush with cancer I had a few years back. I doubt any of you would have even noticed due to the skill of the surgeon. I have another much bigger scar across the top of my right leg. It's from a vehicle accident when I was 12.

I was sitting on the wheel hub of a loaded trailer. The driver did a U-turn and the load fell on top of me. I was knocked out in this accident but, during the incident, I came to for a split second and, in that moment what I thought I saw was the wheel of the trailer coming straight for my head. I remember crying out to Jesus and then I blacked out again.

I really don't know what happened. It's one of those things I'll be asking when I get to heaven. But I remember crawling out from under all that stuff euphoric that I was still alive. I had a sore head from the gates falling on me and sore fingers from the poles rolling and squashing them and then, to my surprise, a very large gash. I have no idea how that happened but it serves as a reminder. It's a scar that tells part of my story. Likewise in John 20, Jesus' scars tell us about him and form part of redemption's story.

In today's passage there are two sets of three repetitions: firstly, three mentions of Jesus' scars and secondly, three offerings of peace. Having reflected on this passage, I think the two are linked, with the focus being those words in verse 23: *If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*



### Jesus' Scars

Jesus comes and stands among the disciples and says, '*Peace be with you*'. But it seems that it is not until verse 20, when he shows them his scars, that they recognise him and rejoice. Verse 20 says: After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Thomas, who was not present, also wants to see Jesus' scars. He says in verse 25, "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."

Finally, when Jesus appears to Thomas, he shows him his scars. Verse 27 says, 'Then he said to Thomas, "*Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side.*"

The disciples instantly recognise Jesus when they see his scars. The group then declares to Thomas, echoing the words of Mary, 'We have seen the Lord.' And when Thomas sees Jesus' scars he declares, 'My Lord and my God.'

In writing his gospel, John is keen to establish firstly that Jesus is God and secondly that the cross is his glory. Jesus' resurrected body is scarred and Jesus is recognised by his scars. We are followers of a scarred God. A God who is deeply and indelibly marked by suffering.



### **Peace be with you**

In verse 19, Jesus enters the locked room and says, '*Peace be with you*'. In verse 21, after showing them his scars, Jesus again says, '*Peace be with you*'.

Finally, in verse 26, appearing again after eight days, Jesus says a third time, '*Peace be with you*'.

It would have been a common greeting in Jesus' day but here, it is the culmination of what has been accomplished on the cross. That terrible rift between God and us, God himself declares it finished. He extends scarred hands to us, scars that we inflicted through our sin, and calls peace. We are followers of a scarred God. His scars and his suffering were inflicted by us but his words to us are '*Peace be with you*'.



### **Forgiveness**

These threefold repetitions draw us into the centre of this passage. Verses 21 to 23: '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.*"'

Let's begin with the words that really make people do a double take: '*If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.*'

Two things this is not: Firstly, this is not an add-on superpower for ultra-spiritual Christians such as apostles and priests. Secondly, this is not a carte blanche for us to judge and forgive sins or not forgive sins as we see fit. The Bible makes it clear that forgiveness is Jesus' prerogative.

I think if we are going to understand these words, we need to read them in the context not just of this passage but the whole of John.

There is a movement in John's Gospel where it is shown how Jesus and the Father are one. This is done through Jesus' speeches, through people's reactions to his words and through the miracles John chooses to include. It could not be made clearer: Jesus is God.

Come chapter 13, an extraordinary new aspect is introduced and is developed in the next few chapters. If we obey Jesus' command to love one another, we will dwell in Christ and Christ will dwell in us. In other words, Jesus who is God, invites us into unity with him.

I doubt I will ever fully grasp the magnitude of John's Gospel and this invitation that Jesus extends to us to enter into unity with God and with one another. And I know I'm not alone in this.

When we were at Eltham Baptist, the preacher spent about ten weeks trying to unpack John 15 and what it means to dwell in Christ and Christ in us. It is an extraordinary concept. And we need to hold it in view, if we are to have any understanding of these words in John 20.

Back to verses 21-23. Firstly, God in the person of Jesus, says, *'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.'*

Many times, throughout John, Jesus has spoken of being sent by God. As people who are now part of that relationship, we are sent just as Jesus was sent and what we carry on this mission is peace. Peace is what we are to extend to others.

Next, God in the person of Jesus breathes on the disciples. This is Genesis 2 all over again. Just as God breathed life into the first person, so he breathes life into us his body the church.

Jesus then says *'Receive the Holy Spirit.'*

This new life that is breathed into us is God dwelling within us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

This God who dwells within us has called peace. He extends peace to us. If we do not extend that peace to others, how can we say that we follow Christ or that Christ dwells within us or that we are his sent ones?

Being a Christian is not just me and God in some cosy bubble. It's all of you lot too with all your warts and irritating habits. Jesus says, back in John 13, this is how people know that we are his disciples because of our love for one another. This is how we put legs on our faith ... we love one another. Peace be with you. They are solemn words we are saying to one another.

We are calling each other into unity. Some of the scars you carry will have been afflicted by fellow believers. By extending forgiveness, by offering peace, we are inviting them in. Some of the scars you carry will have been inflicted by those who don't follow Christ. The commission is still the same. We still invite them into the unity of the communion of God. We still extend forgiveness and offer peace.

We need to learn to recognise Jesus by his scars otherwise we just won't be able to do it. We won't be able to extend forgiveness. We'll say those words 'Peace be with you' but we won't mean them. Our scars will just be scars and we'll never recognise that, just as with

Jesus, they are our glory and the way we will be recognised as his. Though wounded and scarred, we still forgive and we still extend peace, because that is the God we follow.

