

4-19-09 Homily by Father Larry Covington
Second Sunday of Easter B 2009

Easter Sunday has come and gone. The rest of April stretches before us. The big flower arrangements are gone out of the sanctuary. The relatives, if they came for Easter dinner, have all gone home, and the last egg has been found under the sofa cushion. So here we are waiting. But not quite sure what we are waiting for. Maybe we are waiting for planting season to begin or school to be over, or to see if Easter made any difference to us or to anybody else. We have hung up our good cloths and set the wilted lilies outside the backdoor promising to plant them in the ground. We've closed the door, and now, we wait.

It isn't so different in Jerusalem. Friday and Saturday had passed. Sunday had come, and with the dawn came the unexpected...indeed the unbelievable news that Jesus had risen from the dead. It was the same word the preacher brought us a week ago when the church was packed and we sat listening in our good clothes. The disciples who gathered in the room had heard

the news but hadn't seen anything to confirm it so they closed the door and locked it. And they waited. Some, no doubt wondered if it was time to go home, to get back to whatever they were doing before all this happened. To pick up the pieces and start over, but for now, they waited, not quite sure what they were waiting for. We know the story: their waiting paid off. Without knocking or unlocking the door, Jesus Christ appeared in their midst saying "Peace be with you" ----we get little evidence of the disciple's reaction----just Jesus' simple greeting, "Peace be with you,"----as though he was waiting for some liturgical response, "and also with you." Then something strange happened. This same Jesus, who had appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden and told her not to hold him, now invites the disciples to look at his scarred hands and side. Eight days later, Jesus again comes into the room without opening the door and invites Thomas to touch him, to place his fingers in the prints of the nails, to put his hand in Jesus' wounded side.

Now this is odd; it's convincing, but strange just the same. I come to this part of the story wanting to ask some basic questions.

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?

We quickly give the child answers: "this is how the disciples knew for certain I was Jesus." Come now, Mary Magdalene knew simply from the sound of his voice in the garden. In Luke's gospel two disciples recognized Jesus at the table in Emmaus when he broke bread. There is no mention of wounded hands. Why are there wounds in this story?

Who knows? God knows. Even the child who dares to ask the question knows there is something in the scars, something important, as important as Mary hearing her own name in the garden when she was convinced only of Jesus' death. As important as a stranger breaking bread with the two disciples at Emmaus----their eyes were opened and they knew it was Jesus. But as soon as they recognized him, Jesus disappeared, leaving

them with pieces of broken bread and each other. The scars are not proof----especially for those of us who have never touched them.

The scars remain as a witness to the truth.

Why didn't God fix Jesus up? Surely God could have. At times it seems that God did, for Jesus' resurrected body was not limited by time or space. "Do not hold me," Jesus said to Mary, as though his body couldn't be embraced or held or touched. In this story Christ appears inside a locked room without coming through the door, yet this is no ghost! Touch my hands, my side. Touch these wounds, and peace be with you.

What is this story saying to us in our waiting? Many things, no doubt, but there is one thing we dare not overlook: 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. People who are deaf or know sign language have a sign for Jesus, and they make the sign many times during worship: the left middle finger touches the right palm and the right middle finger touches the left palm. When they touch the

place they speak without words: Jesus, the one with wounded hands. They bear Jesus' name in their own flesh.

We must touch the places where the wounds are. This isn't the only place where Jesus 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.

Have you ever been betrayed by someone you loved or betrayed by a cause you'd given your life to? "Behold," Jesus said; "one of you will betray me."

Have you been disappointed by those closest to you? Have they let you down in significant ways? "Could you not stay awake with me one hour?" Jesus asked them.

Have you been afraid to go on living but also afraid to die? Have you been uncertain whether you had any sense of God's will for

your life or anyone else's? "Father," Jesus prayed, "if you are willing, remove this cup from me."

Have you felt utterly alone, completely abandoned? Jesus cried out, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?"

Touch the palms of your hands. Jesus was wounded long before the cross. His wounds touch the wounded places in our lives: all the betrayals and all the denials----our own and those made against us. Jesus' birth as a human child marked him with the wounds we all feel as children of earth. Jesus was not a spiritual baby nor did he float over Galilee without touching the ground. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us," wrote John. Touch the palms of your hands.

Touch the places where the wounds are in your own life and in the lives of others. No one is unscarred by living. You and I have wounds almost too painful to her, wounds we can't talk about, even with those we love. We will never be all fixed up, not in this life. The wounded Christ comes to us saying, "Peace be with you." You don't have to pretend that you're all right, that every

thing in your life is fine. Jesus comes to you and me as we are saying, "Peace be with you."

Years ago I saw a play that invited me and the other audience members to end our pretence. In the play Lily Tomlin portrayed all the characters, from Trudy the bag lady to Agnes Angst, a punk rock teenager. Agnes is furious with the world. She dresses to show rebellion against everything and everyone. She rails in anger against her father, the biochemist experimenting with new forms of life in the lab. She's disgusted with her grandparents and their plastic covered living room furniture. When she can no longer stand to be with her parents or her grandparents, she runs away to "The House of Pancakes." There, in the trashcan she finds a book by G. Gordon Liddy. In his book, *Will*, he claims that human beings have the capacity to do anything they want; they can keep pushing against all the odds. He compared this extraordinary human will power to holding your hand over a lit candle: "The trick is not to mind it."

As the first act of the play comes to a close, Agnes is alone on the stage. She flings defiance at the whole world----her parents, the lab, the plastic covered furniture, and every other hypocrisy. “I don’t mind I was born at the time of the crime known as Watergate. And must’ve missed out on most things that made America great, but I don’t mind it...I don’t: mind that the teenage suicide rate is soaring like a comet. The boy in school I loved most died last year of an overdose. But I don’t mind it.”

Then she ends down to light an imaginary candle. One beam of light focuses on her hand as she speaks: “For life is like that candle flame and we are like Gordon Liddy’s hand hovering over it.” All goes dark and the curtain comes down. In the darkness of the theater we hear Agnes cry out, “I mind it!” I mind.

Touch the palms of your hands. The word is Jesus, and his word for you and me is, “I mind your pain and your loneliness, your abandonment and your despair. Don’t pretend your pain doesn’t matter. Don’t wait until you’re all fixed up. “Put your finer here in

the print of the nails. Place your hand in my side. DO not be
faithless, but believing.”

My brothers and sisters, I mind.