

Jesus' Scars and Ours

On Sunday, we marked the beginning of Holy Week by focusing on the events of the last week of Jesus' life. In particular, we asked what we can learn from Jesus' suffering.

1. Warm-up Question: When you were a kid, were you ever in a Passion Play or Easter Pageant? If so, what roll did you play? How did it go?
2. Read Matthew 21:1-11.
 - a. During the Palm Parade into Jerusalem, what do you imagine Jesus was thinking and feeling? What do you suppose the disciples were thinking and feeling?
 - b. The extraordinary high of the Palm Parade didn't last long. Later that afternoon, Jesus entered the temple and saw booths selling sacrificial animals occupying the area reserved for "unclean" people to come to pray. He launched a protest to cast out the sellers. It didn't go over well. Within a few days, the crowds that cheered Jesus' triumphal entry were shouting, "Crucify him!" Next thing you know, Jesus is screaming as spikes were driven through his hands and feet. What do you suppose Jesus was thinking and feeling now? How about the disciples?
 - c. The pattern that Jesus experienced – going from the highest high to the lowest low in no time flat – is not uncommon in life. Jeff reminded us of the example of Paula White receiving a kidney on a Thursday, only to pass away on Saturday. When has life jerked you from great joy to great sorrow in a whipstitch?
3. Thankfully, the story of Holy Week doesn't end with the cross. Three days later Jesus rose and began appearing to his disciples.
 - a. Read John 20:19-25. Suppose, like Thomas, you were not present when Jesus appeared. How do you think you would have reacted when the other disciples told you Jesus had appeared to them?
 - b. Now read John 20:26-29. Normally when we talk about this story, the focus is on doubting Thomas. But on Sunday, Jeff invited us to pay attention to another important detail in the story. Although Jesus was risen from the dead, dwelling now in his immortal resurrection body, he still had scars! What have you typically imagined your resurrection body will be like? Did you ever imagine that it would bear scars from your life's most painful experiences?
4. Jeff asked, "Why would God allow our resurrection bodies to bear scars constantly reminding us of our most bitter moments on earth? How can heaven be heaven if we will still bear our scars when we're there?" He suggested the answer is found in the following logical syllogism.

Thesis: Jesus' resurrection body was perfect.

Antithesis: But Jesus' resurrection body still bore the scars of his deepest pain.

Synthesis: If both are true, that must mean: the scars of this life will enhance, not detract from, the beauty we carry with us in this life and the next.

To help us think this through, Jeff shared the story of a time when he saw a breast cancer poster of a naked woman posing exotically, showing off the jagged scar that marked where her breast had once been. It was the first time in Jeff's life it occurred to him that a scar could be beautiful.

- a. Do you think a scar can be beautiful? Why or why not?
 - b. Jeff said, "A scar is a wound that has healed. As such, a scar is a proclamation that someone has triumphed over a great wound – that whatever happened to them, instead of defeating them, made them better, stronger, wiser, more compassionate, and more grateful for the gift of life." Your thoughts?
 - c. Read Romans 8:18. What does this verse say to you?
 - d. Read Hebrews 12:2, Mark 8:34, and II Timothy 2:12. Taken together, what do these verses say to you?
5. Theologian Frederick Buechner [pronounced Beek-ner] has written about a concept he calls "the Stewardship of Pain." In church lingo, a good steward is someone who is faithful to, and makes the most of, opportunities God gives. The idea that pain is an opportunity that we ought to make the most of is stunning to most of us. Next Sunday we're going to dig deeper into this concept of "the Stewardship of Pain," so we can rise from our pain like Jesus. In the last few minutes of last Sunday's sermon, we began to explore what it looks like to NOT be a good steward of our pain. Buechner identifies four ways we can squander our pain. Which of these four are you most likely to stumble into? Explain your answer.

Mistake 1: Stuffing my pain inside, ignoring it, and pretending it never happened.

Mistake 2: Using my pain as a crutch to win sympathy. "I'm such a victim!"

Mistake 3: Using my pain as an excuse for failure.

Mistake 4: Allowing myself to become embittered and trapped by my pain.

6. During this week that leads up to the cross, Jeff invited us to imagine ourselves walking next to Jesus down the Via Dolorosa toward Golgotha, carrying our own cross, i.e., our own deepest pain. He asked us to ponder three questions. If you're comfortable, share your answers.
- a. What is the deepest wound life has inflicted on you? (Be as honest as you can.)
 - b. In response to that wound, have you made any of the four mistakes Buechner identifies?
 - c. Where are you in the healing process?

To be continued . . . on Easter Sunday!