

**John 20:19-31** *Healing Wounds*  
First Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, Alabama  
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The Rev. Terry Hamilton-Poore

**John 20:19-31**

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. 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." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "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."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

For the Word of God in scripture,  
for the Word of God among us,  
for the Word of God within us:  
**Thanks be to God.**

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Reader 1: “My husband quit his job and we moved to his hometown. No one yells everyday anymore. I have come to the realization that maybe I deserve to be happy, too.”

Erin Peregrine Antalis, Lincoln, Nebraska

Reader 2: “The pandemic forced me into the present. It’s the meditation I never wanted, but have come to appreciate. That said, last week I kicked a hole in the bathroom door.”

Jessica Berta, Milwaukee

Reader 1: “I made a vow not to skip another Christmas or Japanese New Year with my parents. I don’t know how many I’ll have left with them.”

Paige Bowman, Washington, D.C.

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These quotes, and others you’ll be hearing, are from an article in the New York Times entitled “Who We Are Now,”<sup>1</sup> that asks people how they’ve been changed by the pandemic, and how they plan to live their lives going forward.

We are in a liminal moment—a crossing over from one way of being to another. So were the disciples. They had isolated themselves in a room, hiding from the threat that lurked outside. Sound familiar? Then Jesus walked right through that locked door and said, “Peace be with you.”

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<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Dias and Audra D. S. Burch, “Who We Are Now,” in *The New York Times*, April 5, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/04/05/us/coronavirus-pandemic.html?searchResultPosition=182>

He was a sign that his death, which they'd thought was the end, was simply a new beginning. And then he showed them his hands and his side. Those wounds, of course, provided proof of identity, and yet, it's kind of strange that they were still there, isn't it? You would think that emerging into a new life after an excruciating death would mean erasing the wounds of the past in order to have a fresh start. But no: the wounds remain. They remain as a reminder to the world that Jesus shares our suffering. But they also remain so that we won't forget the lessons of that suffering—the lessons of vulnerability and compassion, the lessons that the dominant systems of this world will seek to crush the life out of any who oppose them, and the even bigger lesson that, when we stand up to them, those systems don't get to have the final word.

Think of the wounds that have been revealed over this last year. The gaping chasm between the haves and have nots as hospitals and morgues filled with the elderly, the poor, people of color. The deaths of George Floyd and Brianna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbury that shook our sense of who we are as a nation, and woke us up to the fact that there are two Americas—one for white people, and one for everyone else.

What wounds in the world and in your life became clear to you this past year?

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Reader 2: “I just couldn’t deal with the lack of empathy. Now I have very few people who survived on my list of friends. And my phone is a whole lot quieter. But I honestly wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Iara Diaz-Araujo, Orlando, Florida

Reader 1: “Coming out of this, I realized emotions can’t wait for another day. I am calling my parents more, and expressing my love and gratitude to them.”

Vaneet Singh, Memphis

Reader 2: “I really feel like I learned a lot during this pandemic, but this new feeling has this real feeling of emptiness I’ve never felt before.”

Justin Parker, New York

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Jesus showed his wounds to his disciples as a reminder that the lessons of the past must not be forgotten. But Thomas wasn’t there to see him, or his wounds. Without seeing them, he refused to believe.

Those who are outside of the church also won’t believe in a Risen Christ if his church doesn’t show the wounds. If we fail to acknowledge the deep hurts in this world, and if we seem to claim that faith brings success and solves all of life’s problems, and if we act as though we, ourselves, were whole and unblemished—then they will know not to believe a word we say.

As we begin to cross the threshold into post-Pandemic life, how will we acknowledge our own pain, share our own doubts, and step into the struggle on behalf of our neighbors, so that we can be credible witnesses to a resurrecting God?

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Reader 1: “My church has been paying for my rent, utilities, and food while I am living with no paycheck. This year has stripped me from so much, but it also allowed me to focus and evaluate the big picture of my life. What kind of legacy do I want to leave behind?”

Beca Bruder, Alexandria, Virginia

Reader 2: “It forced me to let go of any notion that I could hold myself together and get on with the show. But it also made room for me to fall fully apart and look at the pieces. Since then, I’ve changed my housing, my church, my career plans, and the family and friends I allow in.”

Shelby Doyle, Melrose, Massachusetts

Reader 1: “I do not want to go back to before. There is a lack of compassion and help. It is all about money. When I see such inequality, unfairness, sometimes I am like, ‘Why are we doing all this?’”

Yasmine Karrenberg, New York City

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When Jesus stepped out of the tomb, his past wasn't erased. He carried it with him. His wounds were a reminder of what matters in life.

What have you learned about what matters in your life? What will you eagerly resume, as you become able? What will you let go of forever?

Jesus carried the past with him, not so that he would relive it—"No thank you!" right?—but as a reminder to his followers to live differently—more peacefully, more courageously, more compassionately, more joyfully, more freely.

May the wounds that we bear as we step back into the world, guide us to do the same.