

“The risen Christ walks on wounded feet” a sermon based on John 20:19-31 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on 28 April 2019.

Easter in Colombo and Batticaloa in Sri Lanka ended in carnage. While at Easter worship, around 250 people were killed and 500 people were wounded. This in a country not far from us that endured decades of terrible violence. In 2009 a massive battle ended a long-running civil war. Hundreds of thousands of people were trapped between fighting enemies. They hid in hope the flying bullets would not strike them. In paddocks nearby are the detritus of their fleeing, rusted buses and bikes and vans and cars, bulldozed into piles. Thousands were killed.

In a tiny church, away from the intimidation of threatening authorities, I listened to the stories of survivors, and of families and children of many who did not survive. A conversation of deep anguish. We had driven past kilometre after kilometre of houses and buildings left uninhabited, pocked with bullet-holes. Thousands of people still traumatised by the memories and the loss. Killing fields bearing testimony to the ferocity of war.

Then ten years, then Easter Day, a week ago. Easter Day this year was another killing day, another wounding day. Yet in Sri Lanka I met some of most compassionate and brave people I have ever met. Church leaders who speak for unity and respect, despite intimidation. Who despite threats, faithfully bore witness to the uniting love of Jesus Christ. In Batticaloa, I met Christians and Muslims who had surrounded each other's churches and mosques to protect them from violent crowds. I met with a theological college principal who had invited a Buddhist community to use their chapel when the Buddhist Temple was too small for a special event. In Sri Lanka, new life was emerging after death had ruled for years.

In the events we mark on Good Friday and Easter day, the power of death is defeated. But in its last throes, the power of death still maims.

After Easter Day, it is a wounded Christ who appears. He still bears the marks of crucifixion. Resurrection did not take from Jesus' body the wounds people inflicted. Resurrection did not remove the mess of a very messy dying. Which gives us hope, we wounded people. Which gives us hope, we wounded church. Resurrection does not take from us the wounds we carry.

I have heard stories of abuse in childhood. Bullying at school. Ostracism from families. Alienation from communities. And the deep wounds of grief and abuse. We can remember words spoken years ago as if they were said yesterday – wounds.

And the wounds of faith - of faith being belittled, doubt being silenced, genuine questions being rubbished. And I have heard of the wounds people experience in the church, including here. Broken confidences, undermining, intimidating, shouting, accusing, insinuating, questioning motives, organising dissension, distrusting.

Wounds inflicting wounds. Knox Church is a wounded body of wounded and wounding people. A body of people who carry wounds and the memory of wounds, some decades old.

Colleagues speak of a growing pattern of wounding in the church. The result, it seems, of a body under stress - rising costs, earthquake strengthening, high insurance premiums, major differences about what constitutes Christian faith, changes to previously accepted practices, arguments about fundamental principles.

It was no less messy for the first disciples.

They met Jesus knowing they had forsaken him, and knowing Jesus knew. Peter met Jesus knowing he had denied him three times, and knowing Jesus knew. Jesus was the one person they least wanted to meet. No wonder they met behind closed doors. Can we feel their shame and fear, the awkwardness? Was the welcome as positive as John declares it?

And Jesus says - "Peace be with you." It must have been an enormous relief. When we are embarrassed and ashamed and afraid, do we not long to hear words of peace, of trust and hope? And Jesus showed them his hands and his side. Jesus invites Thomas to touch the wounds in his body. Here was a wounded Christ meeting wounded people. And he spoke the words many of us wounded people need desperately to hear.

"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." Bearing the sins of others is a burden too great for us to carry.

Instead, how can the wounds we carry be part of our life with Christ, rather than wounds that wound others? How can forgiveness release us from the temptation to retaliate? How can the massacres of Christchurch and Sri Lanka not be played out again and again? A question for us, this Sunday after Anzac Day.

After Easter we carry wounds but with a risen Christ. After Easter Christ speaks peace to our wounded being. So we don't need to pretend perfection or rightness. We know - don't we? - that our wounds are only too obvious, and become more obvious the more we wound others.

On the evening of the first day of resurrection, Jesus honoured our bruised, broken, scarred and disabled selves, the real-life body in which we live. To our wounded selves, Jesus speaks peace. Into our wounded selves, Jesus breathes the very spirit of creation. Through our wounded selves, we are sent, just as God sent Jesus. Our wounded selves become part of the future that God has for us and all people.

Resurrection is the breaking in of the decisively different world God means for us. Thomas's assertion of faith "My Lord and my God", proclaims a new ruler who brings a new reign. Thomas, having touched the wounds of Christ, chooses to be part of the new world Christ brings.

Malcolm Guite's poem *Doubting Thomas* is a poem addressed to Thomas. It begins by referring to a question Thomas asked Jesus when Jesus said he was going ahead, to God's house:

"We do not know... how can we know the way?"
Courageous master of the awkward question,
You spoke the words the others dared not say
And cut through their evasion and abstraction.
Oh doubting Thomas, father of my faith,
You put your finger on the nub of things
We cannot love some disembodied wraith,
But flesh and blood must be our king of kings.
Your teaching is to touch, embrace, anoint,
Feel after Him and find Him in the flesh.
Because He loved your awkward counter-point
The Word has heard and granted you your wish.
Oh place my hands with yours, help me divine
The wounded God whose wounds are healing mine

We can long for our bodies, physical and ecclesial, to be free of pain. We can be overwhelmed by wounds and wounding, tempted to give up, give in, go in search of a painless body. Yet, it is to our wounded self that a wounded Christ says – Peace be with you. It is to our wounded self that a wounded Christ offers the way of forgiveness. It is our wounded self that a wounded Christ sends, just as the Father sent him. It is into our wounded self that a wounded Christ breathes God’s own Spirit. It is a wounded risen Christ who stands amid the killing of Colombo and Batticaloa. It is to the wounded Christ that Thomas says – My Lord and my God. God comes in a wounded body to wounded people, speaking peace.

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