

In my seminary training, before you could be ordained, you had to spend one year as a fulltime pastoral intern. For some reason, we were called vicars. When I was a vicar, I came to know a little boy named Ray Ray who lived near the church. Although he was only 8 years old, Ray Ray was pretty much on his own. I met Ray Ray one day when I was out doing little puppet shows with children in a neighborhood park. Ray Ray began to come regularly to church – on his own. He didn't necessarily make it in time for worship every Sunday but he was definitely there for coffee hour treats. Belong long, the church became a kind of surrogate family for Ray Ray who bore a lot of scars from his background, some visible and some not.

I'd met Ray Ray during the first month of my internship in June. That July our church summer day camp began. We sang songs, played games, painted murals, went on trips and we made paper mache puppets with the children to act out Bible stories. July was also the month my father was diagnosed with the cancer that would quickly take his life. He was diagnosed on the 4th of July and he died on August 5. Every day, after day camp, I drove 40 minutes to the hospital to be with my parents. After a few weeks of keeping up with rambunctious children followed by bedside worry and grief, I was physically and emotionally exhausted.

I remember one evening when I drove back from the hospital. All I wanted to do was close the door behind me, get in bed and sleep. As my VW bug pulled up to my building, I saw Ray Ray on the stoop outside, apparently waiting for me. My first thought was **Oh no. Not now.** He bounced over to my car window full of energy as usual...**I'm here to do a puppet show for you Vicar Heidi.** A puppet show with Ray Ray was the last thing I wanted. I was about to tell him that this wasn't a good time when Ray Ray said **I know you're going to love it.** I didn't have the heart to tell him no. Ray Ray bounded up the 3 flights of stairs to my apartment with me and found the puppets he knew I kept there. **You sit here** he instructed me as I collapsed into a chair and then he began his show. One of the puppets was just kind of sitting there, like me actually, looking very sad. **I know you're sad** the other puppet said. Let me cheer you up. And the puppet began to perform a silly dance. The first puppet was still sitting there. The silly dancer came over and patted the sad one. **It's OK... I love you.**Then Ray Ray turned to me: **Do you feel better now?**-- he asked hopefully. I did. It turns out I needed that puppet show after all.

Ray Ray was what we might call a wounded healer. Wounds are very important in today's Easter reading. Easter is too good for just one Sunday so the church celebrates Easter for a week of Sundays, seven Sundays in a row. It's still Easter, but our lives remain wounded and scarred. People we love continue to get sick. Or we get sick. People we love continue to die. Or hurt us. People continue to do horrible things to one another. No ceasefire seems to hold. People continue to die and die and die in the Middle East, in the Ukraine, in Somalia, and closer to home in what are sometimes called "Culture Wars." Where there will be cuts to school lunches that get food from local farms, impacting both children and small farms and the Health and Human Services Department plans to eliminate services for LGBTQ youth who call 988, the national suicide and crisis hotline, a line that gets around 2000 calls a day. And closer to home the peoples place here in Kingston will have the meals they serve cut in half 650 fewer meals kids seniors veterans usda cutsand that's just the tip of a melting iceberg. It's Easter but we bear old scars and sometimes, fresh wounds.

In our gospel, we see that the risen Christ himself continues to bear the scars of Good Friday. Jesus has risen from the tomb, leaving his grave clothes behind, and yet, his scars remain.

If Jesus is risen to new life, in an Easterized body, why not lose the wounds? Some people in the early years of the church rejected this version of Easter with scars. They believed that Jesus did not

really live a human life in a fully human body and did not **really** suffer on the cross. It only looked like he did. He was like an alien in a human suit who looks like us on the outside, but is actually a divine extraterrestrial being who knows nothing of true human bodily experiences. This is one of the reasons that the church developed creeds like the Apostles Creed with the words “He suffered under Pontius Pilate” and the Nicene creed with the words “For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried.” The words *he suffered* are there to defy the idea that he didn’t. Jesus’ scars are an enduring sign of his suffering for our sake, his suffering for all who suffered and who still suffer under Pontius Pilate, whose name in the creed is both historically accurate AND can stand in for the names of all who put political expediency, domination and personal comfort over neighbor love and true justice. Jesus suffered because of the stance he took in loving solidarity with us embodied humans.

When the risen Jesus appears with his wounds, the disciples are locked in a room, hiding out in fear but Thomas was not with them. Tradition has often labeled him as Doubting Thomas. But Thomas is the only one who’s NOT hiding behind closed doors. Aren’t the others showing signs of doubt by allowing their fears to control them, to lock themselves away? Maybe the reason that Thomas is not in the room with them is that he is out and about, actually showing more courage, trust and faith than they are. Some scholars suggest that Thomas was absent because he had volunteered – or been selected- to go out and get food and drink for the rest. Thomas was in charge of the Easter evening coffee hour.

In any case, Thomas wasn’t there and the story describes his encounter with Jesus a week later. He had told the others: *“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.”* And so Jesus returns “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” And Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus does whatever is needed. When the disciples lock themselves in, Jesus comes through the door anyway. When Thomas insists that he needs to see and touch Jesus’ wounds, Jesus obliges. Jesus doesn’t wait for them to come to him in faith, Jesus comes to them where **they** are, as they are, with their fears and worries, their doubts and their needs.

Jesus comes as a **wounded** healer. And when Jesus appears to those shut in by fear he doesn’t say: What’s wrong with you? Where is your faith? Didn’t you pay attention when I was teaching you? He doesn’t call out their betrayals and cowardice. He doesn’t blame them or shame them for abandoning him in his moment of need. Instead, Jesus says *Peace be with you*. Shalom. In fact, he says it three times, just to make sure they get it. *Peace be with you*.

And then he offers them fresh meaning and purpose for their lives: *As the Father has sent me, so I send you.*”

And THEN he gives them the wearwithall for what it means to be sent as Jesus was sent- into a world of colonial brutality and weak-kneed leaders like Pilate eager to wash their hands of any responsibility. *he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.* The risen Jesus comes in love and breathes on them, infusing them with new life, as God breathed into clay to create human life in the beginning, Jesus’ spirit comes now to re-create, to resuscitate their fear-tensed bodies and anxious spirits.

This tells us that resurrection is not just for the final great getting up morning when every tear is wiped away and everything is made whole but on days like today when so much still remains broken...when we come with our own doubts and fears and hurt that can close us off from others, from taking a new

step, from getting up and trying again. According to this story, some days, just getting up out of bed on a regular morning can be a little resurrection. In a world that too often feels like Good Friday, the risen Christ comes to lift us, to inspire us and to empower us to keep on keeping on when we feel that we just can't- or maybe that it's just not worth it.

This means that as a community of Jesus' followers called the body of Christ, WE.ARE a scarred, imperfect body that nevertheless can offer hope, WE can be wounded healers for others. WE can do silly dances! WE can welcome one another, scars and all. In fact, we will be especially tender with one another because of those scars.

Beloveds in Christ, we can seek each other out and support each other through all kinds of struggles. We can share the reviving spirit of love. We can listen to another's pain and we can speak with clarity in the midst of confusion. We can do hard things like face unpleasant truths about ourselves and our church and our community. We can be a community that welcomes differences in thought and age and culture and race and language and gender and sexuality – we can welcome body and neuro-diversity. We can be a community that offers sanctuary for **and with** the vulnerable. We can do hard things... like letting go of long held hallowed traditions when they no longer serve us or more importantly, **most importantly**, when they no longer serve our neighbors. We can do hard things... like forgiving someone who has wronged us and letting go of long held grudges that keep others at arm's length. The Rev Dr. Martin Luther Kings words from the Birmingham City Jail decades ago are truer than ever: *If today's church does not recapture the **sacrificial** spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning...Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust.*

But this is not our fate. We CAN do hard things because we DON'T rely on OUR anxious spirits and OUR stubbornness and OUR weak-kneed **flesh**...We can take risks and rise up over and over and over again **through** the wounded body of Christ, and together AS the wounded body of Christ. Rising up. Coming through walls. Breaking through structures that divide and separate to create new forms of compassionate loving, justice-making community like the one in Acts where the wolves of wall street lie down with the lambs and everything they owned was held in common and there was not a needy person among them.

I wasn't with Thomas and the other disciples that day when Jesus invited Thomas to see and touch his wounds, but...I have known the risen one waiting for me and coming to meet me in my need with silly dances and loving words and bread and wine. **Do you feel better now?** Ray Ray asks...or was it Jesus coming to me through the walls I put up. **Do you feel better now?** And with Thomas I cry out **My Lord and my God.** The world needs more wounded healers. You might be one yourself. Tell your neighbor... Amen.