

Easter 2C, 2013

Text: John 20:19-31

Title: Crucified and Risen

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The church where I grew up had a statue of Jesus in the narthex. He greeted you every Sunday morning when you came into church.

He was a typical, western European Jesus with long, flowing, shoulder length brown hair, a neatly trimmed beard to match and a pale complexion. He wore a long flowing white robe.

The one thing that I always noticed about this Jesus was his hands. He was holding up His right hand in blessing and there was a red mark right in the center of the palm, and one to match on the other hand, and on the feet, too.

This is the Jesus I grew up with, a Jesus with nail marks in his hands.

This is the Jesus who shows up in the upper room, too. He shows His disciples the nail marks in His hands.

When Thomas is doubting, Jesus shows Him, too, the nail marks in His hand.

Have you ever wondered why the marks are still there? When Jesus rises from the dead, why isn't he made whole again? Why doesn't He have perfectly healed hands and feet? Why is He still walking around with a gaping wound in His side?

One reason is to make Him easier to recognize. The disciples need to be sure that it's really Jesus, don't they? What better way to prove that He's really Jesus?

But that's not really necessary, is it? In the garden, Mary recognized Jesus when He simply said His name. And who else is going to walk into a room with closed doors. Jesus could have been completely healed and still be recognized as Jesus.

The scars mean more. They're more than just a way to tell Jesus apart from all others.

The scars are an important part of Jesus' identity, who He truly is.

Easter does not erase Good Friday. When we celebrate Easter we don't forget Good Friday. Easter is about the resurrection of our crucified Savior.

If Jesus had died in some other way, if He had died from illness or an accident or old age, and then come back to life, he would not be your Savior.

Lazarus came back to life. Lazarus is not your Savior.

This Easter season we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ the crucified, the one who died on a cross for you.

Good Friday is when Jesus saves you from the big death, the eternal death of hell and separation from God forever. Because of Good Friday, you do not have to fear eternal punishment from God because of your sins.

Easter Sunday is when Jesus saves you from the little death, the temporary death when your heart stops beating and you are laid to rest. Because Jesus was raised, you will be raised, too.

The two go together, it's all part of who Jesus is.

When John meets Jesus again in Revelation, it's the crucified and risen Jesus. Jesus says to him, "I died, and behold I am alive forevermore."

Jesus wouldn't be Jesus if He hadn't died on the cross. The cross wasn't a mistake or a tragedy, but it was part of God's plan from the very beginning. Jesus was the one last, final, ultimate sacrifice for sin. He was the perfect offering, pierced for our transgressions.

It's important that we continue to worship our crucified Savior, even during Easter, because this is where our forgiveness comes from.

As Christians we never lose our focus on the cross of Jesus and His death for our sin, because we never stop needing His forgiveness.

If you stop sinning, if you become totally perfect in every single way, then you can be done with the crucified Jesus. Then you can tell Jesus, I don't need your wounds any more.

But as long as you keep sinning, you keep needing forgiveness, and you still need a wounded Jesus.

That's why we keep Jesus on the cross all year round. Sometime a long time ago people started telling Lutherans that we shouldn't have crucifixes with Jesus on them, that we should have empty crosses, and that the empty cross was a symbol of the resurrection.

The empty cross is not a symbol of resurrection. If you want a symbol of resurrection, use an empty tomb. All the empty cross says is that Jesus died and was taken down.

We need to keep our focus on Jesus on the cross, because that's where our hope and comfort comes from. If you are worried about your sins, if you're wondering if God could really love someone like you, the answer is yes, and you see that in Jesus on the cross.

If you are worried about the resurrection, if you are wondering if you'll have life beyond the grave, or if you'll see your loved ones who have died in faith again, the answer again is yes, and you see that in the empty tomb and the risen Jesus.

We need them both, and we see that in Jesus, holding out His hands and feet, even for people like Thomas, even for those who can't believe that something so wonderful could actually be true.

John writes, "these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

You may not see Jesus in the same way that Thomas and the disciples did, but you can read and hear all about Him in His Holy Word.

You may not touch Jesus in the same way that Thomas and the disciples did, but you eat and drink His body and blood in the Lord's Supper.

You have been given faith in Him, so that along with Thomas you declare that Jesus Christ is your Lord and your God. Not just the risen Jesus, but the crucified Jesus, too. Jesus is Lord and God as He dies and as He rises.