

MARKS OF LOVE

Grace and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

It is a privilege to be with you today, on this Second Sunday of Easter, to join with you in the 50-day long feast of Easter, the season of *Alleluias*. Easter Day, the Feast Day of the Resurrection of Our Lord, has come and gone. Some have called this day “let down Sunday.” I hope you don’t see it that way. Let us celebrate this day for what it is—the Second Sunday of Easter. Easter is not over, for Easter does not last a day, or a week, but a week of weeks. Easter is the Queen of Feasts, taking us to the 50th day, the Feast of Pentecost, which this year is June 12.

Every year on this 2nd Sunday of Easter, we have this Gospel reading from John 20. It is a wonderful text to culminate the octave of Easter. We could talk about *fear* and *faith*; or about the *peace* of Christ in this world, the peace the world does not give. Twice Jesus says, “Peace be with you.” He blesses us to be peacemakers: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” Sent to be peacemakers, sent to be witnesses, to tell and share and live the Good News of God in Christ, the Good News of God’s Love that casts out fear and the good that conquers evil in this world. We could talk about *faith* and *doubt*. Is doubt harmful to faith, something to avoid? Or is doubt, as Frederick Buechner suggests, *the ants in the pants of faith*. Maybe a topic better than faith and doubt is faith and unfaith, false faith, faith that totally distorts the gospel of Jesus. We could talk about *Jesus’ presence* in the gift of the *Holy Spirit*. Jesus breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven, gone for good. If you hold onto them, then there you are, holding on, burdened with them.” I am drawn to preach on forgiveness, for that is the calling, job, business of the church. The church is much more in the forgiveness business that it is in the morals business—naming blame and passing judgment. But this morning, I would like for us to join the disciples, including Thomas, in taking a good look at the crucified and risen body of Jesus.

Having said, “Peace be with you,” Jesus showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. . . . Jesus said to Thomas, “Peace be with you. Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not be faithless, but believing.”

Thomas said, “My Lord and my God.”

Martin Luther, when once asked about the return of Christ and how we would manage to recognize Jesus, responded, “By the scars.” By the scars.

The disciples, men and women I believe, were holed-up in a Jerusalem room. Maybe it was where they had shared the meal before the crucifixion. That very morning, the first day of a new week after the death of Jesus, that Sunday morning had been both trying and exciting. They heard news from Mary Magdalene about the tomb now empty of Jesus’ body. What does it mean? After some had rushed to the tomb to see if indeed it were empty of Jesus’ body, Mary came later to announce: “I have seen the Lord.” Is it true? Dare they believe, or hide in fear? Then, lo and behold, Jesus shows up. “Peace be with you,” he says. Have no fear. I am with you. God is with you. He showed them his wounds. This is Jesus, the Crucified One. He was dead, but God raised him up. God’s love has conquered the powers of evil, the principalities and rulers of this world. *O Death, where is your victory?* Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Death shall not be proud. See his Marks of Love—this is Jesus, the Crucified.

Perhaps you have heard the story about a young woman waking from sleep as she is lifted from her bed by the strong arms of a fireman. Through the smoke, flames and heat he carries her outside to the cool night air, to safety. He sets her down and she looks back to see her little cottage engulfed in flames. Fire is leaping from the roof, lapping up the walls, swallowing her little home. Firemen are dutifully hosing down the house, but all seems lost. Suddenly, in great anxiety, the woman cries out, “Where’s my baby?” “Baby?” say the firemen. “What baby?” Against their objections and restraint, the woman breaks free and runs back into the growing inferno, the firemen unable to hold her back. They were certain that there was no chance to find and save a baby. They feared she would not survive. Then, after a bit, through the tremendous heat came a dark shadow from the burning house. It was the woman. Her nightgown was on fire. A little bundle of blankets was also aflame. The firemen quickly smothered the flames. The woman’s hair had burned. Her face was badly burned. Her hands were charred. The firemen rolled back the burned blanket and inside the folds was a baby boy—alive, unharmed.

Years later, that boy, now a teenager, was still in fine health. His mother was in reasonably good health, though she hid from the world her scars. She always wore gloves, a hat with a veil, and dark glasses. The boy’s friends teased him about his “weird” mother. Though he put up with the teasing, he also felt uncomfortable about the gloves, hat and veil, and dark glasses, though he could not remember ever seeing his mother without them. Was there something wrong with her? Why did she dress that way? He was either too afraid or too embarrassed to ask.

Finally, one day he asked her. She stopped, still, a bit stunned. Anxious, worried, she said, “O.K. I’ll tell you why and show you my hands and face.” In a few sentences she told the story of the fire and the rescue of the little baby from the flames. Then she removed the gloves, the hat and veil, and the dark glasses. “I look horrid, don’t I? Now you know why I didn’t tell you or show you before this.” Her son was, in fact, a bit taken aback. Then he reached out his hand and gently caressed her face. He took her hands in his own, looked into her eyes, his eyes welling with tears, and he said, “Mother, you are so beautiful.” He kissed her and embraced her. – Marks of Love –

We, you and I, have been saved from the fire. Jesus, the Crucified One, has saved us. See, his hands, his feet, his side. See the marks of the nails, the marks of love. Do not be faithless, but believing. Do not be fearful, but courageous. We have been carried through death to life. We who have been buried with Christ in baptism have also been raised with him. We bear the mark of his cross. We come to share in the feast of his resurrection. With Thomas, we fall to our knees and confess, “My Lord and my God!”

To God Alone Be Glory.

Amen.