

Date: April 18, 2021

Scripture: Luke 24:36b-48

Title: TWO GREAT TRUTHS

I read a story recently about a man named Fred Karger who has earned the unofficial title of the “World’s Greatest Party Crasher.” Over the years, Karger has crashed hundreds of high-profile parties and celebrity events. He even ended up several years ago on the stage at the Academy Awards and at the White House Correspondents’ Dinner for President Obama. Karger claims there’s no high-profile party, wedding, funeral, or political event, he can’t crash. He says the key to being a successful party crasher is to look confident, as if you belong there, and no one will question you.

Our Bible verse today makes me think of the art of party-crashing. This time, though, the party crasher was Jesus. The interesting thing is, it wasn’t a party until Jesus showed up. Before Jesus got there, things were kind of gloomy.

Jesus wasn’t exactly an uninvited guest in this story, but he certainly was unexpected. After his crucifixion, his disciples were trying to sort out the meaning of the reports they had been receiving about appearances of the risen Christ. It was very confusing to them. Was it a hoax? Perhaps it was some kind of ghost. Last week we talked about Doubting Thomas. But, it’s important for us to see, it was difficult for all his followers to deal with Christ’s resurrection.

Then suddenly it happened. The disciples were gathered together in one place and the crucified Christ himself stood among them. The disciples were startled and frightened. Then Jesus said to them, “Why are you troubled and why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, it is I myself . . .”

The response of the disciples, is a sermon in itself. Luke tells us, the disciples “disbelieved for joy . . .” It was simply too wonderful to be true. Jesus was alive and he was with them, right there . . . in their presence! Jesus had been raised from the dead. Talk about bringing life to a party! Even today, people desperately want to believe, but something holds them back.

Greg Boyle is a Jesuit priest, who has spent decades ministering in the toughest neighborhoods in Los Angeles. He’s the founder of Home Boy Industries, which provides jobs and counseling to young men, who have been released from prison. In an interview, Boyle told the story of José, a young man from the streets.

When José was six years old, his mother told him to kill himself, because no one wanted him. Can you imagine a mother saying that to her son? When he was nine, she abandoned him at an orphanage. His grandmother assumed custody of José, but she beat him brutally. It’s no wonder that when José grew up, he turned to drugs, gangs, and then eventually to crime, to deal with his painful past.

José ended up in prison, which turned out to be the best thing that could have happened to him, because it was in prison, he heard the message of Jesus. Through a prison ministry, he learned that Jesus was the sole embodiment of God’s love and that Jesus came to die for us, on the cross, to take away our sins, and give us new life.

As José told Greg Boyle about his background, he showed him some of his scars, the scars left behind, by his childhood beatings, his drug use, and rough living. Since he found Jesus, José was no longer ashamed, of his scars. As he said, “How could I help other wounded people, if I didn’t make friends of my wounds?”

The risen Christ, showed the disciples his scars, because Jesus was going to send the disciples, out to do the work, God the Father had sent Jesus to do, to save wounded people. They couldn’t save wounded people, unless they could see and touch and make friends with Jesus’ wounds. Only then, could they proclaim, with confidence the unlimited love of God.

Many people desperately want to believe, but something’s holding them back. Maybe **IF** they could see Jesus’ scars, it would make a difference. Why? Several reasons.

First, some people have difficulty believing that God really cares about hurting people that much. So much, that God would give God’s life for them. The claims of the Gospel are outrageous! The divine Creator of all that lives, moves, and has its being, came down to earth, suffered and died, to say to us, that no one on this earth, is beyond God’s love and concern. Outrageous!

A Savior with scars in his hands, feet, and side? Some of us are more comfortable with an impersonal God, who’s the Source of life and power, but not of personality. The idea of God with nail prints in his hands, feet, and side, because of God’s great love for us, is an idea, we’re not ready for.

Professor Maria Teresa Dávila put it this way: she writes that Jesus’ resurrected body, shows his disciples, that the triumph of life over death, is “not a victory without cost.” As Dávila writes, “Victory didn’t erase the scars. Jesus carried on his skin, the evidence of a life lived in radical commitment to God’s love and justice.”

In trying to deal with the meaning of the cross, on which Christ died, the early church came to understand, that those nail prints in Christ’s hands and feet, should have been ours. But God so loved the world, that God sent his own Son, to bear the burden brought about by the iniquities, of us all. Can you deal with that? Can you believe that God really cares about you that much?

Jesus’ courage, was rooted in Jesus’ love for humanity. Jesus knew we could never be good enough, by our own efforts, to stand in the presence, of a holy God. So Jesus covered our sins, with his holy blood, and made us perfect, in God’s sight. Jesus paid for our sins, to set us free, from the power of death.

It’s like a judge a few years ago in Fairfax County, Virginia, who heard a landlord-tenant dispute. The landlord wanted to evict a deaf couple, who couldn’t afford to pay their back rent.

Judge Donald McDonough was accustomed to dealing with more than 100 landlord-tenant disputes on an average Friday, so this wasn’t the first time he was called upon to pass judgment on a situation like this. But there was something about this deaf couple, and their grim situation, that touched Judge McDonough’s heart. Before he rendered his judgment, he excused himself from the bench, and went back to his chambers. A few minutes later, he returned with \$250 cash, the exact amount of

money the deaf couple owed in back rent. He handed it to the landlord's attorney as he pronounced his judgment: "Consider it paid."

What beautiful words, "Consider it paid." Those are words Christ speaks to us. Our sins, our debt, our failures. "Consider it paid." The empty grave, the empty cross, the wounds in Jesus' hands and feet and side, those are all physical reminders of God's ultimate announcement to humanity: "Consider it paid." That's how much God loves us. It's hard to believe, that God loves us that much, but Jesus' scars, are a reminder.

Then, there are others of us, who simply have difficulty believing, that life really goes on beyond the tomb. It seems too wonderful to believe, that there's a world beyond this one, another existence in which, that which dies here, is resurrected to new life there. Yet, such a conviction, is at the heart of our faith.

It's very difficult for most of us, to face the thought of dying. In the cartoon, "Family Circus" the family is evidently returning from a funeral. The mother says to the children in the back seat: "We'll see Granddad someday, when we go to heaven." With that, the smallest child in the family says, "Could I just wait in the car?"

I can understand that sentiment. None of us wants to die. But that's life. No one gets to wait in the car. We'll all die. Thankfully, that's not our final destiny. We were created for life, not death. God didn't bring us into being, for this world only. Christ showed us, that death is no longer our enemy. Death has been conquered. Because Christ lives we, too, shall live. We no longer need to fear death. Without the Easter faith, not only death, but life itself, is ultimately meaningless. What value is there in love, that ends at the grave?

Some of you may remember the name Alfred Krupp. Krupp was a wealthy manufacturer who supplied weapons to the Nazi regime and used slave labor in his factories. After World War II, Krupp was put on trial for crimes against humanity, for forcing prisoners of war to work in his factory, producing the weapons that allowed the Nazis, to wage war against the Allies.

Those who knew Krupp well, said, Krupp was so afraid of death, that he would not allow his family, friends, colleagues, or his employees, to ever speak about death, in his presence. As he lay dying, he offered his doctor a million dollars if the doctor could prolong his life, just a little longer. But no amount of money, could buy Alfred Krupp more time. His power and money weren't enough to protect him from his greatest fear, his own death. You have to wonder in Krupp's situation, if it was fear of death, or fear of judgment, that filled his heart with terror.

That's all the non-believing world can do with death, fear it, ridicule it, deny it, avoid talking about it. But not those who have seen the scars, of the risen Savior. Jesus Christ is alive, and because Jesus lives, so shall we live!

Many people resist believing the Good News, that Christ is alive. Some can't believe God really loves us that much. Others can't believe, that life really does go on beyond the grave. **But even more significantly, most people don't want to deal, with the implications, of those two truths.** The Bible makes it clear, that we cannot save ourselves from death. No amount of avoiding the subject, or worrying about it, or fearing, will change that fact.

What if Jesus really did rise from the grave, what does that mean for our lives today? What if there really is a God, who is that intimately concerned with our lives? What does it mean, if this life really is, but a prelude to everlasting life? What difference would it make in your life, to see the hands, feet, and side of the risen Christ? Would it cause you to take more seriously your walk with the Man of Galilee? Would it have some effect on the goals, you have set for your life? After all, if life is indeed eternal, some of our goals are going to seem awfully short-sighted and self-serving!

Former disgraced presidential advisor and prison ministry founder Chuck Colson tells of visiting one his mentors, Ken Wessner, a few days before Wessner's death. Wessner had been a successful businessman, the CEO of the ServiceMaster Corporation.

After his retirement, Wessner dedicated his time and energy to a variety of ministries. Now he was dying of kidney cancer. But he wasn't scared or self-pitying or sad. He had a peace and joy that comforted all those around him.

A few days later, Wessner called his close friend Ken Hansen, who was also dying. Wessner's wife reports that the two men spoke with joy about meeting Jesus soon, about having new bodies without any pain or weakness. Because of their faith in the promises of God and the sacrifice of Jesus, both men faced their suffering and death with joy and confidence.

No wonder, Jesus had crashed their pity party. They had seen the hands and feet of the risen Christ, and they knew, that there's more to life than death. Those who live their lives in the light of eternity, never run out of a purpose for life.

"See my hands and my feet . . ." said Christ to his fearful disciples. God really does love us that much. Life really does go on beyond the tomb. How are you living in response to those two great truths? Live life Trusting, Believing, and having an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.