

**Augusta First Baptist Church**  
**John 20:24-29**  
**Do Your Scars Ever Hurt?**  
**April 15, 2007**

John 20:24-29

*“But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. [25] So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “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.” [26] A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” [27] Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” [28] Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” [29] Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”*

Here we are, a week after Easter, a week after the most triumphal day on the Christian calendar, and all is right in the world and in our lives. Is that true? I suspect not. Instead we awoke to the same realities that greet us on most every other day: trouble in the Middle East, war, poverty, bills to pay, school projects that are due, doctor visits, meetings to prepare for or endure...the list goes on and on.

In this Easter season, we are not much different than the disciples following the resurrection of Jesus. They gathered behind their locked doors out of fear, out of distrust, and quite frankly, because they just did not know what else to do. In spite of this climate of distrust and despondency, Jesus appears first to the women and now to the disciples.

Well, most of the disciples. Thomas was not there. When he eventually arrives, the room is giddy with excitement and they tell him Jesus is alive! But Thomas has been hurt too deeply. His disappointments are many. The painful events of his past have robbed him of any imagination that would nod towards a different reality. Thomas announces: “Unless I see the mark of the nails...I will not believe.” That is an interesting word Thomas uses, the word “mark.” It means literally an imprint, image, or a standard. It can also be understood as scar.

I remember years ago, when the very first Harry Potter book was published in 1998. Most every evening I would join with my children in a bedtime ritual of reading Harry Potter. We made it all the way to the fifth book, before they felt that they were too old for that kind of stuff. I went on to read volume six for myself, and I am looking forward to the publication of volume seven, the final in the series. The series focuses on the experiences of Harry Potter and his friends, while they are students at a boarding school, Hogwarts. Oh, I forgot to mention that Hogwarts is no ordinary boarding school situated somewhere in Europe. It is a boarding school for...wizards. Harry Potter is a student of wizardry, who was left an orphan when he was an infant. In the first volume, Harry’s parents die tragically by the curse of an evil wizard named Lord Voldemort, who wanted to take over the world. But instead of dying along with his parents, Harry only suffered a scar on his forehead - a scar that is shaped like a lightning bolt. This scar has stayed with him through the years, and everyone knows Harry by his distinguishable scar. Anytime he is in the presence of pure evil, his scar burns into his forehead. When he thinks of his mother and father, his scar aches from the memories.

Have you any scars? I’ve got a few scars on my body. Here is one beside my eye. I was no more than five or six and I was rough housing with one of my brothers, and next thing you know there is a doctor sewing up this side of my face! I still have this tiny one on my thumb. A few years ago, I was running the garbage disposal, and one of my prized butcher knives slipped over the edge and into the drain. The garbage disposal catapulted the knife up into the air and across my thumb. I can still look at this scar and relive part of the pain.

So, here we are on this Sunday after Easter, and we view the scars of believing. That's right – the scars of our beliefs. Jesus wasn't the only one brandishing scars that day. Thomas had a few of his own – scars of disbelief and uncertainty. Chances are, that most of the other disciples had some scars as well. There was Peter, who bore the scars of denial, James and John, who bore the scars of arguing over greatness. There was the scar of an empty seat that Judas once occupied, but who betrayed Jesus and deserted them all for good.

Looking out among our fine gathering, it is easy to see that we do not have the numbers we experienced last week. I feel pretty confident in saying, churches throughout the land are experiencing the same thing. We are like that about our faith – crowd in the day we celebrate resurrection, sing joyfully, expect the best music, and hope the preacher has a good message. But next week, things return to normal.

Last week was a day of celebrating faith. Today, is a day for nursing our scars. Not all scars are visible. Some are deep inside in the shadowed recesses of memory or experiences.

\* **The Scars of Doubt:** Thomas had those doubting scars. "*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.*" (v.25) Thomas is not really different than the rest of us. He just wanted to know the facts. He was linear in his thinking. That is, things had to add up. One plus one must equal two and when someone dies a cruel death, there is no more life. He just could not accept some things that were not supported by empirical evidence.

\* **The Scars of Disappointment:** In the synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke – Thomas is merely listed alongside the other disciples. He is just a name. We know nothing about his occupation, his associations or his personality. The Gospel of John, however, gives us his face. We are introduced to Thomas in the 11th chapter, and it is a noble first impression that the reader is given. Thomas was committed to Kingdom of God, to the point he was ready to head straight into Jerusalem and die. In some respects, Thomas comes off looking fearless, in a way that we have not seen from the other disciples. But then the outcome was not at all what Thomas expected. Jesus was not the triumphal King of Israel, but was executed like a criminal. Thomas was scarred with disappointment, to the extent he just could not see the living.

\* **The Scars of the Unknown:** Moving through the gospel of John, we next read of Thomas in chapter 14. Jesus is speaking of going to prepare a place for his followers. Thomas may be the only honest one in the bunch when he asks, "*Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?*" (John 14:5)

At the age of about 8 months, infants go through what is often called “separation anxiety”, what behaviorist Erik Erikson would describe as, “basic trust and basic mistrust.” While psychologically we outgrow this, that is, we develop further and move beyond those levels of trust and mistrust, sometimes we are stunted spiritually.

Surrounded by disappointments, overwhelmed by failures, our children grow up and leave home, our parents get old and die, and our own health is not so good, the scars of fear and separation makes its imprint. Like Thomas, we hear our own trembling voices, “How can we know the way?”

Scars, however, are not always the mark of something bad or a blemish of shame, of which we try to hide. Surely, you remember as a kid or perhaps even as an adult, showing off your scars to your friends. There are some scars we need.

\* **The Scars of Service:** Christ bore the scars of his giving of himself. Where are your scars? If we come here today, without any scars regarding our beliefs, our faiths, then I say shame on us! For scars indicate that we have been busy doing something about our faith, working it out, if you will, our salvation.

One church member wrote me, when he found out what I was preaching on scars and said: “I’ve got some scars - some I don’t know where they came from, some as a result of carelessness or an accident, and a few on my hands from helping a single mother move into a house and from helping her do a lot of yard clean up to make it a home. The last ones I mentioned don’t hurt, they serve as reminders of an opportunity of which I was available. The absence of additional scars remind me of lost opportunities, yet also remind me that the scars of Jesus are sufficient to allow me second chances.” Sad is the one who leaves this world, without any scars to bear testimony of a life lived well.

\* **The Scars of Survival:** A scar can be an indication – albeit, a rather small one at times – that we have survived and are healing. Scars in and of themselves, are only testimony that you have gone this way before and you did not perish, but are stronger.

There is a difference, however, between scars of survival and wounds that are festering. Let me say something very direct and personal. In fact, this may cause some uneasy questions within your family. Some of us bear the scars of shame from our past. For example, it is estimated that over 60 million Americans are victims of childhood sexual abuse. Additionally, hundred of thousands of children each year are physically abused. They grow up, and instead of bearing scars, still have open wounds. Scars indicate healing. Wounds show there is no healing. When there is no peace in your past, the fears, disappointments, and anxieties of the past will only grow and fester.

For some, religion has wounded you, instilling in you a fear of the unknown. Many preachers, I confess, are much like Thomas. They thrive in doubt. Haven’t you heard this line? If you were to die tonight, are you sure you would go to heaven? Some churches major in playing off of our fears. Fear the government, fear public schools, fear science, especially if it seems to challenge some of our notions. I think you get the point. Some religious leaders have labeled such events as September 11, or natural disasters as God’s judgment. Do you hear the message? Be afraid. Be very afraid. God is going to get you.

Yes, it disturbs me to say so, but religion can leave us with wounds and when wounds are left unattended they only fester.

Beneath the wounds of our past, are scars waiting to make us stronger. A life of gratitude considers the personal scars and gives thanks that we have indeed made it. Our scars can very well be the mark of God, a point of gratitude.

Several years ago, I was participating in a group called Leadership Cobb, through the Cobb County Chamber of Commerce. We were car pooling to a particular event that evening, and one of my fellow passengers was telling us all about her recent experience adopting her first child. She spoke exuberantly of her joy in bringing this infant into her home and claiming the baby as part of her. But the most touching part of her story had nothing to do with her baby. She said that while she was waiting to go meet with the judge in the judge’s chambers to finalize the adoption, another little boy – about nine – was waiting for the same thing. The little boy was talking aloud so that anyone could hear him, “today I get my last name. Today I become a Grady. Today I get my name.” Soon the judge called the little boy in to the chambers, to finalize the adoption process and minutes later he came out with a smile as big as his very own face: “I am a Grady, I am a Grady. I have a name!” The wounds of rejection and being orphaned were healed and he was given a name and claimed in the name of love. My brothers and sisters, Christ presents himself to us today inviting us to place our hands into his scars, to place our doubts and fears, our loneliness and rejection, our disappointments and discouragement and allow God to claim us and name us.

Go forth now in your scars, and live in God’s grace, and be thankful that God has marked you through baptism for life eternal.