



## Our Wounds Have Stories

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“I’ll show you mine if you show me yours!” my sister said as she held out her arm to show me the faint lines of where melanomas from her arm and hand had been cut out. I traced those lines with my finger, feeling the raised edge of skin on her arm, on her hand, wondering at the tiny moles that posed such a threat to her body that they needed to be excised from her skin. Then, I presented my wrists to reveal the signs of my recent carpal tunnel surgery adventures that took place at the same time she was going through her own procedures. We shared stories that left such marks on our bodies, our lives.

We all bear scars, from the bad scrapes and nicks from the double dog dares of childhood, where we jumped from swings or fell from tree branches to the seams up our legs and chests from bypass surgery, or the joyful lines from gender-affirming surgeries.

Some of these wounds are visible; many are hidden.

We all hold the scar tissue from the myriad of inner wounds of betrayals and relationships gone awry from the hurt done unto us, and the hurt we have done unto others, the griefs that continue to cause the surprise of pain and emptiness. All of us carry the permanent blemishes of living; all of those scars tell stories.

It is interesting to me that, in the stories of appearance of the resurrected, Jesus to the disciples, Jesus shows his wounded body to allay their fears. Not only are they comforted, for the disciples (especially Thomas), the visible wounds of Jesus prove his authenticity.

Rev. Josh Scott writes, “What does it mean for Jesus to be known by his scars?”

All of our scars tell our stories, and this is no different for Jesus. Rev. Scott muses that Jesus’ wounds “*paint a vivid picture of a human being committed to a vision of God and God’s kingdom that is just and generous, with an embrace wide enough for anyone and everyone. They tell a story of resisting the dehumanizing forces of empire by insisting on a God who sees everyone as valuable, a God who has numbered everyone hair on our heads. Jesus’ scars tell a story of refusing violence in favor of peacemaking and returning love in the face of hatred. The truth is the scars by which Jesus’ disciples know him encapsulate the very essence of the life he lived that led to them in the first place....*”

The scars tell a story of hope, of love which includes immense suffering, of agony, betrayal, and a failed mission. What does it mean, that the resurrected body still contains the scars of what came before?

Christine Valters Paintner, writer, author, Abbess of the Abbey of the Arts says, “This is a staggering revelation. The resurrected body is not about perfection.” Paintner suffers from chronic illness that often leaves her exhausted and unable to do the things she wants to in life.

She wonders what it means to practice “resurrection” in a body that is chronically ill. She writes, “I love the truth that Jesus experienced the sometimes excruciating pain of this human form, and his resurrected body still had its wounds, pointing the way toward something wondrous about them in the resurrected life.

She continues, “Our wisdom traditions teach us that pain — whether emotional, physical, mental, or spiritual — can be a doorway. It can be a portal into discovering and inhabiting a much deeper and more aligned way of being in the world.”

Our wounds are guides into “profound compassion and embrace of vulnerability”.

Knowing that the newness of life still carries the woundedness of the past, as well as the ill of the present, Paintner writes about her own scars, and how they have become doorways into wisdom.

As many of you can relate, she writes that “navigating the medical system can be relentless, exhausting and dispiriting. My weeks are often full of various appointments which demand the little energy I have and often promising new consultants bring little new insight or help.” In the midst of this, she realizes how grateful she is for her core team, those who listen to her story, who don’t promise cures but offer balms of loving presence while giving of their skills. As she prays for her team regularly, she realizes her wounds “weave her into a circle where she can vulnerable and know she is not alone.”

In addition, she marvels at how her wounds lead her to awareness of sparks of wonder around her, including the gift of her furry companion, Sourney, her friends, baths, massages, and walks when her body is up for it. Tiny bits of joy and marvel are healing and renewing.

And yet, her wounds weep and ask her to feel her grief and express her anger in service of transformation. Making space for the grief that arises every time she has a letting go is essential. Not holding it together and giving way to lament and tears and vulnerability is a hard wisdom. Pain is exhausting, fatigue is limiting, being ill is challenging. Expressing grief makes us intimate with all the injustices around care—or the lack of it—in our world. The pain of lament honors the reality that all is not well in all of the world.

What are the wounds you are carrying? How can you listen to those stories? Is there wisdom to be gleaned?

I might note here that sometimes, it is not always possible to see the doorway to wisdom in the midst of your suffering~~and that is ok. Sometimes our pain drowns us; we just need to be in a place of messiness, and simply ask for help or support. The wounds are too fresh or deep for any kind of wisdom to emerge. We see you. I see you. It isn’t time.

For many of us, our wounds call us to practice resurrection. To hear the stories of our scars, to let them lead us to new revelations. Richard Rohr writes, “If we do not

transform our pain, we most assuredly will transmit it.” The risen One was able to allow his pain to be transformed, allowing healing and hope to flow from his wounds to his friends, and beyond.” (Scott). Is there wisdom and healing to be freed from the story of your wounds?

I was with my mom last week, who fell and broke her hip and needed a partial replacement. My mom also has dementia but is able to live in assisted living. Dementia and anesthesia often don't mix well, and this has been the case with her. We still don't know what the outcome will be for her—will she get physically stronger? Will she be able to go back to her home? Did she have a stroke? The questions abound.

Every day was like Groundhog Day. It was a new revelation she had surgery; it was a surprise to see me. The sadness in my bones has been heavy with the questions and the reality of not knowing. It is a unique woundedness born of caretaking, right? Many of you know this.

The morning that I left, she gripped me tightly in her arms, telling me she loved me so much, whispering she was scared...I have never heard my mom say she was scared of anything (and she has had plenty of scary things happen to her). And, when I asked her to say more, she was quiet a moment, and then “I just love the highlights in your hair.”

I laughed, holding the pain of her fear and the silliness of the moment. It was a precious gift, to bear witness to her vulnerability, to bear witness to her “dorothy-ness that revealed itself in admiring hair...”

Our wounds have stories, friends.  
They tell us there is joy in the sorrow,  
There are dreams in spite of pain,  
There is grief and lament, and hope that somehow,  
some way that all shall be well...  
either here, and now...or another time.

Our wounds tell stories.  
May we have the strength to listen to them.  
May we be blessed with their wisdom.  
Amen.

### Sources

Rev. Josh Scott, “April 14: Third Sunday of Easter” *In The Lectionary*, Christian Century, April 2024, p. 25.

Christine Valters Paintner, “A Love Note from Your Online Abbess, March 31, 2024” Abbey of the Arts, <https://mailchi.mp/abbeyofthearts/practicing-ressurrection-through-the-wisdom-of-our-wounds-march31-2024?e=54ef398d0f>