

Broken

Luke 24:13-35

The Holy Scriptures are filled with ghost stories – holy ghost stories. From Saul’s encounter with the ghost of Samuel to Ezekiel’s “zombie army,” to the dead man who came to life after touching Elisha’s bones, to the raising of Lazarus, to the revival of Jairus’ daughter, to Jesus’ own terrifying resurrection – at least terrifying to the guards who literally froze in fear, these stories remind us that supernatural encounters come with the territory of our Christian faith.

If anything stands out among these kinds of experiences, it’s that as human beings, we are witnesses to both the brokenness of our world and to God’s power to heal and resurrect all life within it, including us. Without brokenness, we cannot witness to the amazing power and miracles of God or realize our promise and heritage within our covenantal relationship. Without brokenness, we don’t need a God to heal us. Encountering brokenness, recognizing brokenness, is vital to the purpose and story of scripture, in which the transitory and temporal nature of life is transcended by God and that transcendence promised to us as well.

From broken to remade, dead to alive, lost to reinstated, infected to healed, wounded to restored, natural to supernatural, God is master of the new and renewed. Both the Potter and the Breath.

Just as we confirm our very faith and belief through the witness of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances to his disciples, we also confirm the basic, undeniable, inevitable, and immutable truth born only of the Christian faith: that Christ’s sacrifice, his woundedness, brokenness, and death and subsequent resurrection fulfills God’s ultimate saving initiative to free the faithful from sin and the limits of mortality and grant them everlasting life. This is the core message of the apostles.

It’s no mistake then that Thomas explores the actual wounds of Christ to confirm both his faith and a brand new uniquely “Christian” theology: that of a bodily and authentic resurrection. These aren’t mere wounds. These are mortal wounds. And yet Jesus lives. That theme continues in Jesus’ encounter with the pair on the road to Emmaus as seen in our scripture for today.

No one truly believed in the resurrection before Jesus’ death. Not one of Jesus’ disciples expected to see him after his death, even though he told them about his upcoming “resurrection” multiple times. It seemed to them far-fetched, unreasonable, impossible, a bit too crazy to take seriously. They may have accepted the fact that something may be out there after death, but they did not accept or understand Christ’s sacrifice-death-resurrection scenario until after his post-resurrection appearances. Even during their commissioning after encountering him several times in various ways, many still doubted. And yet, a movement was born. That movement depended upon what happened in these post-resurrection experiences and the witnesses who saw firsthand the impossible made possible, the promise fulfilled. As they processed their experiences, their view of life, death, God, and Jesus needed to change. The entire theology of the early church was founded on encounters in which Christ defied mortal wounds and grave and stood before his disciples alive with the gaping holes to prove God’s miracle.

We often wag our finger at Thomas for doubting, but the only reason that any of the disciples accepted that Jesus had resurrected was because he appeared to them the week before! Thomas was merely a week late. And as we noted last week, his witness to Christ’s wounds would confirm not just his faith but ours.

Now, another encounter will shake up the disillusioned and downhearted and get their pulses moving. We call this encounter, the encounter on the Road to Emmaus.

Most scholars believe that the place the scriptures name Emmaus is most likely present day Amwas, about 19 miles from Jerusalem, where the disciples were still sitting shiva and hiding from the authorities in a locked room. The story tells us that Cleopas and another disciple, whom I believe to be his wife Mary, were traveling dejectedly back to their home in Emmaus. Disillusioned by Christ’s death, they believed the mission was over. Their hopes and those of Israel had been dashed. Jesus challenges them and takes them through the scriptures which point to his version of the messianic

promise, one so foreign it was hard to wrap the head around: death and resurrection. They don't really understand what he's getting at with his unique reading of the scriptures, and don't even recognize him until they see the wounds.

Author Leonard Sweet tells his interpretation of the story of Emmaus in his book, *Jesus Speaks*. The importance of the encounter in these disciples' home is not merely in the breaking of the bread but in seeing and recognizing the brokenness of Jesus as revealed in his wounds. This encounter confirms his resurrection and the reason behind the entire sacrificial theology—as he explained it to the Emmaus disciples in the scriptures as they walked the road.

I have always liked to call Christ the master of the “teachable moment.” Even after his death, he continued to follow up his teaching of scripture with real-life encounter. In this case, himself. His presence. And his wounds. He is the miracle.

Although the breaking of the bread is important metaphorically, just as it was the night of the Last Supper, this scripture passage is not about duplicating the night of the upper room. Their recognition of Christ has not to do only with his breaking of bread. After all, Cleopas and Mary weren't there that night in the upper room for that bread and wine ritualistic experience. Only the twelve were. They wouldn't be remembering that Christ had done this before. They weren't recognizing a ritualistic repeat act. They hadn't witnessed to him creating the tradition that we now call Holy Communion, and it would take time before the early church would celebrate “communion” in remembrance of Christ's act that night.

No, their recognition comes with the wounds, revealed in Christ's breaking of the bread, as he turns forward his wrists and tells them: “broken for you.” And then disappears. Now that's a ghost story to make you jump out of your seat! It jarred their hearts and minds too. In an instant, they remembered the scriptures he had illuminated. In an instant, they recognized not just Jesus but the truth of God's victory. He had “done it!”

That evening, Christ's aunt and uncle received their own “communion” experience with Jesus—as they recognized not just Jesus but the miracle of his resurrection—God's majestic feat.

In a sense, Christ is driving home experientially what he was unable to get across to them during his teaching moments on the road: that the Messiah must die and then will be resurrected on the third day.

When he breaks the bread for them at their table, acting as host, he shows them the meaning of his Messianic progression: he has sacrificed, been broken, for them, he has relieved the world of sin. He has died and was buried, and now he sits in front of them revealing himself alive and fully resurrected. The wounds tell the story. The evidence of his brokenness reveals the true miracle and glory of God!

Why did Christ do any miracle in the gospels? He told us time and time again: To point to the glory of God. Why did he affect these post-resurrection encounters? To point to the glory of God. Why was his body broken? To point to the glory of God! Why was he resurrected? To point to the glory of God, that all may believe and receive the gift of everlasting life!

The glory of God is what fills the disciples with hope, so much so that they practically run back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples only to find that they had seen him too! The gift of God is for all: The disciples' mission was born.

Why is this so important? Because God wants to give you a gift! It's a gift of everlasting life.

You don't need to earn it. You don't need to arrange it. You don't need to do anything other than believe it!

Christ's gift was not a one-time thing for his own disciples, either those in a locked room or disciples on the way home from the greatest tragedy in history. His gift was meant for every single person until the end of time.

Let their stories be your witness. Let their jolt of realization be the one that sets you free. Christ's wounds mean your freedom. Christ's death and resurrection means you live. Christ's victory is your victory. To God be the glory!