

## Manningham Uniting Church

7<sup>th</sup> April 2024 Easter 2 B

**Theme:** Exposing our Wounds

**Text:** John 20:19 - 31

**Introduction** Now who wants to share some of the feelings that you have identified in the various characters in John 20:19-31.

Congregation share...

**Let us pray.**

All we have are a few brief stories. There's the one about the empty tomb. A stranger robed in white, a gardener perhaps. Folded grave-cloths. Weeping women. Fleeing men. Horrible wounds. Rumours. Confusion. Doubt. Joy. **Love. Fear.** And always the nagging question.

**Why?**

Just some disconnected stories, scant stories, light on details and yet powerful in their truth.

It has been said that, *"The shortest distance between a human being and truth is a story."* Now some of you might disagree but it has also been said that the greatest story ever told is the story of resurrection. Like all good stories, the story of the resurrection has been told repeatedly, as storytellers attempt to convey its truth.

We have heard the Easter's story of resurrection so many times, that you would think the truth of resurrection would be obvious to us all. Yet, some of us struggle to find truth in Easter's familiar stories.

Some of us have been profoundly shaped by these stories.

Some of us have built our lives around the truth that others have reported to us about these stories.

And some of us have rejected these stories and filed them away with all the other idle tales in which we can find no truth.

Some of us have moved on from these stories convinced that there is no longer any truth to be found.

Some of us love to hear these stories because they take us back to familiar truths that inspire a nostalgic sense of well-being.

Some of us, are determined to wrestle with Easter's stories until they release all the truth that we can find in, within, and between the lines; truths that call us toward a new way of being, a way of being that we long to embrace.

I am a wrestler, like Jacob of old. Over the years I have wrestled with Easter's familiar stories determined to get from these ancient tales not just truth, but an inkling of the DIVINE ONE who dwells in, with, through, and beyond all our stories.

Every year, after the excitement of Easter Sunday, the stories of a community locked away in fear comes to us. Every year some element of these stories touches me in ways that open old wounds and awaken familiar fears. The disciples knew that Jesus had died. Some of them have encountered the risen Christ but not Thomas.

For me Jesus was the embodiment of the LOVE that we call God. LOVE dies. LOVE dies again and again and again. We've all seen the wounds of such death. We bear these wounds in our bodies. When LOVE dies it is the touch of the wounded that comforts, soothes and heals so that LOVE can rise again.

We have been told a story about death that portrays death as the end. We humans have been telling stories about the meaning of death ever since humans have been able to tell stories.

**Read my lips:** *"It has been said that we tell stories, but the truth is that the stories tell us; for in the stories, we discover who and what we are."*

And so, after the excitement of Easter, amid our resurrection proclamations, this story is told and once again we find ourselves locked away in fear.

**For LOVE and fear are intimately intertwined.**

**Love and fear are two sides of the same coin.**

Author and vulnerability expert Brene Brown, discusses in her book "Daring Greatly" how our need for love and belonging is at the root of all fears. **The more we love and long for something, the deeper the fear of losing it.** When we feel so much love for someone or something, it can be challenging to relate to that person or project with real openness. Instead, many of us try to hold on to it or even try to control it (eg. overprotective parents, struggling to say "I love you").

**When you love someone, you are afraid of losing them.**

If you lose them, you will be devastated and your heart will break in a way that it might heal from on the surface, but it will be changed permanently. Even though you will laugh again and have fun again and live again, for a time, you feel like you won't and it's horrible. *Think of it like this: fear is the "gripping," the instinct to hold onto something from a place of tension and clinginess. Love is the "release," the ability to relate to others from a place of openness, curiosity, and expansion.*

Can you remember the euphoria that you felt, the very first time you fell in love? It was astounding to feel so very much for your beloved and it was also terrifying. The thought

that death might one day touch your Beloved is also terrifying. And yet the mere touch of your beloved reminds you of the power of LOVE to transcend even the fear of death. In the familiar words of another story, *“It is truly better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.”* A cliché perhaps, but even clichés reveal the truth when they touch our fear.

**Now I do not fear death, not my death.** But the death of those I love, the pain of these losses, the fear of these wounds locks me up in ways that only the touch of those I love can open me to the risk of loving. The all-too-familiar stories of those who loved Jesus locked away in fear, touches my own fear in ways that unlock me, release me, heal me and give me the kind of peace that opens me to who I am.

Our stories tell us precisely when they reveal the truth of who and what we are. Our most treasured stories are kept alive by how they continue to tell us who and what we are becoming. Our most treasured stories are living stories and like everything that lives, they change. A treasured story changes over time because we tell them differently just as surely as these stories tell us differently.

The story in John 20:19 – 31 exposes the wounds of the followers of Jesus. They loved Jesus and were wounded by his death. *Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. <sup>25</sup> 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.”*

Thomas needed to see and touch the wounds of Jesus. Looking at the Gospel story for this morning I am once again reminded of the insights of Henry Nouwen, who wrote the truth that emerged from his story when he wrote: *“Nobody escapes being wounded. We are all wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually.”*

Nouwen asked, *“How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?”* This question emerged from the stories of Nouwen’s life, and out of those stories, Nouwen coined the phrase, **“Wounded healers”**. Over the years, in the embrace of my wounds I have seen the power of wounded healers at work. I have seen embraces that have moved me to unlock some of the doors that my own pain has caused me to shut down, releasing me from the fear of more loss.

**There is both captivity and freedom in our woundedness.**

Our stories tell us who we are. May your stories, our stories, the followers of Jesus’ stories, may they continue to tell us who we are and who we are becoming.

## **The wounds of Christ are all around us.**

As we remember Christ's wounds, may these wounds continue to inspire in us a desire to touch and be touched, to heal and be healed. For like Jesus, we too are called to embody the wounds of Christ; we too are called to be wounded healers. In this telling story, we hear Christ's earnest prayer in the word expressed from the depths of the wounded ONE, "SHALOM." Peace be with you. SHALOM. Our longing for this Shalom, this peace, opens us to the pain of our woundedness, which has the power of healing.

There's a Benediction by the Irish poet Padraig O Tuama that captures this longing. He spoke at one of our Synod meetings. Padraig writes: *"the task is ended go in pieces our concluding faith is being rear-ended certainty's being amended and something's getting mended that we didn't know was torn we're unravelling and are travelling to a place of new-formed-patterns, with delusion as a fusion of loss, and hope, and pain and beauty. So, the task is ended go in pieces to see and feel your world."*

My hope and prayers for us all - may our stories, your stories, the stories of Jesus' followers, continue to unravel us, expose our woundedness, and challenge us into becoming the wounded healers that the world longs for us to be and needs. May the healing of our wounds release us from our fear and open us to the depths of who we are and willing to risk loving again.

May LOVE rise from tombs to free us from the places where we have been locked away in fear. May we go from this place, to touch and be touched.

To be LOVE arisen here and now, is the Shalom, the peace our world cries out for.

And when we share the bread and the wine, may we remember the wounded Christ who invites us to his table.

**Amen.**