

He Kept the Scars

John 20:19-22; Genesis 2:7

Sunday, July 31, 2022 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction

There was once a famed football player named Ray Nitschke, who was a linebacker for the Green Bay Packers. He was famous for his tough and aggressive play and eventually ended up in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Nitschke once lost several teeth in a very physical football game. Afterward he was found wandering around the field, looking for his teeth. When asked why he would do that, he replied "because they were my teeth." I don't know if he ever found them all. I doubt that he ever had them re-inserted into his mouth, but rather he simply visited the dentist and was fitted for dentures. He, along with many like him, were willing to live with the scars they gained. It's not just football players. Soldiers often return with scars, including some that cannot be seen. People who dare greatly, such as mountaineers, will sometimes come home with scars from the dangers they endured from either altitude or cold, or both. Parents and people who love deeply often receive emotional scars from concern or a broken heart. Scars of one sort or another seem to be part of life, and they are important because they often tell stories. They reveal much about how a person has lived, who or what was important to them, what they were willing to risk or what they were willing to sacrifice. Here in this final episode of Christmas in July, we look not at the birth of Jesus but when He returned to His disciples soon after rising from the dead. What He tells them is vital and changed history, but first He showed them His scars. Why?

- Set the Stage

The Sabbath after the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus had passed and some of the disciples were hiding behind a locked door for fear of the authorities (Note: The Apostle John often references religious authorities as "Jews". He was Jewish himself as was Jesus and the rest of His disciples). Mary Magdalene has already seen Jesus and reported it to them. Peter and John investigated but were left confused, disturbed and still in fear for their lives. Jesus suddenly enters in, somehow getting past the locked door and speaks words that change history, but first He shows them His scars. When He died His body was probably one great big wound, but all that was gone apparently, after His resurrection, except for the nail holes in His hands, His feet and the wound from a spear into His side. That was still there. I think He still has them to this day.

Scars-His suffering and His Commission

I think that the scars demonstrate Christ's prophetic identity and emphasize His suffering. The disciples, most likely, had heard of Psalm 22 as a description of the sufferings of the Messiah, and would have known about verse 16, which says, "For dogs have surrounded Me: the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and my feet". His scars were proof that this was truly Jesus, and not some imposter.

His scars also told the story of His suffering, which is significant in light of His words of commission in the next sentence. By comparison, Jesus spoke words of commission to His disciples, words adopted by the church world-wide, at the end of Matthew's Gospel. There He begins with the words "all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth", then He tells them to go and make disciples all over the world. The emphasis is on His power and authority. Here, in John's Gospel, He said something very similar but here the emphasis is on His suffering for people and for the sins of the world.

Send-He gave them their purpose

Right after He showed them His scars He gave them their purpose. He told them, "as the Father has sent Me so I send you." It's interesting to note that the verb "sent" in "the Father has sent Me" is perfect tense. Jesus has not retired from the field of mission and ministry. He is still the Sent One, as the original disciples and countless others have picked up the cause. Every Christian is "sent" in some sense. We're all on mission during the course of our lives, even if we never leave the town of our birth.

Receive-He gave them their power cf. Genesis 2:7

Then Jesus breathed on them and said, "receive the Holy Spirit", which, I think, was fulfilled at Pentecost. There's a clear comparison to Genesis 2:7, in which God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed on him, thus making him a living being. Here the Holy Spirit is sent to make people new, not just different. Christianity is a new life, and new identity, and a new purpose, and it is all presented here in the context of the scars of Jesus.

Main Point: He kept the scars

For now, I think the main point is that Jesus kept the scars. It shows that He is the real Jesus. It will show He is the real Jesus when we finally see Him face to face, and that this Jesus cares. He cared enough to enter humanity and live a human life. He suffered for the sins of the world and died for the same. He is the Christ who cares for every person as if they were the only person on earth. That is the real Jesus

- Application: We all get scars of some sort or another in this life.

Scars tell stories and they reveal priorities. Our scars, hidden as well as overt, tell our stories and reveal our priorities. Christ, even in his resurrected, glorified form, still has scars and they tell His story as well.

- Conclusion

I don't know if Ray Nitschke ever found all of his teeth, but he had a point in looking for them. They are part of his scars, and they tell his story. All of us have scars that tell stories of one sort or another. Christ has scars that he showed as He sent His disciples out into the world. His commission was based on his authority, but also on His suffering as well. He kept the scars.