

Sermon given on Easter II, 2019, at St. Andrew's Church, Kent (John 20: 19-31)

In the Name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today's Gospel reminded me of something that happened to me six years ago on Labor Day weekend. I used to have a dog—her name was Lucy—and she was about as cute and cuddly of dog as could be. Some of you might remember; she enjoyed coming into town and hanging out at the coffee shop when it was across the street. But there was something wrong with her. Over time, she simply became more frantic in her behaviors—more anxious, possibly. I'll give you a simple example. She loved riding in the car, and when I first got her, she would wait patiently by the car to be let in. In time, however, she started running circle around the car while barking frantically. She also began to dislike certain types of people. For instance, she didn't like smokers; I'm guessing it was something about the way they smelled. But the problem was that, as time went on, she went from grumbling at smokers to growling and even barking at them. Most of the time, she was fine, as sweet as ever, but something was going on; something was wrong with her.

I went on that Labor Day weekend to visit my friends Kevin and Marie at their beach house near Plymouth, MA, taking Lucy with me. When I got there in the late afternoon, it was beautiful, and we all decided to go down for a walk on the beach—Kevin and Marie and I, along with our dogs, who got along well. But there was an issue: a neighbor of theirs stopped by, a woman named Nancy who was a heavy smoker. I've know her for years. Lucy started growling ferociously at her, and I leaned down toward her, just to get her to hush up. She turned toward me, and—BANG—she bit me right in the face.

It was an awful night. My upper lip had big tear in it, and there were gashes in my face and nose. Blood was everywhere. I shouted at my friends to put Lucy in my car, her safe space, and then Kevin rushed me to the hospital, first to the one in Plymouth, and then, after they decided the case was too much for them

because of some issue with the nose, up to the Tufts Medical Center in Boston. About 27 stitches and several hours later, I was back at their house. I felt awful, I looked awful (with the school year just a few days away), and worst of all, I knew I was going to have to put down that cute and snuggly dog who, even then, just wanted to jump up in the bed and sleep next to me.

I still have a scar from that night, here on my upper lip. It's not too noticeable, but I suppose if I ever were on the FBI Most Wanted list, they would include it as one of my identifying marks—which indeed it is. It says something about me—my history, and that awful night. It is part of who I am—and this is something that scars do. They tell our stories—they identify us—and such scars certainly don't have to be just physical. Perhaps they are emotional. Perhaps they are all that remains from some relationship, or from some experience in childhood. Those scars can be very real as well.

I speak of all of this because of what happens between Jesus and Thomas in today's Gospel. Jesus has appeared to the disciples, granting them his peace and bestowing on them the power to forgive or retain the sins of any. But there was a problem: Thomas was not in the room at the time, and he would not believe unless he saw the mark of the nail in Jesus' hand and the wound in his side. Perhaps these were not literally scars, but they were indeed wounds, the marks of Jesus' harrowing crucifixion on Good Friday—and Thomas needed to see those identifying marks. One week later, Jesus appeared again to the disciples, and almost immediately 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." Thomas' response is telling. More simply saying, "Oh, it is you, Jesus," he goes further. "My Lord and my God," says Thomas. "My Lord and my God."

I think Thomas' response was driven by something more than seeing in those wounds only the marks of his crucifixion. For Thomas, they were something more—they pointed also to Jesus' resurrection. He

saw in them that somehow, in the love of God, good is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate, life is stronger than death, and the love of God triumphs over all.

In short, Thomas saw those scars as something horrific, but also as something filled with grace—and I think there’s a lesson in there for all of us. Do we see our scars as merely a mark of some horrific experience, or, like Thomas, can we see them as marks of the grace and love of God? Take the scar on my lip as an example. I can think of it only as a sad souvenir from the night that Lucy bit me, or, when I see it, I can think of the night that my friends Kevin and Marie took such good care of me, with Kevin driving me to the hospital and comforting me for hours. I can also think of my other friends who came to visit that weekend, whose compassion and sympathy was boundless. I can think of people who wrote me notes when I finally put Lucy down. I can even think of the doctor who treated me that night. There I was, in the ER at Tufts Medical Center, and the first doctor to treat me—well, I found out afterwards that he, a young fellow, had been a doctor for about three hours. I knew something was up with him; I could tell he was nervous when he got his iPhone out and started taking pictures of my face. Then another doctor walked in—also fairly young, and looking like he was all ready to head out for the weekend. His hair was slicked back, he had a knapsack on over his shoulders, but he had heard there was a tough case and wanted to have a look. It turned out he was the head of maxillo-facial surgery at Tufts. He saw my face and said, “Let me have a look at this.” He started to put on surgical gloves and then realized he should probably take that knapsack off first. Two hours later, after caring for me meticulously and compassionately, he headed out the door to start his Labor day weekend, and my face looks good today because of his efforts.

All of these people—my friends and, in one case, a complete stranger—in their own ways worked to bring the love of God to me in that moment which in some ways felt like my own Good Friday. They did so through their compassion, their sympathy, their kindness. They brought light into the darkness of my night and brought about the dawn of resurrection. I got through that experience, and here I am today.

And I want all of you to think about the scars in your life. Who was there with you to get you through those experiences? Was it family, friends, a complete stranger, or simply the abiding presence of God himself that got you through? Are those scars simply the mark of some horrific experience, or are they also the mark of the love and grace of God, made present in your life by others?

That, I believe, is what Thomas saw in the wounds of Jesus, and what we should see in our own scars.

And it is important for us to keep this in mind as we go forth in the service of our Lord. We all have been through our own Good Fridays, and there are countless other people out there in the world who, even now, are going through their own times of horror. As followers of the Risen Lord, we are called to bring the love of God to those people, to bring some light into their darkness, as has been done for us time and again, and as our Lord has done once and for all for us in his resurrection. We are called to bring the light and life of Easter to those going through Good Friday, so their scars become more significantly marks of love, healing, and resurrection. And if we can do this, not only will we make the grace of the Risen Lord known to those who are hurting; I am certain will will also come to know Jesus a little better for ourselves. Amen.