

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers

Sunday, April 19, 2026

Friends, as we prepare to hear God's word read and proclaimed, I invite you to get comfy in your pews and to close your eyes. Take whatever prayer posture you need and let's take a couple deep breaths together. Let's take a deep breath in and breathe it out slowly. Another deep breath in.

Breathe it out slowly. Breathe in God's mercies. Breathe out God's mercies to others. Breathe in God's mercies and breathe out God's mercies to others.

Gracious spirit, you are as close to us as our very next breath. So we pray that you would dwell within us and around us. That you would quiet any voice within us but your own, that we might this morning hear your word for us, and that in hearing we might be called to lead lives of response. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

So we continue this morning in the Gospel according to John in the second week of our Eastertide sermon series entitled Resurrected Life. We believe that there are marks by which those who follow in the way of Christ can live in the world. We believe that the resurrection is not simply a day that we celebrate, but it is a way that we move through the world together. And so each week during this season of Eastertide, we'll explore a different way in which those who call upon the name of Jesus are called to live in the world. This morning, the Gospel of John, the 20th chapter, beginning in the 24th verse and going through the 29th verse, will help center our study this day. Let us listen together for God's word to each of us and indeed to God's church.

But Thomas, who was called the twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But Thomas 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." A week later, Jesus's disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the door was shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then 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 answered him, "My Lord and my God." Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

Tucked into a neighborhood in southern Berlin, a concrete cylinder rises four stories from the cityscape. During his reign of terror, Hitler had a grand plan to rebuild Berlin with large monuments. Small men often need big monuments. So Hitler decided that he would build several

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on an unprecedented scale. He had plans to replicate the Pantheon in Rome, but to have it be 88 stories high and seat 180,000 people. He had plans to replicate the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, but many, many times larger. He wanted to build a stadium that would hold 253,000 people. Now, in order to prepare for the immense weight that would soon rest on the swampy soil of Berlin, Hitler's architects needed to test build an extremely heavy object. So they built a 12,650 ton concrete behemoth in southern Berlin. It had a foundation that was 60 feet deep. They did this, put this incredible concrete structure together, to see if it would sink into the ground or if the soil could manage to hold the weight. It became known as the Nazi Block. When the Nazis were defeated and World War II came to an end, many Nazi relics and monuments were destroyed as the German people worked to reclaim a common moral posture. Yet this concrete cylinder could not safely or easily be dismantled. It was simply too big and too close to homes and businesses and transportation infrastructure to practically be removed. So instead, it sat there for years. Some believed it to be a wound on the landscape of Berlin, reminding the public of the darkest moments of their collective history. At some point over the years, though, people began to see the value of remembering the darkest moment in their history. And so they no longer wanted to completely erase it since it served as a reminder of what can happen when cancerous thoughts are allowed to grow in a society and horrible deeds go unchecked. In 1995, the government turned it into a historical monument. You can go see it now. You can tour it. Although you can't go 60 ft under the ground, you can just look upon this concrete behemoth and learn about this awful time in German history, indeed the history of our world. It turns out that sometimes it's better for scars to be preserved rather than erased. Scars can help us. They can help us remember the good and the bad. In fact, they can help shape our common life as we move forward in the world together.

And what is true of common scars is also true of the scars that we carry. The scars we carry can be put to work for good, if we let them. In a similar fashion, Jesus chose to retain his wounds when he was resurrected from the grave. And we must, as those who follow in the way of Jesus, ask why.

If life could return to his body, then why not take it a step further and make his body perfectly new again? Isn't that what a good God is supposed to do? Isn't that what it means to be in fact redeemed?

Maybe though we have it wrong. Maybe that's not how God works or is supposed to work. That's certainly not what happened to Jesus during the resurrection. When he appeared to his disciples the first time, before the text that we read this morning, he showed them, presented to them, his hands and his side. Interestingly, the text does not say that the disciples wished to see his hands

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and his side. Simply that he presented them his wounds—the nails that had pierced his hands and left a forever mark; the spear which had pierced his side.

They didn't ask, but it seems that it was Jesus's decision to show off his marks on that Easter night. Thomas, as our text reminds us, of course, was not with him, with them. He didn't get to witness the scene, see the hands in the side presented. Later, when his fellow disciples caught up with him, they told him all about what they had seen. Famously or infamously, Thomas responded that he would not believe unless he could see those wounds himself and touch them with his own hands. A week later, Thomas got his wish. Importantly, we learn in this scene that the one that would meet Thomas in his need was a savior who was unafraid to show his wounds. And in seeing those wounds, Thomas says, "My Lord and my God." There is something that happens when Thomas sees the wounds of Jesus that changes how he believes.

Often, y'all know this, Thomas is preached as a doubter, and there's this tension between doubt and belief that to me seems wholly unhelpful for us. This week when I was contemplating Thomas, I began to think about what made him skeptical. Sometimes we're born skeptics, and maybe Thomas was, but other times we learn skepticism from the lives that we live, from the wounds that we take on. Sometimes we learn skepticism from those who care for us when we're young. Sometimes we learn it from those who covenant to love us forever. Sometimes we learn it from even places like this. Skepticism. Sometimes it's healthy. Sometimes it's even a good defense mechanism. But almost always our inability to trust grows from some type of wound. We get presented with Thomas as a whole human adult, but we rarely think about what wounds Thomas endured to make him such a skeptical disciple, to not even believe the ones who he's walked with, lived with, shared food with, witnessed miracles with for the last three years. What wound did he carry that made him as he was?

Whatever it was, I'm grateful that Thomas was greeted by a savior unafraid to show him his wounds. And even though it turns out it's not the best thing for Thomas to have to see these wounds in order to believe, Jesus meets him in his need and shows these wounds. This God that Thomas knows in Jesus Christ is a God that does not conceal or erase the difficulties of the past. This is a God who shows off his wounds rather than hide them. A God who has wounds and puts those wounds to work in the world. This is important for us, as a friend reminded me this week, because there are too many churches where we gather together and people are forced to hide their wounds. And so if we here at Idlewild are to truly follow in the way of Christ, we must not do so. We must not pretend that we worship a savior who hid his.

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It seems to me that this text from the Gospel of John might simply be an invitation for us in this Eastertide season. From Thomas, we learn a lesson. We learn a lesson that wounds might very well be the most authentic way for us to connect to each other. Certainly for Thomas, seeing and touching the wounds of Jesus were the most authentic way in which he could connect, even know his risen Lord. This past week, I got to spend time with one of my dearest friends. I got to know that friend during one of the most difficult times of his life. He tells the story of coming home from work one day and his wife of 15 years meeting him in the kitchen, saying that she wanted a divorce. Now I know not the whole history and background of that. So there's no judgment there, but what I do know is that that was a wound that he carried and continues to carry. I happened to meet him right around the time that that happened. And by happenstance or providence, we ended up living together as dear friends for a couple years. He needed someone to help carry the mortgage that he hadn't intended to carry on his own. I had gotten kicked out of my apartment—not for bad deeds, the landlord needed it back. It was perfect timing. What I got to see was how he navigated a deep wounding to his heart and to his spirit. And it was as difficult as you might imagine it would be. For those who've experienced divorce or even heartbreak of any kind, perhaps you know, perhaps you are well acquainted with that hurt. This past week, I got to travel to celebrate what I call the second Holy Week, which is Master's Week, got to do so in Augusta, Georgia. I got to once again rest under the roof of my friend. This time I got to see him with his wife of now almost eight years and their little son, a little redheaded 5-year-old who's smart as a whip. I got to watch them interact, he with his wife and their child. Not all stories end like that, of course we know. But what was interesting for me as I watched and observed was to see how the most painful experience of his life, the place where he had become most wounded, had become for him the place where he was most well acquainted with God's grace and God's power.

Each of us carries wounds. It's just the truth of being human. My wounds are many and varied. You've heard me speak multiple times about losing my mother as a child. I can speak of that specific instance and that story, that wounding, that most painful experience of my life, to also be the place where I have become most well acquainted with God's grace and God's power.

And you have wounds, too. As well as you dressed this morning to come to this place, as well behaved as we seem to be in this moment, each of us by virtue of navigating this thing called life, we have wounds. They might be physical like Jesus's were, but they also might be emotional as I imagine Jesus's were as well. They could even be spiritual, which I know they were for Jesus. And so I wonder if instead of worrying about doubt this morning, we might hear this story from the Gospel of John as an invitation in this season of Eastertide. Your deepest wounds, your most painful experiences, they may well be the place where you can become the most well

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acquainted with God's grace and God's power. Now, I don't know the wounds that you carry to this place. I didn't walk alongside you as you went through them, but your God knows them, perhaps even more deeply than you do. And I think this scripture lesson teaches that if you are willing to lay your wounds bare before Jesus, you might just find that your most authentic connection to our risen savior is through those very same wounds. I wonder, if it's in the season of Eastertide we heed this invitation. I wonder, if our wounds, like those of Jesus, might become enduring signs of God's grace and power in our lives and in the world. I wonder, when that happens if we might be able to proclaim with our whole being, my Lord and my God.

Let us pray.

Gracious one, you show up unafraid to show your wounds.

We are reticent to do the same. And yet we see in your teachings that when we do, there's a connection, there's a belief, there is a transformation that can happen that seemingly can't happen otherwise. And so we pray, oh Lord, this day that you would grant us courage and even wisdom to not hold back from you pretending like you don't know the deepest places of hurt that we have experienced, and beyond that to hope, to believe that in our wounds we might become most well acquainted with your grace and your power within our lives and indeed the world. We lift these prayers, these hopes in response to the invitation of our God and the hope of your transformation within us. We lift them in the name of Jesus. Amen.