



# ST BART'S

A Sermon by  
The Rev. Dr. Robert S. Dannals, *Interim Rector*

## The Scars that Heal

*Sermon preached at the eleven o'clock service, April 3, 2016  
The Second Sunday of Easter—Based on John 20:19-31*

We had a ritual in our home while our girls were growing up. If we were expecting company, we would run around picking up old magazines and books, a mountain of accumulated mail, putting away shoes and clothing. We would discreetly hide items in cabinets, and tuck away nonessentials into drawers, and otherwise made the place look clean and spotless.

Afterwards, we would stand around and congratulate ourselves on how good everything looked. And although we didn't actually say it out loud, we were hoping that our houseguests would think we lived that way all the time.

Something very similar happens when we dress up for, say, a formal evening or a church event. We hope that people think we always dress this way, look this nice. You may know the old saw about clergy who have a house and a yard: The question is asked, "Do you cut the grass in your robe and in your clerical collar?"

We have the tendency to "pretty things up." Well this is a good trait in moderation; on one level it tells others that we want to offer our best. But there's a darker side to this trait as well: the hiding of who we are.

British author Susan Howatch wrote several novels about the stresses of these efforts. The primary volume in the set is titled, "Glittering Images."

In it a wise monk explains why the hero is coming apart at the seams both mentally and physically. We all have two selves, he says -- the glittering image the world is allowed to see and the not-so-shiny self that hides behind the glittering image. Wholeness and peace are impossible when the two images are worlds apart. Our souls can be torn apart by the strain of pretending to be someone we are not.

Years ago while doing my seminary parish work, I was privileged to train at Church of the Savior in Washington, D.C. The venerable and humble pastor, Elizabeth O'Connor, was my supervisor. I asked her one day: "Betty O, what main gift do you think the church will need in the decades to come?" I expected her to say something like prayer or spiritual growth or discipleship. She said, "Authenticity... Yes, to be who we say we are, because there's too many fakes in the church."

In her novel, *Final Payments*, Mary Gordon Keenly contrasts a facade of beauty with genuine internal love that dares to be honest. Her heroine is a fledgling social worker assigned to visit "The Homes of Citizens" who are paid handsomely to care for the elderly.

When the novice suggests to her boss, an older and efficient institutional analyst that she wanted to base her judgments on the homes where genuine care is displayed, she was refuted by her employer: "You're there to check for cleanliness and to chart information, not to make friends and to decide whose hands are being held and whose noses are being swabbed."

Later, upon visiting several homes, our young social worker observed that "some of the cleanest and most efficient places are those operated by families that have no human warmth ... they just do it for the money. It's just a job, not a calling. They don't care for Mrs. Jenkins who can't find her reading glasses or for Mrs. Williams who gets lost at

the end of the hallway. They just care about an external image, what realtors call 'curb appeal.' "

But one place the young social worker visited was different from the rest. It was unkempt but warm and caring. She runs into the owner on her visit, who was in the kitchen weeping because one of the residents is dying of cancer. "It's Alice," the owner blurts out, "I can't stand it that she's dying; we are going to miss her so much."

The young social worker writes on her sheet: "This is a home that I'd like to visit again. These people really care, they are involved in people's lives, they treat each person as if she or he really matters."

When Jesus appeared to the disciples behind locked doors, he refused to project any glittering image of a resurrected messiah. He came as their teacher and friend, with nothing to hide. The first thing he did was to show his disciples the scars of crucifixion; they remained a part of his presence, his healing, his saving grace. "Peace be with you," he said twice. Then he invited Thomas to touch the scars. Do you notice, there is a connection between pain and peace. Faith came to Thomas when he looked upon those scars and experienced them as the way to healing and peace.

I was reminded of the connection between Christ's scars and real peace this past week. In the face of the trauma, violence and death in Pakistan, I learned on National Public Radio of a Presbyterian lay physician named Donna, who was providing relief medicine and counseling for the injured and their families. The interviewer asked, "What are you learning in Pakistan about ISIS? What are you telling people; how are you explaining this horror?" "I am telling people that some events are too complicated to explain ... but each of us has to take our part in confronting evil with good, and, quite frankly, we're not doing a lot of talking," she said. "The other day, we were walking among the maimed and the dead, and visiting with the families of those who have lost loved ones and we're touching them. We're touching them; we're administering medicine; we're providing food and water; we're holding them and telling them that God still loves them."

It is easy to concentrate on the few evil people who set off suicide bombs and forget the hundreds and hundreds of good people of all religions who are working to help rid our world of ISIS and who respond to victims with medicine and care. Children and teenagers, I want to say to you that the world must seem scary to you at times. But please remember that there are millions more good people as vessels of God working for wholeness and peace.

In the face of Donna, the risen Christ is walking among the rubble of Pakistan, and the risen Christ walks among us here. He holds out his wounded hands for us to see. He offers us a peace that is not the absence of struggle but is the presence of love within the struggles. Each and every day you and I have the outstanding privilege of displaying the scars of real compassion, to imitate Christ in our own sphere of living.

To all of us Jesus says, "I know that you have doubted me from time to time, but I want you to know that my scars show how much I believe in you. As God has sent me into the world, so I send you... Receive my Spirit. Be a person of forgiveness." May we be found saying with Thomas, "My Lord and my God."

**©2016 St. Bartholomew's Church in The City of New York.**

For information about St. Bart's and its life of faith and mission  
write us at [central@stbarts.org](mailto:central@stbarts.org), call 212-378-0222, or visit [stbarts.org](http://stbarts.org)  
325 Park Avenue at 51st Street, New York, New York 10022