



**Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA**

**Rev. Scott E. Schul**

**6th Sunday after Pentecost: July 1, 2018**

**Sermon Title: "Scars"**

**Gospel Text: Mark 5:21-43**

Have you ever bought a souvenir t-shirt on vacation? A few years ago at the beach I bought one, and it still makes me think whenever I pull it out of my dresser. It reads: "Scars are like tattoos but with better stories." **Where are *your* scars? What stories do they reveal about *you*?**

I have three scars, and each has an accompanying story. My first scar came to me late in elementary school. As is usually the case between siblings, I had no reservations about taking a swing at my little brother if I thought he needed an attitude adjustment. But that was *not* a privilege I extended to other people. If anyone else wanted to mess with him, they had to come through me. And so one day when a neighbor boy named Eddie started punching my little brother, I sprinted across our front yard and onto the street where my brother was getting the worst of it. With a couple quick jabs, I promptly ended it and sent the bully scampering home. But in the process of doing so, I scraped the pavement, leaving a small but permanent mark on my right thumb. This scar reminds me that there's a lot of injustice in this world, and sometimes you have to stand up to it and defend others, even though you might get hurt in the process.

Another scar is only a few inches away, on my right wrist. I acquired this one in college. I was a student worker at the music department library. It was late and we were bored, so my friend John and I came up with the bright idea of having a desk chair race. We each sat on a big metal, wheeled, desk chair and propelled ourselves backwards across the tiled room to see who could get to the other side first. Those old chairs had lots of sharp edges, and as I flung my chair backwards, one of those edges sliced a one inch cut onto my right wrist. That scar remains an ever-present companion, and reminds me that what may seem to be a silly, harmless stunt can leave a lasting, painful mark on one's life.

My third scar came near the end of 1991. It runs from the base of my sternum, down across the left side of my ribcage and ends at my waistline. That scar resulted from a surgeon's removal of my spleen. Unlike the other scars, this didn't arise from anything foolish or reckless that I'd done. My spleen had developed a cyst and had to come out. At the time, I was in my first year of legal practice, and I had to miss several weeks of work while recuperating. In this huge law firm, some partners who didn't know me and who judged people solely on the basis of how many billable hours they could accumulate saw me not as a young man recovering from major surgery, but as a slacker who wasn't meeting his monthly targets. That scar daily reminds me of the damage we cause when we judge people by numbers and see them as mere disposable *economic units* rather than *flesh-and-blood human beings* with inherent worth and dignity.

So those are my scars. **Where are *your* scars? What stories do they reveal about *you*?**

Scars of course aren't limited to the *outside* of our bodies. In fact, I think the heaviest, deepest, most painful scars we lug through life are the ones on the *inside* of our bodies. And like physical scars, some are self-imposed while many others have been unfairly inflicted upon us. Those inside scars have stories too. Were you mistreated by a family member, a friend, a boss or a co-worker? Did a relationship go sour? Is there someone who cut you out of their life? Are you carrying the scars of missed opportunities, foolish mistakes, words you wish you hadn't said, or actions you wish you hadn't taken? Are you burdened by scars of regret, embarrassment, failure, guilt, or abuse? All of our scars leave lasting marks and impact the way we act, think, and react. For better or for worse our scars define who we are, and they accompany us wherever we go.

That's how it was for the woman in the middle of Mark's Gospel today. We don't know her name. She's simply called "the hemorrhaging woman." She'd been bleeding for twelve years. At one point in her life she must've been a woman of status, because she had seen and had evidently suffered under the treatment of countless physicians. It appears she had become estranged from all of the things that once gave her joy. Where is her family? Where are her friends? Where is her smile? They all seem to have vanished. She's just another hopeless, nameless, and virtually invisible face in a crowd that has surrounded Jesus. How would she describe *her* scars? Which ones caused her the most pain: the ones on her body? The ones on her soul? The ones that isolated her from the rest of her world? Her scars have stories to tell, but does anyone care? Will *anyone* listen? Maybe *her* scars aren't all that different from *our* scars.

In a moment of utter boldness she crossed all boundaries of social and moral propriety, came up behind Jesus in the midst of the crowd, and touched his cloak. It was a last, desperate act of faith by a scarred woman who was out of options. And in the split second of that touch, something astonishing happened. She was healed. *She* knew it, and so did *Jesus*. He stopped in his tracks and turned to the crowd. Did his voice rage with anger as he said, "WHO TOUCHED MY CLOTHES?" Or was it searching, soft, and deep with compassion as he asked, "Who touched my clothes?" The woman probably could have safely slipped away through the crowd, but something in Jesus' voice drew her closer. She fell before him in fear and trembling. **What happened next is what strikes me as the REAL healing moment in this text.** As we read in verse 33, she "told him the whole truth." I don't think it was just a confession that *she* had touched him. I think it was the *whole truth* about what she had endured physically, emotionally, socially, and economically. I think she emptied her heart out, there at Jesus' feet. I imagine she practically bathed his feet in tears as twelve years of pent-up pain and anxiety at long-last poured forth from her.

After listening to her, Jesus gave her a new and beautiful name: "daughter." No longer was she just the nameless hemorrhaging woman. No longer would she be defined by her physical condition or all that she had lost. As the words of her "whole truth" echoed in the air, Jesus gave her a precious gift. "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." Jesus healed *all* of her scars – the ones people could see, *and* the even weightier ones she silently bore within.

**As the t-shirt reads: “Scars are like tattoos but with better stories.”** So where are *your* scars? What stories do they reveal about *you*? Jesus invites you to be healed as you share with him your “whole truth.” Maybe today he’s calling you to *repair* a relationship that has frayed, or *end* one that’s become abusive. Maybe he’s telling you it’s time to be honest about what you’ve done, who you’ve become, and what you need to do. And maybe he’s telling you that the scars you bear were the result of a terrible injustice, and shouldn’t label you or control you anymore. Do you think Jesus has the power, the will, and the love to accomplish all that?

Through today’s Gospel, Jesus is telling you that *you are loved*, and *there is hope*. You need not be *defined* by your scars. You need not be *burdened* by your scars. There *is* healing. There *is* liberation. There *is* new life.

Jesus can *promise* this because he made it all *possible* for us, through *his* scars. He longs to hear your “whole truth.” And he’s waiting to tell *you*: “Daughter/Son – your faith has made you well.” Amen.