

**April 24, 2022 | Sanctuary Worship Service**

**Text: [John 20:19–31](#)**

**TITLE: Life After Trauma**

*By the Kathryn Ophardt*

Now that some classes are back in person at the seminary, I was visiting with a few students before class. We were talking about hospitality and whether they will receive guests unannounced. One of my friends bluntly stated: There are only two people who can show up at my apartment without an invitation and that's my mother, and Jesus Christ. The scripture reading today tells of Jesus visiting unannounced. Not only that, but the announcement that he made is just as surprising. After sharing God's peace, Jesus' first words are, "As the Father, My Heavenly Parent, has sent me, so I send you." Jesus miraculously shows up after his friends and disciples watched him be brutally killed and they get no time to process his return. You'd think there would be a celebration or reunion, but instead of coming back together for old time's sake, Jesus sends the disciples out! Instead of hiding the scars, Jesus lets them be a witness to the resurrection. Instead of going back to how things were before Jesus died, Jesus invites the disciples to join him in something new!

This curious encounter tells us something about the resurrection reality that Jesus brings into the world. Jesus showed to his disciples then and to his disciples now that resurrection is not about coming back from the dead. It is about coming to new life through Christ! It does not erase the pain, but rather redeems it.

So what is the resurrection reality? Based on this passage from John, it seems to involve peace and forgiveness, embracing the Holy Spirit, and going out into the world bearing the witness of Christ's new life! Resurrection can seem supernatural, or something that is reserved for Jesus, but I have come to believe that we live through this pattern of life, death, and resurrection many times in our life and faith. We embody this pattern through ritual, like in baptism as we die with Christ and come to new life through Christ as we accept our identity as God's beloved children. Systemically, we testify to the resurrection reality whenever we hold onto hope in the midst of tragedy—that violence, war, and death will not get the final word. And personally, we walk the path of resurrection each time we go through something hard and find hope on the other side.

The resurrection reality says that there is new life on the other side of trauma. The crucifixion was a traumatic event—physically, emotionally, spiritually. Jesus is a survivor of that trauma, and even in the resurrection, Jesus bears the scars. Jesus even showed the scars to his disciples—to all of them, not just to Thomas. But Jesus said, "blessed are those who have **not** seen but still believe." I don't hear that as scolding Thomas for wanting to see Jesus' scars because the rest of the disciples wanted to see them too. Instead, I hear Jesus saying, "Blessed are those who have not seen my scars but still believe that they are real." Jesus' blessing includes us, as people who have not seen the scars but who still believe in Jesus' pain and new life. It is part of the Christian witness to believe a trauma survivor without needing *to have lived* their story. It is a part of the Christian witness to believe survivors regardless of whether *you have seen* their scars. I'm going to say it one more time:

It is a Christian witness to believe trauma survivors.

There is a whole spectrum of trauma—whether it be that of the cross, or war, or wound, or abuse, whether it is personal or generational, whether it is church trauma or trauma from the ongoing pandemic. There is life after trauma! There is life after trauma whether it is physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual or a mix of all of the above. In the resurrection, Jesus Christ shows us that there is life after trauma! And like Christ, you do not have to hide the scars. And like Christ, you do not have to show them either. You and the wholeness of your being are welcomed by God. And you are welcome here.

As I thought about what it means to be a witness to the resurrection reality, I thought of how I have had a glimpse of it this year, and I'd like to share my witness with you all today. As many of you know, my spouse, Victor, is from Mexico. We have spent the last two years wandering through the desert of the U.S. immigration system as we applied for Victor to get a visa to live here with me. Over that time, I have come to realize that this process has been traumatic. It was brutal to beg the government to let me live with my spouse and then suffer a year of complete silence with no one to contact and no way of knowing if our application had gotten lost in the bureaucratic abyss. It was painful in ways that I cannot describe to separate from my beloved without knowing when we would see each other again, especially during the pandemic when we weren't sure if they would close the borders again. My spiritual director, who is a wise, wise woman, helped me to make meaning of our rhythm of separation and reunion. She told me that each time we say goodbye, it was a kind of death. The long distance was like the uncertain hope of Holy Saturday as we anticipated being together again. And each time we are reunited it is a witness to the joy and truth of the resurrection! When Victor was approved for the green card, I felt like I could breathe again and after two years of holding my breath, that is a kind of resurrection! When we were finally reunited without the ticking clock of the next plane to catch, that was the moment when I felt like we stepped into new life together. When Club 116 threw us a party to welcome Victor into the community, that felt like a celebration of new life too. This is all to say that we experience the resurrection reality in small and large ways throughout our lives. When we have hope that injustice and grief are not the end of the story, that is a witness to the Resurrection! The resurrection reality promises healing, but it does not promise to avoid pain in the first place. Resurrection is not about coming back from the dead, back from the thing that felt like it killed you. It is the invitation to be transformed and find new life with Christ who accompanies us on the path of Resurrection. And that path points to life after trauma!

And we know that God invites us—All Of Us—into this resurrection reality because Jesus breathed on the disciples! Jesus breathed on them the breath of God—the breath of the resurrection—the breath of new life. And I believe that as disciples today, we are filled with that breath too.

Breath and Spirit are deeply intertwined. Whether *ruah*, in Hebrew, or *pneuma*, in Greek, the languages of our spiritual ancestors use the same word for Spirit and for breath. Whether it describes God's ethereal presence hovering over the waters at the beginning of creation or Jesus breathing into the disciples the sacred breath of the Holy Spirit, we are filled with and surrounded by God's Holy Spirit! Psalm 150 calls "Let everyone that breathes praise the Lord!" We are full of the breath of God.

We are full of the Spirit. We are full of new life in Christ. So let us praise God. Let us live in a way that witnesses to the Resurrected God whose sacred breath and Holy Spirit sustain and empower us. Christ speaks to us today: "As my Parent has sent me, so I send you. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." So go, breathe deeply, and be a witness to the Resurrection in your midst!

All Glory Be To God. Amen.