

The Scars that Heal All Wounds
John 20:19-29

It is so good to see each of you – and to be seen on the livestream - as we wait, in eager anticipation, for the entire body to be regathered.

The last year has been painful in many ways. Covid has cost us a lot. It is not an exaggeration to say that our lives will never be the same. Even if last year had never occurred, we each bear private scars and personal wounds that pain us still today.

We're reading through the NT this year and, this week, the book of James. James speaks to this issue –

James 5:13-16 - Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

The problem though, is that even after

- we are healed of physical sickness – *raise him up*
- Our sins are forgiven – *he will be forgiven*

We still live with the scars and the wounds of life in a fallen world. Where does all this pain go? Is it never resolved? Will it ever be healed?

These are the kinds of questions that turn agnostics into believers. For instance....

Example: Immanuel Kant is an 18th century German philosopher. Raised in a Catholic home, he becomes an agnostic early in life. But in what's called, "Kant's Moral Argument," he postulates that God must exist for moral reasons.

- His thinking is that the scars and wounds of this life do not find resolution during our lifetimes. We may heal but still hurt.
- There must be a way/time/person who can wholly heal us so that we don't hurt anymore.
- In addition, life's injustices are often never rectified.
- There must be a way/time/person who can right these wrongs.
- And so, for moral reasons, God must exist as the Healer of all hurts and the Justifier of all injustices.

This is why it is said that Kant closed the door on God but kept open a window.

This idea of hurt and injustice is one that has risen to the forefront our minds in the last year. As Kant well knew, Christianity proposes a solution to what ails us.

Many of you know of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. In our verbiage, Tolkien led to Lewis to Christ. Both are both committed to re-telling the Gospel in unique ways.

Lewis, in particular, felt that his childhood, High-Church, stained-glass windows, religion, left him cold and unaffected. As a result, he invested his life in re-telling the Gospel through fiction.

"But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday School associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could."

- C. S. Lewis, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said"

His Ransom Trilogy and *The Chronicles of Narnia* are both examples of *stealing past watchful dragons*.

But it is probably Tolkien, who is the master storyteller about the healing of our wounds.

First: Frodo's Unhealed Wounds

Tolkien speaks to the unhealed wounds we all endure in *The Return of the King* and the character of Frodo Baggins. In his quest to destroy the "One Ring to rule them all," the single ring that controls all the other rings, and the future of the world, Frodo receives four serious wounds:

- a) a stab wound in his left shoulder by the Black Riders (Nazgûl), at Weathertop
- b) a spear wound in his right side from the orc in Moria
- c) a poisoned wound from the spider, Shelob, on the back, left side of his neck
- d) Gollum bit off the third finger on his right hand at Mount Doom

APP: Even as I'm listing Frodo's wounds, you are contemplating your own.

The destruction of the one ring means that all of Tolkien's worlds; the worlds of dwarfs, men, elves and nature, have been saved.

But even after the ring is destroyed, and Frodo is on his way home, he still feels the effects of those wounds. Tolkien expresses it this way -

“At last the hobbits had their faces turned towards home. They were eager now to see the Shire again; but at first they rode only slowly, for Frodo had been ill at ease. When they came to the Ford of Bruinen, he had halted, and seemed loth [unwilling] to ride into the stream; and they noted that for a while his eyes appeared not to see them or things about him. All that day he was silent. It was the sixth of October.

‘Are you in pain, Frodo?’ said Gandalf quietly as he rode by Frodo’s side.

‘Well, yes I am,’ said Frodo. ‘It is my shoulder. The wound aches, and the memory of darkness is heavy on me. It was a year ago today.’

‘Alas! There are some wounds that cannot be wholly cured,’ said Gandalf.

‘I fear it may be so with mine,’ said Frodo. ‘There is no real going back. Though I may come to the Shire, it will not seem the same; for I shall not be the same. I am wounded with knife, sting, and tooth, and a long burden. Where shall I find rest?’

Gandalf did not answer.’

Frodo’s question is ours.

As I said earlier, even after

- we are healed of physical sicknesses
- Our sins are forgiven

We still live with the scars and the wounds of life in a fallen world. Where does all this pain go? Is it never resolved? Will it ever be healed?

In *The Return of the King*, it ultimately becomes all-too-evident that Frodo’s wounds will not heal in Middle-Earth. And so, he is given the opportunity to leave his beloved Shire and the world he has known, to sail to the West, to what is called, *‘The Undying Lands’*, the only place where his wounds can be healed, and Tolkien’s version of Heaven.

Sam, Merry and Pippin, his three dearest friends and companions during his ring-destroying adventures, all gather around him in great sadness.

“Where are you going, Master?’ cried Sam, as though at last he understood what was happening.

‘To the Havens, Sam,’ said Frodo.

‘And I can’t come.’

'No, Sam. Not yet, anyway...I have been too deeply hurt, Sam. I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them.'

Tolkien never denies the reality of scars or wounds. But he places them alongside a still profounder sense of present hope and eternal joy.

Of course, the 'Undying Lands' are Tolkien's steppingstones to Jesus and Heaven. He has done what Frodo could not do for himself, what we cannot do for ourselves.

There, on the cross, Jesus not only endured the physical torture associated with crucifixion, but sin – and all at once.

That burden is far greater than the One Ring that Frodo bore. Jesus confronted all the forces of evil and overthrew them.

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them... (Colossians 2:15).

... he [God] raised him [Jesus] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²²And he put all things under his feet (Ephesians 1:20-21).

And Frodo, as we all are, is both a type and anti-type of Christ in Tolkien.

Christ *alone*, died on the cross and brought the ultimate defeat of sin and evil, that no one else can bring, unlike Frodo, who, on his own, could not ultimately destroy the ring,

...there is salvation in no one else... (Acts 4:12).

This is precisely why Tolkien will not allow Frodo to destroy the ring in his own strength or on his own. Ever the faithful Christian, Tolkien reminds us that only Jesus, fully God and fully man, can accomplish such a task.

And this is what the Bible says about Jesus after the resurrection.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ²⁰When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." ²²And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said

to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." ²⁴ Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." ²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." ²⁸ Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

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This gives us a good indication that Jesus will bear these wounds forever. But, that by believing in what he has accomplished on the cross, we may be healed of our wounds.

"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5).

1 – **19** - Jesus comforts – *Peace be with you*

For he himself is our peace (Eph 2:14).

- a) Peace with God – *being justified by faith, we have peace with God-* (Ro 5:1)
- b) Peace in our souls – *the blood of Christ will...purify our consciences -* (Hb 9:14)
- c) Peace with others – *has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility –* (Gal 3:22)
- d) Peace in the world – *Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end –* (Is 9:7)

2 – **21** - Jesus commissions - *As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you...(on a peace-creating mission).*

3 – **27** - Jesus confirms - *Do not disbelieve, but believe*

4 – **29** - Jesus challenges - *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*

This is the challenge for today – to believe...on Jesus as the wounded Healer. How else, will you truly, wholly and permanently be healed?

Conclusion: Tolkien's 'Undying Lands' in the West' finds its source in Jesus Christ, who alone can heal us. It is such an important and meaningful text, let's read it again.

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Like Frodo, what unhealed scars are you bearing? How are you not healing? Have you believed on Jesus and his scars, i.e., his work on the cross?

Community Groups:

(Not all CGs are meeting today but some of the church based CGs that do not need childcare are meeting)

- 1 – Read the text
- 2 – What do you think makes it so hard for Thomas to believe in the resurrection?
- 3 – What proof does Jesus show Thomas?
- 3 – What is Thomas’s reaction?
- 4 – What convinces you about Christianity?
- 5 - What wounds are you carrying from this past year?
- 6 – What wounds are you carrying from beyond that time?
- 7 – Take time to discuss Kant’s moral argument
- 8 – What books or movies do you know of that portray the Gospel?

9 – Read Isaiah 53:5 and John 20:19, 21 & 26. What ‘peace’ is Jesus offering?

- Peace with God – Romans 5:1
- The peace of God – Philippians 4:6

10 – What wounds cannot “be wholly cured” until Jesus returns?

11 – Read Colossians 2:15. What cosmic wound does Jesus heal in his death and resurrection?

12 – How does Eustace’s inability to ‘undragon’ himself speak to our works?

13 – How does Eustace’s ‘undragoning’ by Aslan speak to Christ’s work?

More:

We read in *The Return of the King* (Book 6 Chapter 4) that Gandalf says this to Frodo and Sam, about the day the One Ring is destroyed. It occurred on -

“The fourteenth of the New Year, or if you like, the eighth day of April in the Shire reckoning. But in Gondor [the world of humankind] the New Year will always now begin on the twenty-fifth of March when Sauron fell, and when you were brought out of the fire to the King.”

In the Jewish calendar, The Passover (the day on which Christians believe that Jesus died) begins on the 15th day of the month of Nisan, which typically falls in March or April of the Gregorian calendar. The 15th day begins at 6pm in the evening of the 14th day, and the seder meal is eaten that evening. Christianity believes Jesus to have died on Passover, thus securing our salvation as the Messiah.

Tolkien deliberately placed the destruction of the One Ring, the day every world is saved, on the Jewish day of Passover, in the Christian world, the day that Jesus died.

And more....

To see how C.S. Lewis demonstrates the healing that only Jesus can perform –

Second: The ‘Undragoning’ of Eustace

C.S. Lewis tells the same story in a different book with different characters in his ‘undragoning’ of Eustace in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. He begins the book with this introduction:

“There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it.”

On one of the visited islands, Eustace finds a dragon's lair, guarded by a very weak and dying dragon. True to his nature, Eustace is very greedy for the treasure. He puts on a gold bracelet and then, weary from his journey, falls asleep. When he wakes up, he has turned into a dragon.

Lewis writes,

"Sleeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself."

(In reality, Eustace was always a dragon. It is just now evident).

Eustace had fleeting thoughts of relief at being the biggest thing around, but he quickly realizes he is cut off from his friends, and all of humanity. He feels a weight of loneliness and desperately wants to change.

That night, Aslan, Lewis's Christ-figure, leads Eustace to a very large well. Eustace thinks that bathing in the water might cure him, but Aslan tells him he must undress first. Much to his increasing pain, Eustace discovers that no matter how hard he tries, he cannot not take off the dragon's scales. And no matter how many layers he peels off, he is still a dragon.

This is how he recalls the story to his friend, Edmund.

"Then the lion said - but I don't know if it spoke - 'You will have to let me undress you.' I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it.

"The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt.

"Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off ... And there was I as smooth and soft as a peeled switch and smaller than I had been. Then he caught hold of me - I didn't like that much for I was very tender underneath now that I'd no skin on - and threw me into the water. It smarted like anything but only for a moment. After that it became perfectly delicious and as soon as I started swimming and splashing I found that all the pain had gone from my arm. And then I saw why. I'd turned into a boy again..."

C. S. Lewis, Chapter 12, "The Dark Island," in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

PS – Do you see how Lewis acknowledges that works/baptism can't save us. Eustace can't wash until Aslan has 'dedragoned' him. In *Letters to Malcolm*, Lewis writes, "[We must lay before him \[God\] what is in us; not what ought to be in us.](#)"

And Lewis's acknowledgement of the difference between salvation and sanctification is also priceless. He concludes that story with this narration –

"It would be nice, and fairly nearly true, to say that "from that time forth Eustace was a different boy." To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. He had relapses. There were still many days when he could be very tiresome. But most of those I shall not notice. The cure had begun."