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Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
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Psalm 133; John 20:19-31  
“Seeing, Touching, Believing, Healing and Mission”

The Hebrew text read by Debbie, the cover quote and various elements of the service point to and recognize “Earth Day” which we celebrate this Wednesday.

The Gospel text is the subject of my sermon. I was drawn to this story by a painting by 16<sup>th</sup> century artist, Caravaggio, which appeared in the April 1 edition of the magazine, Christian Century.

The painting shows Thomas sticking his finger into Christ side, into the wound, although the text says Jesus invited him to do so but Thomas instead exclaimed, “My Lord and my God” without doing a thing. Jesus says, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

There’s a progression in the story of seeing the wounds of the risen Christ, touching the wound if one goes by Caravaggio, and thereby believing that Jesus is alive, which then heals the believer, or better, galvanizes him or her into action.

Jesus says that in believing in him we have life in his name, which is healing. He also says, as God sent me, so I send you, which is mission.

The progression is seeing, touching, believing and healing/mission. Before I provide illustrations of what I am saying, I want to say that for Christians any wound, death, or death-like situation we see or encounter is an encounter with the death and wounds of the risen Jesus.

The wound, whether it is despair, depression, marital problems, sickness, suffering in conflict and war, you name it, is the wound of Christ. As Christians, we do not turn away from the wound. Jesus encourages us to face it – to see and touch – and to believe in him. In doing so, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to affirm Christ’s life in the world.

Two illustrations will hopefully, bring this home.

The first comes through the brilliant film I mentioned in the introduction to my sermon last week, “The Salt of the Earth” featuring Brazilian photographer, Sebastião Salgado.

Wim Wenders and Salgado's son, Juliano directed the movie. Wenders is a major figure in New German Cinema. His name alone is enough to encourage you to see the movie. It was nominated for an Oscar this year in the documentary feature category.

The subject is exceptionally artistic and the movie itself beautifully conveyed in cinematography and presentation.

Mark Feeney of the Boston Globe wrote last Sunday that Sebastião Salgado is a kind of pilgrim. For more than 40 years, he traveled the globe, chronicling human suffering and natural beauty. His images have an Old Testament intensity and grandeur. As "a witness of the human condition," Wenders calls him in "The Salt of the Earth."

"(In the movie), we hear from Wenders, Salgado, Salgado's late father, his director son, and wife. We see him at work, in New Guinea, Siberia, on his family's farm, and in the Amazonian rain forest. Mostly, we see his images: from Latin America, the Sahel (in North Africa), post-Gulf War Kuwait, the war torn former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Congo, the Galapagos; of workers and refugees the world over; of whales and walruses and icebergs. Often stupendous, even operatic, the photographs more than hold their own on the big screen. They're like arias, with the filmed footage as instrumental music connecting them."

The center of the movie is the heart of darkness. One sees the devastation of the Rwandan conflict and migrations of Africans in Ethiopia, Sudan and the Congo. It is almost too much to bear. Salgado is completely spent yet says we must see this. Indeed, we must. It is the wound of Christ and Salgado is the voice telling us to see and touch the wound.

One gets the sense in the movie that if Salgado remained in the wounds of the earth he would not have survived. He explains in a TED Talk that he returned home from his years of exposure to the devastation of the planet and was terribly sick with internal bleeding.

One imagines he had an ulcer but his doctor said he was dying inside and he had to take a break from his witness of dying people and their worlds. His diagnosis and recuperation coincides with his return to Brazil and to his aging parents on his boyhood farm.

The farm was fertile with rich forests, ample grazing pasture when he was a boy but the land had dried and the forests were gone, and the cattle reduced to nearly nothing. They lamented this state when Salgado's wife, Lélia, suggested they plant trees on the land. They did so, over a million indigenous trees of multiple varieties and after a few rotations, the forest returned and bloomed.

Later, they established a nature reserve and called it Instituto Terra. The Instituto is dedicated to a mission of reforestation, conservation and environmental education.

Through this process of restoration and resurrection, Salgado's health returned and he went back to photography, this time to shoot the beauty of the earth and its animals. He befriended the lovely and became healthier and whole in the process.

The wound of Christ was the devastation of the earth and humanity's inhumanity to humanity, which Salgado said we must see. Their dying farm mirrored the earth he had seen but they believed that if they planted trees, in other words, believed in resurrection, new life would emerge and it did. Thereby, Salgado's health returned and he continued his mission as a photographer.

Seeing wounds without the life and hope we have in Christ could take us down. Instead, we have life because they are the wounds of the *resurrected* Christ. There is life and hope in the resurrection.

The other story goes back to my experience of the surfer in a garbage-filled wave in Java, Indonesia. It appears in the book, *Overdevelopment, Overpopulation, Overshoot*. I spoke about it in my Passion/Palm Sunday sermon. For me, this was Jesus on the cross 2015. Looking at this picture on this post-resurrection day was looking at the wound of Jesus.

I could easily despair but as a Christian, I believe in new life. The scarred and wounded risen Jesus says to me as he said to his disciples in today's story, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

My mission is to do all in my power to reaffirm life for the planet and I do not have to do it all, in fact, I cannot do it all. I can begin in a small way. I recall another wave I witnessed, this time at the San Francisco International Ocean Film Festival a year ago.

With nifty graphics, a filmmaker transformed a water wave into a wave consisting of plastic bottles. There are so many plastic bottles in the ocean that he envisioned a time when plastic bottles instead of water would transport surfers.

The small action I can take to affirm life is to refrain from drinking from plastic bottles. I have one bottle, which I bought from an outdoor shop. I fill it from the tap and use it over and over and hopefully my children will use it when I'm gone. My footprint in this sense is extremely small. It's as simple as that. Every

little thing we do to affirm life contributes to the greater whole. But, we must do something.

The gospel story at its center is about belief. It is belief that the crucified Jesus rose from the dead. The disciples see and perhaps touch the wounds of the resurrection Jesus and they believe that God has conquered death in Jesus and in believing in Jesus, they believe that life is more powerful than death, that death is not the final word, that life can emerge from death and therein lays salvation, which is another wording for healing.

This happened in Salgado's situation, it is happening for surfers and nature lovers around the globe, and it happens for us. Whatever the wound, past and present, Jesus asks us to see it and touch it and to believe in life that blossoms in healing and mission/in health and wholeness.

The gospel story is also about believing in Jesus without seeing him as the disciples did. Either way, we have life in his name. Believe, and all will be well. Amen.