

April 14, Easter 3B (Luke 24:36b-48)

Why doesn't Jesus just remind the disciples of a story or an inside joke they shared before he died?

by [Josh Scott](#) in the [April 2024](#) issue

Last year our family spent fall break on Tybee Island in Georgia. It was absolutely gorgeous there, and we had the best week playing in the surf and sand. One evening we took a short ride over to Savannah to have dinner and take a walking ghost tour of the old city. I have always been a little fascinated with the paranormal. Now, I am quite a skeptic; I don't really buy it, though I am open to my mind being changed. Still, from campfire stories to movies, spooky things always draw me in.

Back to the ghost tour. The guide took us all over town recounting story after story, as we passed haunted place after haunted place. It all culminated at a cemetery, which definitely has a ghostly vibe. If you picture a creepy cemetery at night, you've probably imagined it correctly. The tour was billed as family friendly, but the guide definitely forgot about that detail. His parting words to us were to "check under the bed tonight." For the adults it was a fun way to see the city and hear some of the tales that have been passed down for generations, but the kids were terrified by the end.

In Luke's Easter story, the risen Jesus appears to his disciples, first to two of them on the journey to a village called Emmaus and then to the 11 back in Jerusalem. When Jesus appears it's a frightening scene, so much so that they can only conclude that he's a ghost. Naturally, their response is like my kids on that ghost tour: they are overcome by fear. However, this is no haunted sightseeing excursion. Jesus is among them, and to calm their fears he offers them his hands and feet as evidence. Why not just remind them of a story or an inside joke they had shared? Because his hands and feet bear the scars of crucifixion. For his followers, Jesus' scars are a certificate of authenticity.

What does it mean for Jesus to be known by his scars? I'd bet most of us have scars, and every one of them has a story to tell. On my left ankle there is a long scar that tells the story of an attempt to steal third base during a church league softball game (successfully, in case you're wondering). On the side of my right wrist there's one from a bike wreck when I was 12, and on my ear there's one that was left by chicken pox when I was five. Sometimes my kids will ask me about a particular scar or mark and I'll tell them the story of how it got there, but it's really more than that. I'm telling them about my story, about moments that shaped me and left their mark on my life.

Jesus' scars also tell a story. They paint a vivid picture of a human being committed to a vision of God and God's kingdom that is just and generous, with an embrace wide enough for anyone and everyone. They tell a story of resisting the dehumanizing forces of empire by insisting on a God who sees everyone as valuable, a God who has numbered every hair on our heads. Jesus' scars tell a story of refusing violence in favor of peacemaking and returning love in the face of hatred. The truth is the scars by which Jesus' disciples know him encapsulate the very essence of the life he lived that led to them in the first place.

All my life I have heard Christians talk about the "resurrected body" and how it will be brand-new. How they will be free of any of the things that bug, pain, or frustrate us, which is a wonderful hope. Yet I have always wondered why the gospels never depict Jesus as being free of those scars. No doubt they are reminders of immense suffering and agony. They even could be seen as the souvenirs of a failed mission; that's surely what Good Friday felt like. Yet the risen Jesus embraces his scars and uses them to comfort his disciples and confirm his identity, and more, his story.

"If we do not transform our pain," says Richard Rohr, "we will most assuredly transmit it." The risen Christ allows his pain to be transformed and, as a result, allows healing and hope to flow from his wounds to his disciples and beyond.