

## ***See my hands***

The gospels differ in their accounts of the appearances of the risen Jesus. Luke and John agree that Jesus showed his disciples the marks of his crucifixion (hands and feet in Luke; hands and side in John). Only John attributes the hand wounds to nails – something which has been questioned by some who have analysed written and archaeological evidence of Roman crucifixions. But the marks of those nails have become an established part of Christian iconography and devotion, and add to the echoes of Psalm 22 in what have become the accepted details of Jesus' crucifixion: *they pierced my hands and my feet*.

That Jesus' body displayed wounds from his crucifixion was clearly important to Luke and John. In their narratives they serve as distinguishing features to prove his identity to his startled disciples on Easter Day: *Look at my hands and my feet*, he says in Luke; *see that it is I myself*. And that is the physical evidence for which doubting Thomas asks – and receives a week later. But more than that, the wounds assert the reality of both the crucifixion and the resurrection: as the speeches in the Acts of the Apostles reiterate, the Jesus whom God has raised is the Jesus *who was crucified*. His appearance isn't a flashback to when Jesus was with them before, for his body shows what he has undergone since then. His resurrection doesn't deny or cancel out the reality or manner of his death: his body hasn't been Photoshopped to remove the traces of what he has suffered. Jesus is still the Crucified One – and he carries the marks of that in depictions (such as that in Aclé's east window) of his Ascension to his Father's side, for his wounds to be glorified for the adoration of angels above and the faithful below.

I wonder what that might say to us about our bodies? Body image is an obsession for some. Even before the age of fake news, we know that images of, usually female bodies have been doctored to emphasise culturally desirable features – with the result that real people in real bodies yearn to look like them; or reject their own bodies as imperfect or flawed. And it's not only images which are doctored: there is a whole industry devoted to cosmetic surgery and treatments. The Risen Jesus, on the other hand, doesn't show us a perfect, or doctored body. His body is glorious as it is.

Or, perhaps more relevant to us, I'm conscious of so many in our church congregations reaching an age where parts of our bodies are wearing out: causing pain, or restricting activity, or even reducing life expectancy. In the past, the wounds of Jesus have been emphasised as a sign of solidarity with those who suffer in other ways: the famous Isenheim altarpiece shows Jesus hanging on the cross, his skin pitted with plague-like sores, to bring comfort to those the monks specialised in caring for in their hospital. Jesus' wounds are now part of him: true, they no longer cause him physical pain (you might envy him that) but he doesn't deny or reject them, concealing or airbrushing them out. Rather, in Christian tradition they are transformed and glorified, symbolising victory over suffering – perhaps as physical deformities are transformed in Paralympic and associated athleticism.

And then what about the inner wounds we all carry, inflicted on us by others, or accumulated ourselves (regrets, past mistakes, dashed hopes)? Our imperfections and injuries remain part of us, have contributed to who we have become: can we integrate them in a way which doesn't continue to threaten or pain us? As the Risen Jesus carries and shows the marks of the suffering which didn't divert or overthrow him? His wounds are part – an essential part – of his story; of what he has to say to us. *The prints of love*, Charles Wesley called them. Or in the words of Matthew Bridges, *rich wounds yet visible above, in beauty glorified: no angel in the sky can fully bear that sight, but downward bends his burning eye at mysteries so bright*.