

# “Wounded Healer”

Rev. Dr. Tom Glenn

First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

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## Acts 2:43-47

*Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

## John 20:19-21

*When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’*

Please, pray with me. Gracious God, we are grateful. We are grateful for the risen Christ. We are grateful that you have drawn us together on this Sunday to worship and to praise. We ask by your Holy Spirit that your word, that the songs that we sing and the prayers that we say may be inspired for us by your spirit. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. For you are our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

And awe came upon everyone. All who believed they were together. They held all things in common. Now I will have to admit to, in fact, being somewhat awestruck by what is said in this first reading that we had, that Tom read for us in our passage and acts. Somewhat awestruck by this early church.

It may not necessarily be the same reason that those first disciples were in awe. But what impresses me, what creates a sense of awe in me is that it's pretty simple really. It's that they did hold all things in common. Does that not strike you as kind of extraordinary that they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all as they had a need? What has occurred to me this last week - and looking once again at this passage as well as the Gospel - is the indication, this sharing of possessions is the indication of what a tight-knit, very cohesive, intimate community they must have been. Not only sharing goods, but I suspect sharing as well their life stories, their struggles, their fears, their hopes, and their dreams, the wounds that life has given to them along the way. In fact, I wonder if it was not this kind of sharing initially of life stories, of wounds and struggles, and fears, and hopes, and dreams that enabled them to deeply accept and love one another, flaws and all and enable them to offer healing to one another. I wonder.

And so that does bring me to our Gospel reading for this morning. I don't know if you've noticed but every year on this Sunday after Easter, every year, it's a three-year cycle--the lectionary, but every year we have Thomas again. Thomas the doubting disciple. The one who needed Jesus to reappear again so he could put his finger on the mark of the nails. And so he could put his hand into his pierced side. Not only see the wounds from that excruciating day of crucifixion, not only see them, but touch them, put his fingers and his hands on them, in them. And I don't know about you but I can tell you, I can confess to you there is a reason why I am not a medical professional. There is a reason why I am not a doctor or a nurse. And you can all be very glad I am not. Seeing would be quite enough for me. Thank you very much. I would not need to touch anything. But beyond that, there is, it seems to me, something extraordinary about Thomas' request and his subsequent action. And that there is something extraordinary when I think about it, about Jesus appearing with his wounds. In his resurrected state he appears with his wounds.

One would think that he'd appear more perfectly, would you not, without his wounds? I can tell you when I imagined myself in a resurrected state it's a-- well, maybe when I was 16 years old or 20 years old, but certainly not 76 years old. But Jesus appears to the disciples with his wounds that he received from that barbaric practice of crucifixion. And he appears and tells Thomas to believe. To not only overcome his doubts, to not only put his trust in the one who loves him, and to trust in the love that had overcome death, but to also believe in himself that he too could be a wounded healer. In spite of his flaws, which I'm sure as we all seem to be, he was well aware of. In spite of his humanness, that he too could be a wounded healer, maybe not in spite of, maybe because of. And I wonder whether or not in disappearance, Jesus is signaling to us that to live the abundant life which he came to give us, to live into discipleship, to live into being a follower of Jesus, to live as one who serves others, that call to compassion and to justice, and to love and trust in that gospel and in the crucified and resurrected one that we bring all of who we are. All of who we are.

All of the struggles that we have endured, all of the hopes and dreams, some of them dashed, all of the hurt and the pain, some of which we, admittedly, we have brought on ourselves, those that others have put upon us or that we have put upon someone else, and that we bring all of the conditions with which we are born, and that in the sight of God and in the presence of the resurrected Christ, we are told that we are enough--that we are enough--most likely more than enough. And in the presence of the risen Christ, we are transformed and made whole, full human beings. And that by the power of the Holy Spirit our wounds are transformed and redeemed. Our struggles, and conditions, and so on and so forth are not forgotten, they're not gone, but they are transformed so that we can become bearers of justice and compassion so that we too can become wounded healers. If you've heard me preach before from this pulpit, you have heard me speak about Father Gregory Boyle. He's a man that I greatly admire and very much stand in awe of the work he does. He's a Jesuit priest. He works in Los Angeles with gangs and gang members in the heart of Los Angeles, that's the South Central L.A. area. He lives and works there. He's written a book called Tattoos on the Heart, but I was delighted to discover that he's written a new book, which is entitled Barking to the Choir. I'm not exactly sure what that title means, but be that as it may, that's what it is: Barking to the Choir. And in it, he tells the story of being invited to speak to a group of social workers in Richmond, Virginia. Not only being invited, but to really conduct a day-long in-service training that will be all about gangs. So he decides to invite two former gang members to go with him to speak about their lives; two former gang members that are now working within his ministry called Homeboy Industries. Homeboy being what they call one another in these gangs. And a young man in his mid-twenties named Sergio is one of them. Now, Sergio had spent a considerable time in prison. He had been homeless for a stretch. He had been a heroin addict even for a longer stretch. He was arrested at 9 years old and part of a gang at the age of 12. Finally, after many efforts and outreach to him by Father Boyle and by his ministry, Sergio made the decision to accept the invitation to come clean and to become part of Homeboy Industries. He started with the janitorial crew, what they call in that ministry the Humble Place.

But in time, he became a valuable member of the substance abuse team now being fully into his own recovery and able to help younger Homeboys to try on sobriety for size. And he stood before this audience of social workers in Richmond. He was not a polished speaker. But he stood before them, and he began by saying this, "I guess you would say that my mom and me didn't get along so good. I think I was six when she looked at me and said, 'Why don't you just go and kill yourself? You're such a burden to me.'" When he said that, there was an audible gasp in the audience. But then he goes on, "I think I was nine," he said, "when she drove me to the deepest part of Baja California, walked me up to the door of this orphanage, and said, 'I have found this kid,' and left me there." At this point, his voice was beginning to buckle, recalling all of this and not really used to speaking. He added, "I was there 90 days before my grandmother could get out of my mother where she had dumped me. And my grandmother came and rescued me."

And then he searched for what to say next. He said, "My mom beat me every single day of my elementary school years with things you could imagine and a lot of things you couldn't. Every day my back was bloodied and scarred. And in fact, I had to wear three t-shirts to school each day. The first because the blood would seep through. The second because you could still see the blood. And finally, the third t-shirt you couldn't see the blood. Kids at school would make fun of me. 'Hey, fool, it's 100 degrees out. Why are you wearing three t-shirts?' they'd say." He paused again so his emotions could catch up with him. It was a long pause. It seemed he was staring at a piece of his life that only he could see. And then he finally said, swallowing back his tears, "I wore three t-shirts well into my adult years because I was ashamed of my wounds, and I didn't want anyone to see them." And then he suddenly found a higher perch upon which to rest and said, "But now, I welcome my wounds. I run my fingers over those scars. My wounds have become, and are, my friends after all," he continued, "after all, how can I help others heal if I don't welcome my own wounds?"

And Father Boyle concluded with this, "And all came upon everyone." Indeed. The wounds and the struggles, the hurt and the pain, the conditions with which we are born, our stories, in the presence of the risen Christ, these are transformed and redeemed. Our stories may not be as horrendous as Sergio's. But I am guessing that there's a lot of hidden pain and struggle sitting amongst us. And I would submit that the lesson and invitation is still the same that we too can be wounded healers, wounded bearers of compassion, and wounded bearers of love and of grace. That we too can respond to Jesus' invitation he gave to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my pierced side. Do not doubt, but believe." Amen.