

Haydenville Congregational Church

The Rev. Dr. Andrea Ayvazian

April 19, 2009

John 20:19-31

“Wounded Healer”

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord Our Strength and Our Redeemer. Amen.*

It's a story we know so well.

It's a story that makes us feel better because, like those faithful and flawed disciples, we too have doubts and do not believe.

It is Easter evening. It is dark. Jesus is dead. And yet the tomb was found to be empty.

The disciples have gathered, maybe in secret, certainly behind locked doors. They are being careful, they are afraid.

They are being careful, they are afraid, they are securely hiding behind locked doors and Jesus appears to them.

He comes and stands among them.

And then Jesus says and does something remarkable.

He says “Peace be with you.”

AND HE SHOWS THEM HIS HANDS AND HIS SIDE.

Listen,

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...Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.

Picture this...Jesus appears, although the disciples have carefully locked the door behind them. Jesus appears and says “Peace be with you” and then he offers them his hands with the holes, and he hikes up his tunic and reveals his punctured side.

According to the story in the Book of John, there is not so much as a breath separating the greeting—the words of comfort—and the display of his scars. And I do not for one moment believe that the proximity of Jesus’ words and his actions is coincidental. Jesus’ warm and reassuring greeting is followed immediately by the vulnerable gesture of revealing his scars. “Peace be with you, these are my wounds.”

Jesus’ appearance in the locked room with his followers is his first resurrection appearance to the disciples, according to the Book of John. He has already appeared and spoken to beloved follower Mary Magdalene and he tells her “go to my brothers” (as he refers to the 11 disciples) and say that I have risen and will ascend to my Father. And then on what we call Easter night, he appears in the locked room to the disciples.

When Jesus appears for the first time to his disciples, his first post-resurrection words to them are a compassionate greeting AND then a display of his wounds....how profound is that? Peace to you and these are my wounds—these are his first post-resurrection words and actions to and with his beloved followers.

As Jesus’ current disciples, as a community trying to model our lives after his, as individuals trying to live Christ-like lives, what do we make of this? Can we emulate him? What would it mean?

What would it be like if we took our cue from Jesus and paired our passing of the peace (which we do often in this Church) with a sharing of our wounds?

“Peace be with you Annie, and I’m on Step 5 in AA.”

“Peace be with your Norma and I can’t pay my mortgage.”

“Peace be with you Doug and I am worried sick about my teen-age daughter.”

“Peace be with you Mary and the doctor found a lump in my breast.”

How counter-cultural. How outrageous. How counter-intuitive—because when someone asks us how we are doing, we’re supposed to say, FINE! GREAT! And how are you?

So often we pretend—even with those we know well—that nothing is wrong.

It's considered bad form, especially for men, to reveal weakness, suffering or struggle so we lie just a little, sometimes we lie a lot.

But on the first Easter evening, Jesus refused to pretend. He refused to pretend that nothing had happened and he refused to just go on. He told the truth, "Peace be with you and these are my wounds."

What would happen if WE told the truth?

The poet Audre Lord says that when someone tells the truth it creates the space for more truth around it.

Maybe if we passed the peace, a compassionate greeting, and then told the truth others could tell the truth in return.

Maybe if I said,

"Peace be with you Annie and I'm on Step 5 in AA"

Annie might say

"Peace be with you Andrea, I'm on Step 1 and afraid about what lies ahead."

Maybe if I said

"Peace be with you Doug and I am worried sick about my teen-age daughter."

Doug might say

"Peace be with you Andrea, we struggled when our son was a teen, let's talk."

Maybe Jesus is saying there is strength in truth-telling.

Maybe Jesus is showing us that the juxtaposition of being compassionate and being wounded is a natural pairing.

Maybe Jesus is saying you don't have to choose between compassion and honesty, care-taking and vulnerability

those CAN and SHOULD co-exist. In the same breath.

Maybe Jesus is giving us yet another lesson to live by.

The 13th century Persian poet and mystic Rumi said, "Honesty is the wine God drinks."

Maybe Jesus is saying precisely that through his words and his actions,

"Peace be with you...now look at my hands and my side."

What else is Jesus doing by saying, "Peace be with you...here are my scars?"

He is telling us: I am one of you, I have suffered, I am like you. I am both wounded and whole.

It is not either or, it is both/and. I am like you, we are—all of us—wounded and whole.

Emily Dickinson wrote this about Jesus,
“When he tells us about his Father, we distrust him. When he shows us his Home, we turn away, but when he confides to us that he is acquainted with grief, we listen, for that also is an acquaintance of our own.”

“...that also is an acquaintance of our own...”

We all have wounds. Sometimes our wounds show, sometimes they are hidden. But whether they are apparent not, we all have wounds. Maybe we can be strong enough to share the ones that are hidden. Maybe our sharing will help others heal while it helps us embrace the wholeness that is our birthright.

In the 1950s there was a TV show I used to love called *Queen for a Day*. Some of us older types may remember it. Writing about *Queen for a Day* in a recent issue of the **New Yorker**, Alex Wilkinson says “when asked what they wanted if selected as queen, most contestants asked for a washer and dryer...or a vacation. But not Lili Jacob. Jacob asked for \$500 to have a plastic surgeon remove the number A-10862 from her arm. It had been tattooed there at Auschwitz. She was the winning contestant that day.”

Even if Lili Jacob had the tattooed number removed from her arm and that reminder of the horror was no longer visible, the wound she carried every day would still be a part of her. Lili Jacob could say, “Peace be with you, I survived Auschwitz.”

Our wounds are part of who we are.
If we hide them we are hiding a part of our core selves.
And we also impeding the healing that comes from revealing who we really are and embracing the wholeness that honesty provides.

What Jesus shows us through this powerful first resurrection appearance, “Peace be with you, here are my wounds,” is that we can all be wounded healers.

We can reveal our wounds, AND be a balm to others when they reveal theirs.
We can reveal our wounds, AND be balm to others when we let them minister to us.

Gloria Ayvazian is the primary care-giver for a weak and disabled husband and she could find herself saying,

“Peace be with you, my husband is bed ridden.”

And Gloria could hear in return, “Peace be with you, I will pray for you.”

Gloria’s sharing is healing for herself and her friend’s prayers are good for them both.

Sue Carbin may love living alone and be delighted with her independence but find herself suddenly saying,

“Peace be with you, I dread eating another supper by myself tonight.”

And Sue could hear in return

“Peace be with you, and can you join us at our table this evening?”

Then Sue’s dinner at a church member’s home is healing for Sue and a joy for the friend from church.

Bonnie Atkins may be fine at her very taxing job most weeks but could surprise herself by saying,

“Peace be with you, and I am so full of sorrow and grief for the children I saw this week.”

And Bonnie could hear in return

“Peace be with you, and could we share a pot of tea, I want to hear more.”

Bonnie’s time with her friend would be helpful to Bonnie and healing for her friend who feels valued and trusted.

Like Jesus, we are all wounded healers.

Jesus was a healer but he was not just a healer.

Jesus was wounded but he was not just his wounds.

We are the same.

Our lives, our work, our words, and our witness are healing for others.

And our lives, our past, our current struggles involve wounds that we carry each day.

Like Jesus we are wounded healers.

Like him we can be brave enough to share our wounds and **receive** help.

AND we can hear about the wounds of others and **offer** help.

Like Jesus, we are healers but not just healers.
Like Jesus, we are wounded but we are not just our wounds.

Like Jesus we can be brave enough to pair the healing with the wounds,
courageous enough to hike up our shirt and show the scar,
clear enough to name the suffering and
strong enough to carry on.
And we can be present to others and hold their pain, listen to their story, pray for
their comfort and help carry their burden.

Wounded healers.
We can be both because...

*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...Jesus came and stood among
them and said, "Peace be with you."
After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side.*

Amen.