

## **Wounded Healers**

### **Matthew 14:13-20**

A few weeks back, on a Saturday -- a chilly, rainy Saturday -- a whole bunch of people gathered together in Westport to go for a walk. Weatherwise, it wasn't the best day for a stroll, and since this walk was at the water's edge, at Sherwood Island park, the wind and rain were that much more blustery and uncomfortable. No one there was complaining, though; none of the hundreds who had shown up for this particular stroll seemed much concerned about the weather. They were there because they wanted to be there -- no, not wanted - *needed* to be there. Needed to be there. For each other, for unknown others, and most of all, for someone they loved and lost.

The walk was the *Out of the Darkness* walk, organized each year by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. And everyone there at the walk was someone who had been touched by suicide; kids who had lost a friend, parents who had lost a child, children who had lost a parent, neighbors, cousins, grandparents, ministers. It was the sixth year for Team Emma, the team formed in 2009 by all of us who loved Emma von Euler, whose life had come too soon to its end in June of that year. The sixth year for us, but the first year at the walk for Team Abby: dozens upon dozens of Trumbull High School students who were there because they'd lost a bright, lively 15-year-old this June.

It's not an event at which you're ever glad to see new faces. And yet, out of that gathering, out of all that love and sorrow,

comes the will and the power to do something good,  
the will and the power to prevent other suicides, to heal the hurting.  
Out of the darkness - the name of the walk --  
out of the darkness comes light.  
Out of the wounds comes healing.

Emma's mom, our Nancy, stepped up to the microphone before the start of the walk.  
She told everyone whose mom she was.  
And then she talked to us about the healing that we were now a part of:  
how the walk was helping to fund a new program in Stamford which would empower  
teens to help each other --  
mental health first aid -- equipping teens to watch out for signs,  
reach out with care.

Watching Nancy that day, watching Peter,  
and thinking about how tirelessly, how tirelessly they have worked to prevent any more  
such loss,  
the phrase that came to my mind was one I learned long ago in seminary:  
wounded healer.  
Wounded ... healer.  
In the footsteps of the one who took on the woundedness of the world,  
in the power of God's grace,  
those who have been wounded, I was taught, can find an extraordinary capacity to  
heal.  
Out of the darkness -- light.  
Out of the woundedness -healing.

I picked the scripture story for today,  
the story about Jesus and all those loaves and fishes,  
because I had decided I wanted to preach today on the topic of compassion.  
And so I wanted a story that would really highlight  
Jesus at his most compassionate.

Surely this one must be the best, I thought --  
all those hungry people in front of Jesus,  
and his disciples complaining that this is way too many people to deal with,  
that they ought to send them all away.

And Jesus saying "no, we have to do something about it,"  
and somehow he does -- somehow 5 loaves and 2 fish,  
blessed by Jesus, become enough for everyone.

What a perfect example of compassion, I figured.

But then I sat down to study the passage a little more closely.

And I got stuck on the very first sentence of the passage;

It puzzled me.

Let me read it again.

"Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself."

Before the crowds show up to have their sicknesses healed,  
before they get hungry and Jesus has to figure out how to feed them,  
there's this line.

When Jesus heard *this news*, he had to go off by himself, it says.

What had he heard? Why did he need to be alone for a while?

So I looked to see what story comes before this story.

And I found out.

The news that someone had just given him was that he'd just lost his cousin, John,  
John the Baptist, the boy he'd grown up with, the man who'd baptized him, his friend,  
his bud.

John had died. And they'd just broken the news to Jesus.

And I read that and thought,

"He must have really been hurting. Jesus must have really been hurting."

No wonder it says he went off to a deserted place by himself.

He **was** hurting.

He was grieving. He was wounded.

And yet the next sentence, the next sentence,  
says he didn't stay alone for long.

The very next sentence says that when Jesus saw a crowd of people aching for healing,  
he went to work loving them, holding them, healing them, feeding them.

Out of his own woundedness and grief, he offered his healing.  
Out of his own darkness, he brought light to others.

The idea of the wounded healer is this:  
that those who have been through hurt of any kind,  
loss of any kind,  
can discover in themselves a capacity for healing others,  
new depths of empathy and compassion that connect them to those who most *need*  
that compassion.

To be a wounded healer is to allow what has impacted you  
to be transformed into an ability to understand,  
to offer love and hope.

You *know* this is true --

You know that this can happen.

Let me give you the simplest, silliest, of examples and you'll see what I mean.

You go out in the yard on a summer day and you get poison ivy.

Nasty, awful poison ivy all up your arms.

It's miserable, you're itching like crazy,  
you feel incredibly sorry for yourself.

And yes, there is a recent personal element to this story.

But then you remember your mom's remedy, and you go get yourself that pink calamine lotion and you slather it all over and you're so much better.

A week later,  
you run into a friend at Stop and Shop and *she* says  
"I must have stepped in poison ivy yesterday, I've got it all over my ankles and it's  
driving me crazy."  
First you say -- "oh, I am so sorry, that's the worst."  
And then you say "you know, that calamine lotion really does help."  
Because you've gone through that misery, your empathy level is way up.  
You feel it with them, you practically feel the itch.  
**And** because you've gone through it, you also know what heals.

That, in its most simplistic form,  
is what it means to be a wounded healer --  
to allow whatever it is that has touched you with hurt  
to become your power for healing.  
By God's grace. By God's grace it is possible.

Let me be clear:  
never, never would I tell you that the hurts of our lives  
are put there by God so that we can be better to each other.  
The hurts of our lives -- which are much, much worse than poison ivy,  
those hurts are God's hurts, too --  
NEVER does God wish for us anything but good, anything but light.  
So when the darkneses come, when the shadows pass over us,  
they are no more God's will for us than our own.

What I **am** saying is that God's grace is so powerful,  
God's love and strength so limitless,  
that God can use us, wounded as we are, as instruments of healing.  
That God can open our eyes to find blessing and hope again,  
that God's transformative power can bring light out of darkness.  
and that light can be the light that another person desperately needs.

Each of us carries *some* wound.

Which means that each of us has the capacity to be a healer.

And it's hard for me to imagine that any community is more aware of that than this amazing church family.

Here are the kinds of things we hear from you,  
all the time:

"Alida, if you know anyone who's out of work and having a tough time,  
please let them know they can talk to me.

I've been there and maybe I could give them some encouragement."

**OR**

"Alida, I heard you offer a prayer for someone with prostate cancer.

You know I went through treatment last year--

can you tell them to call me."

**OR**

"My dad had Alzheimer's too, like that woman you were talking about.

I'd love to go and visit with her, give her daughter a little break."

**OR**

"I've got a child with special needs, too -- I'm going to give that dad a call, I know it's  
tough to do this alone."

This is a church full of healers -- wounded healers, loving healers,  
people who are willing to allow the light shine through the broken places in their *own*  
lives

in order to light up the shadows of another life.

Nancy and Peter von Euler are that way --

Jeff Keith and his commitment to cancer survivors is that way --

Eleanor Page, who's offered support for Lyme disease sufferers is that way --

and countless anonymous people here who have driven a new friend to an AA meeting  
are that way.

All, all wounded healers.

Back in late September,  
I brought some guests to our high school youth group, SPF.  
I brought about 30 guests, in fact,  
and when you put that together with the 80 teens who showed up,  
we became way too big a crowd for the Len Morgan Youth Barn.  
So we migrated, that Thursday night, over to the Memorial Room.  
My 30 guests were the residents of Pivot Ministries in Bridgeport,  
men who were emerging from the hell of addiction  
with the loving, firm guidance of Pivot's leaders --  
many of whom had lived through that particular hell themselves.  
Some were not only emerging from addiction,  
but from jail time, too.

And they came for a couple reasons that night to SPF.  
One was to worship with us, to sing.  
And boy did they sing. They shook the glass in the windows of the Memorial Room --  
they belted out "Holy is your name, O Lord Most High,"  
and 'Amazing Grace.'  
And two of them stepped forward and did some epic rapping,  
and then a couple more got our kids up on their feet and dancing along.  
And it was joyous and it was grace-filled, and it was worship to the God of all  
goodness.

And then they sang another song, and this song was harder and rawer.  
They sang "not going back again," and a bunch of them began to weep.  
And when the song was over, one of the men stepped forward to talk to our kids.  
I say man, but he looked like a kid to me;  
he wasn't too much older than our own.  
And he said this. He said,  
"I'm here to keep you from doing what I did.  
I'm here to help you heal in your relationships, and put yourself right with yourself and  
God,

and don't think so bad about yourself that do what I did."

And then he said something that weeks later, our kids were still quoting, still remembering.

He said

"You don't have to walk this road. I already walked it for you."

You don't have to walk this road. I already walked it for you.

That's a wounded healer.

That's someone who took all the broken places in his life, in his heart, and let God's light shine right through the cracks to light someone else's way out of the shadows.

That's a wounded healer.

Each one of us has something.

Everyone of us has a story.

Each one of us has something we carry, something that hurts, something that's missing, some crack in our heart.

With the transformative power of God's grace, every one of our hurts can become someone else's healing.

Through our compassion, through our empathy, we have the capacity to be instruments of peace, every one of us.

Because the one who leads the way is that same one who stood on a hillside long years ago, his heart full of hurt and hope and healing, and offered what he had and it was enough. It was more than enough.

Let the healing begin.

Amen.



