

The Wounded Healer

John 20:19-23

04 18 2010 Sam Jones Memorial UMC

Introduction

Suppose for a moment that a cosmetic company developed a radically new product line. After years of research and development, scientists had finally created a revolutionary **Wrinkle Cream**. It was absolutely guaranteed to remove every line and blemish from a user's face. How well do you think such a product would sell?!?

A multimillion dollar industry in our society is dedicated to eliminating—or at least disguising—the physical signs of aging. Consumers use moisturizers, makeup, sun-block, hair color, acid washes, skin peels, exfoliants, Botox, cosmetic surgery, and more to gain and maintain the appearance of youth.

In stark contrast, a famous photographer told the story of a portrait session with an aging, Hollywood star. At the start of the session, he warned her: "My lens is sharp and the light quite bright. The camera will capture every line and flaw."

The mature woman replied with self-confidence, "Good! Let each wrinkle show--I've earned every one of them!"

The scars we bear on our bodies *are* a part of who we are. Every mark has a story. Each blemish a tale. Every wrinkle an experience. A scar testifies to past surgery. A dark line on the X-ray came from a broken arm in childhood. Freckles are a legacy of summers spent around the swimming pool. The laugh lines around the eyes came from a lifetime of smiles. Oh, and the gray hair appeared when the children were teenagers!

Even if a miracle Wrinkle Cream was invented, I'm not sure that I would waste my money. It would be like erasing a part of who I am.

Have you ever wondered what **God looks like**? Is the Lord's ancient face wrinkled with time? Are his knees scarred from kneeling in the dirt during creation? Do freckles sprinkle his face from wandering among the stars?

Our Gospel lesson today suggests these questions are much more than fanciful flights of imagination. Maybe the Almighty *does* bear the marks of his experience in the cosmos.

I. Cross Marks

Today's Gospel lesson occurred on the first **Easter Sunday**. Evening was falling and *"the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews."* The day had been filled with wonder and confusion. Strange and eerie tales of an empty tomb and angelic messengers. Words of light and life proclaimed in a grave of darkness and death. Some even claimed to have seen the risen Lord!

But the disciples were quick to doubt and slow to believe. Rumors of the resurrection did

little to reassure them. So they huddled together like sheep encircled by wolves as the night fell.

Then suddenly, Jesus was there. No puff of smoke or flash of light. He just appeared . . . and spoke the same simple greeting they had heard so often during their three years together: "*Shalom--peace be with you.*"

Then came the wonderful, awful moment when Jesus held out his hands--and they saw the puncture marks where the nails had been driven. He showed the gaping spear wound in his side. **The Lord of the resurrection still bore the marks of the crucifixion!**

II. The Nature of Jesus Christ

One of the mysteries of Christ's resurrection appearances was that his disciples often did not recognize him.

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| ◆ | Mary in the garden. | Recognized Jesus when he called her name |
| ◆ | Two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. | Recognized Jesus when he broke bread. |
| ◆ | The Eleven in the Upper Room. | Recognized Jesus by his wounds. |

Like the first century Jews who rejected Jesus because they expected a messiah of brilliance and might, we normally think of Christ in terms of power and glory. In the Apostles Creed, we profess that Jesus "*arose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*"

Certainly this is an appropriate and accurate image of our Lord. But like children who think that God lives "**up there**" somewhere, we may unconsciously believe that God is far removed from our daily existence. We suspect that the Lord God Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, exists above the suffering, grief, and pain of human existence.

But Christ's scars remind us otherwise. In **American Sign Language**, the gesture used to signify Jesus is: (*use middle finger of dominant hand to point to the palm of the other hand. point to palms*). Pointing to the scars where the spikes transfixed him to the cross.

On the far side of the empty tomb, Jesus was still marked by the cross. We serve one who knows what it means to live and die in a fallen world. Hebrews says: "*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*"

And Christ's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, continues to minister to our needs today. Jesus promised his followers, "*I am with you always.*" (Matthew 28:20) Always. In good times and bad, laughter and tears, light and darkness, joy and despair, life and death. The Lord of the Resurrection still bears the marks of the crucifixion.

III. The Wounded Healer

Henri Nouwen was one of the great devotional authors of the 20th century. He wrote a

book entitled The Wounded Healer and applied this title to Jesus Christ. Nouwen's words echo the prophet Isaiah (53:4) who wrote about God's **Suffering Servant**:

*"But he was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities.
Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,
And by his wounds, we are healed."*

Jesus Christ is our **wounded healer**—by his wounds, we all are healed. The cross bears witness to the height, width, and depth of God's grace, mercy, and love.

In the closing moments of the crucifixion, a Roman soldier thrust a spear deep into Jesus' side. Over the centuries, this **Sacred Spear** has figured prominently in a number of legends and myths. Some stories claim that the spear was originally made by a master craftsman named Tubal-Cain (a descendant of Cain). The lance was given as a gift to Julius Caesar who later awarded it to a Roman centurion for saving his life. The spear was passed from father to son. Finally, it was carried by the Roman officer present at Jesus of Nazareth's crucifixion.

The great German composer, Richard **Wagner**, composed an opera about the legend entitled "**Parsifal**." The musical was first performed in 1882. The story is an epic tale of the conflict between good and evil.

One of the main characters is Amfortas. He is the leader of the Guardians, a band of Christian knights who have sworn to protect the holy relics of Christendom. Among the treasures under their care is the **Sacred Spear** thrust into Jesus' body while on the cross.

The spear is stolen by an evil sorcerer named Klingsor. Amfortas is severely wounded while trying to protect the lance. During the final battle, a knight named Parsifal regains the relic. The spear is then used to heal Amfortas' wound. The weapon not only destroys evil but also heals the wounded.

I cannot vouch for the veracity of the story. Like most legends, there is probably a core of fact surrounded by myth and fiction. However, Wagner presents a powerful image: the spear violently thrust into Jesus' body was sanctified by the son of God's blood. The weapon became an instrument of healing and wholeness. Whenever the spear was pressed against a wound, the injury would miraculously heal. The instrument of death now gave new life. The story recalls Isaiah's words: "*by his wounds we all are healed.*"

At the cross and empty tomb, God has acted once and for all. The chains of sin and death are shattered. A Gospel song declares, "*There is power, power, wonder working power, in the blood of the Lamb!*" Christ brings healing into our lives. Crucifixion leads to resurrection. Cross to empty tomb. Death to life. Hurt to healing. **Healing** that is first and foremost:

◆ **Spiritual**

The grand work of God's grace is to transform us from sinners to saints. A people of darkness and death are born again into light and life. The damned are saved, and the Heavenly Father adopts us as his own children.

◆ **Physical**

God *can* heal physically. We can all share testimonies about the Holy Spirit's healing power. Our bodies are designed to heal themselves. Sometimes through human agency. Other times, divine intervention.

However, we have more questions than answers. As I put it to a Bible Study, the two challenges of physical healing are that God does heal physically . . . but not always.

Claude Smithmeyer. Failing eyesight prayed for God to heal. Spirit answered: "Be thankful for glasses!"

◆ **Mental and emotional**

Past scars. Future anxiety. Present neurosis

Neurosis.	Karen Horny:	Psychosis:	$2 + 2 + 5$
		Neurosis:	$2 = 2 = 4 . . .$ but I don't like it!

◆ **Relational**

Broken relationships one symptom of living in sin. Reconciliation with Christ leads to what 2 Corinthians calls a "*ministry of reconciliation*" with others.

Jesus greeted the disciples in the Upper Room with the familiar words, "**Peace** be with you." He also promised that the Holy Spirit brings "*a peace that passes all understanding.*" Peace that is more than an absence of conflict or the promise of rest. Instead, it is a healing and wholeness that flows from living in right relationship with God, neighbor, and self.

IV. We Are Wounded Healers

Jesus Christ is our wounded healer. His touch makes us whole. And the terrible sign of the cross is the wondrous sign of healing.

Then Jesus invites us to join him in this ministry. We too are called to serve others as wounded healers. We are instruments of God's grace and peace.

Although we typically think of our wounds and scars as curses, they can also serve as blessings for ourselves and others. While God can use our **strengths** for the kingdom's work, it is often our **weaknesses** that lend themselves to the ministry of healing. We too bear the cross marks of living in a fallen world. Each person here has experience brokenness and grief. God not only ministers to us in our need but also calls to serve others with the same need.

Let me add a **qualification** here to what I am not saying. When someone is hurting, our ability to minister is not based on having the exact same experience. In fact, I would strongly encourage you NOT to say, "I know just how you feel." And then use this as an excuse to launch into your own story of suffering. Because we don't know how they feel!

But we can use our own experiences of suffering to minister to others. And in our service to others, we find additional healing for ourselves. Think about it for a moment—almost every support group in our culture is based upon this model. Folk who have been there/done that and now help others in their journey. Examples:

- Weight Watchers
- Compassionate Friends
- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Alanon
- Narcotics Anonymous
- Other support Groups

As wounded healers, our ministry is sometimes **proactive** by doing things to make the situation better. But other times there is nothing that can be done. Instead, ministry is **being** with the person who is hurting. We share in their loneliness and pain. Our presence reminds others that they are not alone. In grace-filled moments, we might even make incarnate God's presence.

Such ministry moves beyond sympathy to **empathy** and there IS a difference. One author said, "Sympathy is a spectator. Empathy comes with its game shoes on."

A Milwaukee newspaper ran a story about Manuel Garcia, a young teenager diagnosed with cancer. The chemotherapy caused his hair to fall out in patches, so he shaved his whole head. But he felt very self-conscious about his appearance and worried his friends might laugh.

When his brother, Julio, learned of his concern, he showed up at the hospital one night with his own head shaved. But he didn't stop there. Julio talked fifty other relatives and friends into shaving their heads, too. During visitation hours, Manuel's room looked like a convention center for bald men! (or maybe a "before" picture for Rogaine!)

That's healing! Meeting people where they are and assuring them they are not alone. Sometimes we don't even have to say anything. Sometimes there is nothing to say. Acts of healing include holding hands in an ICU waiting room, serving dinner after a funeral, mailing a card, making a phone call, saying a prayer, even shaving your head!

Often healing comes through the **human touch**. Leo Buscaglia has written extensively on realizing our full human potential. His nickname is "Doctor Hug" because he encourages people to **hug** one another frequently.

The medical field has validated his advice. Studies reveal that physical contact leads to an increase in hemoglobin in the blood. Hemoglobin carries oxygen to all the body's organs. The increased levels of oxygen tone the body, prevent disease, and promote healing.

Researchers found that physical contact improves communication, pleasure, and health. Specifically, hugging can help you live longer, prevent illness, cure depression and stress, strengthen relationships, and even sleep better!

Helton Colton, author of three books of healing, concludes, "Fifteen years of research have convinced me that regular hugging can actually prolong life!"

Conclusion

Jesus appeared to the disciples that first Easter night as the Lord of the Resurrection . . . but he still bore the marks of the crucifixion. He comes to us as a wounded healer . . . and by his wounds we are healed.

No wrinkle cream exists that can erase the blemishes and scars of living in a fallen world.

But it is these very marks that allow us to minister to others. We too are wounded healers--
endowed with the Master's touch.