

“Wounds and Warriors and Doves”
John 20:26-29
Rev. David Hutchinson
Sunday, April 19, 2020

Jesus’ wounds may be the most important thing about Him.

At the end of John’s gospel, after the resurrection, there they are.

The wounds of Jesus - - don’t go away after the resurrection - - they take center stage.

Thomas touches them.

The wounds are what lead Thomas to believe.

To believe is the main - - and entire goal - - according to John’s gospel.

And at the end of the gospel - - Thomas believes.

Thomas wants to touch Jesus’ wounds - - or he WON’T believe - - he says.

And then - - 8 days after that request - - Jesus appears - - resurrected and wounded.

And Thomas touches the wounds - - and believes.

And the point of all that - - says John - - is for US to believe as well.

And believing - - will bring LIFE.

Touching our wounds...

Facing our death - - IS the way - - to life.

It is the ONLY way to life.

That - - is the gospel - - in a nutshell.

Jesus dies - - but he is resurrected - - scars and all.

And his scars - - and his wounds - - are what bring life, healing, and belief.

This is so important for us all - - in these days.

This time of sacrifice, and isolation, and illness, will also involve wounds.

People will be wounded emotionally as they are separated.

Thousands have died and more will follow.

Even at conservative estimates, there will be
more deaths than in any major war in our history.

The human race will survive.

But we will be wounded in the process.

People will be wounded economically.

People will be wounded as they experience the loss of a loved one.

And we will survive.

How?

By touching our wounds.

By letting these challenges redefine us.

By NOT just getting back to “normal” - - but by going forward.

I believe that when we gather again in person and celebrate Easter it will be like a resurrection - - and in that moment we may understand THE resurrection of Christ a little better.

I hope we are NOT the same after this.

I hope our nation is NOT the same after this.

If this crisis does not change us in some way - - God help us.

I believe it WILL change us for the better.

As a way to think about all this, consider a group of veterans - - who gather together after returning from battle - - to share their experiences.

There is a group called “Warriors Journey Home” or WJH.

It is a veterans group from Ohio.

In her book, “Resurrecting Wounds” - - Shelly Rambo describes meetings of this group. She uses their experiences - - to interpret the story of Thomas - - in John.

She says that the experiences of these veterans - - reframe the resurrection and an interpretation of the resurrected Jesus - - and Thomas - - the disciples - - and the wounds.

Warriors Journey Home members - - help us imagine what it means to put WOUNDS - - at the center.

Gayle - - one of the members of the group - - talked about her brother Bud - - who returned from Vietnam over three decades ago. / She said, “He came back”. / When she said, “He came back” - - she wasn’t talking about a LITERAL return from the country - - she was talking about Bud’s journey of healing - - after his experience of war.

WJH members are referred to as “warriors” - - a term that places military service and combat within the setting of ancient cultures. / It is intended to give an honorable role - - to members of the community who have engaged in battle.

At the meetings people sit in a circle. / When stories are told in this setting they are usually accompanied by strong emotions. / When she went to her FIRST circle - - Cindi says she just sat and cried.

There is something different about the WJH circle. / The diagnosis PTSD was instrumental to Peter’s postwar healing process. / It was instrumental - - BUT it was NOT comprehensive. / The language of SOUL - - clicked when he first heard it in the healing circle.

Most WJH members tell about changes they experience in the circle - - but Shianne has a particular gift - - for capturing the experiences in VIVID images. / She describes encountering someone in that space of return from combat. / “It is like watching RAZORS come out of someone” she said.

She remembers her own process - - and describes it as a process of confronting her own death - - watching her own death. / “When I had to do my healing - - I had to go back to the places where I was shattered - - and that I died. / I died there. / And so you’re asking me to return to the place that I died”. / Healing work - - involves witnessing your own death.

Something comes after the encounter - - but she INSISTS that you “have to stay WITH the PAIN to know that part”. / There IS this moment when the clouds part - - after a violent storm:

“And then”, she says, “all of a sudden you see the sun - - and it’s dropping on the leaf where moisture is glistening. / And this is the place of the new day - - and the new vision - - and this lightness you feel like there’s release. / I didn’t know I could feel this way. / And there’s something really awesome about this feeling - - and it’s so new. / And so - - THOSE - - are the doves.”

Did you catch what she said at the end - - just now...?

Those are the doves.

Shianne is speaking about her own rebirth.

But NOT exclusively.

She said she didn’t know the feeling was possible.

The doves.

The doves come after the razors.

However - - that is NOT the end of this story.

Shainne is no longer with the group.

Shelly Rambo only says this about that:

“It is a difficult story - - and one I am not equipped to tell.”

The soldier-savior relies on a model - - of the one who dies on behalf of the many.

It is done - - FOR US - - on our behalf.

The pressure is to offer up the work of WJH as inspirational.

To describe WJH as ideal.

And therapeutic models have their transcending sweeps.

They can offer secularized versions - - of the redemption story.

But INSTEAD - - linger with the more COMPLEX story.

Instead linger with the truth telling - - that is there in this resurrection story.

Tom - - another veteran - - puts the question of forgiveness in the circle...

He says,

“There will come a time, I am convinced

when those throughout history, who abused the power entrusted to them

when reasons will be required

and a bitter toll will be extracted.

Only then - - might those whose lives have been decimated...

be willing to forgive.”

Imagine Shianne there - - to receive these words.

There will come a time - - - she said....

For Thomas it was EIGHT days - - after he asked to touch the wounds.

For us - - for you and me - - who knows.

I believe there WILL be better days ahead.

AND I believe we can find amazing GIFTS - - in THIS difficult time as well.

The wounds - - are there to touch - - gifts if we will receive them.

I am so grateful for the stories of warriors in Shelly Rambo's book.

And I am grateful for so many other lives and stories:

I think of veterans in our congregation...

Nurses and doctors in this fight against Coronavirus.

Grocery store workers.

People sewing masks.

People who have the COMPASSION and good sense to WEAR masks.

I am not a war veteran - - and I'm not a nurse.

I am deeply grateful to those who sacrifice and serve.

AND I DO know - - my OWN wounds - - and my own sacrifices.

And I know - - that wounds heal - - in time.

So who knows - - how this time of Coronavirus - - will change us all...

But there WILL come a time...

A time for healing.

A time to gather face to face again.

A time for hugging.

A time for doves.