

June 6, 2010

HEALING FOR THE WALKING WOUNDED

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” Psalm 147:3

In one of the *Peanuts* cartoons Lucy screams at Charlie Brown: “I don’t care if I ever see you again! Do you hear me?” Charlie Brown is devastated by the attack. Linus comes by and says: “She really hurt your feelings, didn’t she, Charlie Brown? I hope she didn’t take all the life out of you.” Charlie responds: “No, not completely, but you can number me among the walking wounded!”

We know what Charlie Brown is talking about, because all of us sometimes number ourselves among the walking wounded. Many people hide their wounds and on the surface of life all seems well, but they are wounded nonetheless. Longfellow’s wife died a tragic death, and months later he wrote in his diary: “Though outwardly I appear calm, inwardly, I bleed.” Even that person you think has it all together may be one of the walking wounded.

Jesus in the parable of the foundations reminds us that there is no escape from the problems, hurts, and storms of life. They are a part of the human scene and the dynamic of human relationships. A modern-day theologian and pastor, Henri Nouwen, who writes from the perspective of a “wounded healer,” speaks of the wounds of life with words such as “alienation, separation, isolation, and loneliness.” We all know firsthand about the wounds, heartbreaks, and shattered dreams in these frustrating disappointments. Some people know dramatically the pain of rejection, failure, verbal abuse, divorce, grief, and sorrow.

And sometimes it seems that no one understands or cares. In reading Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan, many people in our world today relate quickly to the victim in the story, beaten, left bleeding, and unable to cry out. And people who should care pass by and offer no help or understanding. But let me hurry to say that the good news for them and for us is that God is the Good Samaritan to a wounded world. God is aware of our hurts and the wounds of our life. Listen to the words of the psalmist: “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Psalm 147:3).

The prophet Isaiah speaking of the Messiah described him as having the Spirit of the Lord upon him and being anointed to bring good news to the afflicted and to bind up the brokenhearted. When Jesus opened his public ministry in Nazareth, he read this passage from Isaiah and proclaimed its fulfillment in him. His ministry was to bind up and heal the wounds of our life. In the Good

Samaritan parable, Jesus shows us that love is the ability to see the wounded and those in need and to have compassion on them and bind up their wounds. When we hear the great promise of the Scriptures that God is love, we can know that a big part of what that means is that God knows, God understands, God cares, and God heals.

So, let me suggest to you this morning how we can deal with our woundedness and allow God to bind our wounds and heal our broken hearts.

FIRST OF ALL, WE ACCEPT THE REALITY OF OUR WOUNDS.

Because God is with us, we can be realistic about our life. God empowers us to accept and face whatever it is that has wounded our life. Real wounds do not go away because we ignore them or suppress them; they only surface in more destructive and dangerous ways later.

Some years ago, Pat Conroy dealt with just this issue in his popular novel *The Prince of Tides*, which was also made into a movie. It is the story of a dysfunctional family and of an especially traumatic event that occurred in their lives. Tragically, they are forced to live and act as if this event never occurred, and this repressed wound acts destructively upon them for the rest of their lives. It finally comes to a head when the daughter in the family tries to commit suicide and cannot remember what has pushed her to do it. Her brother, through a psychiatrist, becomes her memory; and through a long process of dragging up and facing the wounds of the past, not only is the girl healed, but so is her brother. In helping her, he also helps himself. It is a great, moving story, but it reminds all of us that the first step in any problem or hurt is the power and willingness to face it, to get it out in the open and deal with it. Surrounded and assured of God's unconditional love, we can do this.

Some things in life are not going to change, and we must learn to live with them and to live through them. Paul had something in his life that he referred to as "a thorn in the flesh." He prayed and prayed about it, but it did not go away. He had to live with it and through it. Jesus had to live with and through the cross. The early Christians had to live through persecution. There are some things, some people, and some wounds that we have to live with and through. Reinhold Niebuhr in his "Serenity Prayer" expressed it like this: "O God, give me the serenity to accept what cannot be changed, the courage to change what should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other."

SECOND, WE LEAN ON GOD'S POWER AND STRENGTH. One of the things Paul learned in his struggles with his thorn in the flesh was that this wound and weakness made him rely more upon God. He said: "Whenever I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).

Lloyd Ogilvie in one of his books writes about brokenheartedness and says: "Brokenness builds.....Whatever happens that breaks us open to a deeper invasion of the Lord's spirit is a blessing in disguise." When the wounds of our life seem almost more than we can bear; when we lose a loved one, or a vital relationship disintegrates, or we feel all alone and forsaken, or we have been the victim of unjust criticism and condemnation, or we experience the breakup of our home by divorce; these are times when we do not have the resources, the strength and power to cope or go on. We have to lean on God, trust God to bring us through it, and keep us going.

When Jesus was on the cross in the depths of his suffering, he looked up to God and said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). As God's children we can do the same. In the midst of our moments of suffering, we too can commend our spirit and life into the hands of God.

This is the good news of the Christian faith. We can lean on God for strength and healing!

THIRD, WE CAN HOLD ON TO HOPE. Hope is a necessity for real living, but especially in the wounded moment. As Christians, we can have the hope and expectation that life will be good again. It may not be the same, but it can be good again. Hope is belief in possibility. It is not some unrealistic optimism that everything will work out and things will be like they were before. It is the confidence and faith that however things turn out, God will be with us, will see us through, and will bring healing.

Hope comes out of a resurrection faith, the faith that no matter how bad things get, God is in the midst working with us for good. That's what Paul was saying in Romans: "In everything God works for good" (Romans 8:28).

In the worst moments in the life of Israel, facing the Red Sea with the Egyptians in pursuit, in the midst of the destruction of Jerusalem, in the time of exile in Babylon, and under the heel of the Roman Empire, the word from God was always to hold on to your hope, God will save. And the Psalmist expressed it like this: "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your

hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (Psalm 43:5). The overwhelming word of the Bible is that God is steadfast love, incredibly dependable, a God who will not forsake us or let us down in the crunch. Hold on to your hope!

FOURTH, WE CAN GET IN OR STAY IN A HEALING COMMUNITY. The church is God’s healing community. We are not created to be alone; we were made for community and family. The Bible speaks of the power and strength of community, especially a holy community. We give and draw strength from one another.

You know, one of the tragedies that I have observed over the years as a pastor is that too often the wounded tend to draw away from the church rather than to it. That is sad. But those who hang in with their church feel a strength, concern, and a loving, healing touch they can get nowhere else. I certainly hope and pray that this is your experience here at First Presbyterian Church when you are wounded and hurting.

FINALLY, WE CAN GIVE OURSELVES TO A CAUSE GREATER THAN OURSELVES AND BECOME WOUNDED HEALERS. There comes a time, if we are to be healed, that we turn our attention away from our wounds and focus on something greater than ourselves. Many wounds do not heal because we continuously irritate them by constant examination. If we want to be healed, it helps to forget about ourselves and our wounds for a while and lose ourselves in helping, serving, and caring for others.

It is not surprising in *The Prince of Tides* that when the brother reaches out in love to his troubled twin sister and begins the painful journey into the past for her sake, he not only helps her, but in the process finds hope and healing for himself. In losing ourselves in love, for the kingdom and others, we find ourselves and our life.

Karl Menninger was asked: “Suppose you suspect that you’re heading for a nervous breakdown. What should you do?” Menninger answered: “Go straight to your front door, turn the knob, cross the tracks, and find somebody who needs you.”

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Have you ever wondered why the Samaritan, rather than the priest and Levite, stopped and helped the man who was the victim of the thieves on the Jericho Road? I think it was more than just for the shock factor of a Samaritan doing good. I think the Samaritan knew what it was like to be wounded. He knew what it was like for no one to care. He knew what it was like to be ignored and discriminated against. He could identify with the victim, and his heart went out to him. Out of the Samaritan's own woundedness he helped, and I would imagine that it may have made his own wounds a little more bearable.

The poet put it well in these powerful words:

*We cannot heal unless we love them much,
For only sorrow, sorrow understands.*

Do this, my friends, and I think you will discover this truth: If we give God all the pieces, God will mend our broken hearts and heal our wounds.

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