

## WOUNDED HEALERS

"Other people are going to find healing in your wounds. Your greatest life messages and your most effective ministry will come out of your deepest hurts.

- Rick Warren

### Scripture:

### Psalm 23

<sup>1</sup>The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. <sup>2</sup>He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; <sup>3</sup>he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup>Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. <sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. <sup>6</sup>Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

### 1 Peter 2:19-25

<sup>19</sup>For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. <sup>20</sup>If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. <sup>21</sup>For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup>"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." <sup>23</sup>When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly. <sup>24</sup>He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. <sup>25</sup>For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

### This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



The Presbyterian Church has as one of our sayings or mottos: "We are a priesthood of believers!" Another way of saying this is: "We are all ministers in our own realm of the world."

The Institute on Religion and Public Life has a blog called *First Things*. The guest author picks an important event in church history and applies its relevance to our lives today. In the *First Things* article about the Reformation, Rev. Dr. Timothy

George, the founding dean of Beeson Divinity School, explains that one of Martin Luther's complaints about the Roman Catholic Church's beliefs was their stance that laity had no business in the ministries of the church other than attending worship and giving funds. Luther argued that all who belong to Christ through faith, baptism, and the Gospel should share in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. All baptized believers are called to be priests, Luther said, but not all are called to be pastors.

## THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

Dr. George explains further that "The priesthood of all believers concept is a call to ministry and service; it is a barometer of the quality of the life of God's people in the body of Christ and of the coherence of our witness in the world, the world for which Christ died."

(<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2016/10/the-priesthood-of-all-believers>)

Hence, your purpose in life is to be for one another as Christ would have you be. That doesn't mean you have to be Jesus. No one can be exactly the same as Jesus. But it means you try to live your life as true to yourself and to others as you can be by:

- Using the gifts and talents you have been blessed with to bless the world
- Sharing what you have
- Enhancing the lives of others
- Living up to your potential
- And being thankful to God in the process.

## THE WOUNDED HEALER

This way of being was a major life goal for Dr. Henry Nouwen, Catholic priest and theologian who was born into a wealthy Dutch family. He taught at Harvard and Yale Divinity Schools and wrote many books. One of my favorites was published in 1994 called: *The Wounded Healer*.

**In *The Wounded Healer*, Nouwen teaches how to minister to others in contemporary society using Christ as our example. He said, "The imitation of Christ does not mean to live a life like Christ, but to live your life as authentically as Christ lived his. There are many ways and forms in which a human can be a Christian."**

Nouwen's book begins with a story that forms the basis of his book.

*A well known story among the Hebrew people concerns a Rabbi who came across the prophet Elijah and said to him: "Tell me—when will the Messiah come?"*

*Elijah replied, "Go and ask him yourself."*

*"Where is he?" said the Rabbi.*

*"He's sitting at the gates of the city," said Elijah.*

*"But how will I know which one is he?"*

*The Prophet said, "He is sitting among the poor, covered with wounds. The others unbind all their wounds at the same time and bind them up again, but he unbinds only one at a time and binds them up again, saying to himself, "Perhaps I shall be needed; if so, I must always be ready so as not to delay for a moment."*

Henri Nouwen adds, "What I find impressive in this story are these two things: first, the faithful tending of one's own woundedness and second, the willingness to move to the aid of other people and to make the fruits of our own woundedness available to others."

We are all walking wounded aren't we? I predict none of us have escaped all the pains and sorrows that life on earth brings. And yet, the way we perceive our suffering, the way we work through it and respond to it, and the way we carry the scars from our wounds has a big influence on how we respond to others in their woundedness.

## MY BROTHER, JIM

I decided that when my family suffered the trauma of my brother returning from Vietnam 100% mentally disabled, I would do all I could to understand how trauma can do that kind of damage to the brain spiritually and emotionally. My brother did not suffer a concussion or severe physical trauma. It was all mental.

Until then I didn't understand mental health problems. I had never met anyone with a psychiatric problem. No one else in our family had been treated for mental health issues even though I think some might have lived with untreated depression.

In the seventies it was rare to discuss mental health problems in my small Iowa town. So it was easy for people to dismiss my brother, Jim's illness as a weakness, or that he was just a lazy coward and should just snap out it. Maybe he was trying to milk the government for all the disability money he could get, or he just wanted to smoke pot and waste his

life away. That was the attitude of many of the people in my brother's life when he returned from Vietnam. So he became very angry and got into a lot of fights. He got arrested for DUI's and lost a job and his marriage dissolved.

As his observant sister, who was seven years younger, watching how he was treated and how he responded was my first experiential education in compassion for the mentally ill. I saw how my parents tried all sorts of ways to help him and then gave up. I saw how the police and the court system even tried to be compassionate for awhile and then provided just a short term solution, thirty days in a psychiatric ward when he needed a long term solution. And finally my brother took a long term solution into his own hands and ended his life.

When you personally view the details of a wounded journey with the kinds of ups and downs my brother experienced, you learn empathy for others who go through such hard times, too.

You understand that many in jail today probably have similar mental health problems. You learn that the prisoners and the wounded homeless are just as human and fragile as he was. And you know deep down that if they had a choice they would be walking in our shoes rather than their own. But life wounds kept getting stacked against them. And unfortunate circumstances thwarted their dreams and took them off track onto paths they didn't know how to navigate alone.

### **EMPATHY AND COMPASSION**

Nouwen also addresses ways to operate compassionately in the world. To be a compassionate high functioning human being, we need to have empathy. Being able to walk in another's shoes with out being co-dependent and without crossing boundaries is essential for our development mentally and spiritually as we journey through life.

Nouwen says, "Through compassion it is possible to recognize that the craving for love that other people feel resides also in our own hearts. Also that the cruelty the world knows all too well is also rooted in our own impulses. Through compassion we sense our hope for forgiveness in our friends' eyes and also the hatred in their bitter mouths. When they kill, we know that we could have done it; when they give life, we know that we can do the same. For a compassionate person

nothing human is alien: no joy and no sorrow, no way of living and no way of dying."

**Henry Nouwen was acutely aware that all of us have the capacity to kill, and we have the capacity to love. And when we judge others for making mistakes in life, for succumbing to their impulses, for being selfish and greedy, we must remember that we are capable of those things as well. Being compassionate rather than judgmental when people go through life in a desperate state of grabbing for resources or glory or both is why Jesus could eat meals with tax collectors, and forgive the robber on the cross beside him. He knew they were flawed and fragile vulnerable souls who had lost their way.**

### **GOING THE EXTRA MILE**

In 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2, the apostle Peter explains how Jesus suffered for us, so it is righteous when we suffer in the name of Jesus. That doesn't mean you should go out and get yourself crucified. It means taking the risk of going that extra mile for someone in need. Reach out and be willing to suffer, if you must, to spread the good news that God is Love.

Don't hide in your little bubble and let others be oppressed. Get out of your comfort zone and trust that if you do suffer in some way, it is blessed by God when you are doing God's work in the world helping others despite your own sufferings.

That doesn't mean you should jump out of an airplane without a parachute, but you should assess your life and check to see if you are a little too comfortable, maybe a little too isolative and judgmental of others different from you. Once you have these things addressed and corrected then you can effectively do the work of God as one of the priesthood.

Isn't it reassuring to know: "By his wounds you are healed?"

But don't misunderstand. The cross isn't some kind of transaction appeasing a blood thirsty God; it is the ultimate revelation of God's own heart. It is simply God being God, entering our wounded imperfect bleeding humanity so that we might be

inspired to live according to God's purpose, so that we might have some good news for a world that knows all about bad news, imperfection, fear and death.

The resurrected Jesus does not lose his wounds when he is risen. There is a reason he takes them into the fullness of the resurrection. Remember the story of the Road to Emmaus we read last week. Seeing Christ's wounds and the breaking of bread were the ways his friends recognized him. The sight of his wounds was a sign of his authenticity and assured them it was really Jesus. Only then did the two disciples have courage to go back to Jerusalem and spread the Good News.

When we truly embrace God's love for us, we feel God's light shining in our souls, which then enables us to see the light of Christ in others.

### **MY NEPHEW, KIRK**

I am so grateful that even though my brother was mentally damaged from Vietnam, he married a woman who had great compassion for him and all he had suffered. They had a beautiful boy together who is now thirty-eight years old. My nephew Kirk is living the life my brother might have had if he had not suffered the trauma in Vietnam. I'm so glad his son has a chance to honor his Dad that way.

Yet my brother's wounds are carried by his son as well. When I took his son Kirk at age fourteen to see the Vietnam Veteran's Wall in Washington DC, we happened upon some veteran Seabees also visiting the wall. I went up to them and asked if they would share with Kirk what it was like to be in the Navy as a Seabee on land in Vietnam. They all broke down and cried as they told him what his Dad's work was like as a Seabee during the war. They shared how they were wounded physically and mentally, too. And they helped him understand what his Dad went through because they, too, suffered in similar ways. That chance meeting with complete strangers, who were angels in disguise, there at the Vietnam War Memorial was life changing for my nephew. He told me when we left he had never been proud of his Dad before. But now he was proud of him.



### **WHERE ARE YOUR WOUNDS?**

Where are your wounds? What heartaches have you suffered that leave you feeling like the walking wounded? Can you let down your guard long enough to let the wounded Jesus embrace and heal you? Then you will be able to see that your wounds can be the gifts that make you agents of compassion, hope and healing for our world.

Being wounded healers means seeking ways to relate to your fellow humans through your own woundedness since we all carry our wounds in our own unique ways. When you seek authentic understanding of others, then you will find there are blessings in the awareness that each of us have nothing to fear from each other. We all bleed the same color, we all fear the same things, and we all hope for love and happiness. And by his wounds we are all healed! Thanks be to God!

### **Benediction:**

**May you never have to suffer unjustly. But when you suffer justly may you remember: by his wounds and by recognizing others have wounds too, you are healed.**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen**



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