

Sermon – Sunday August 21, 2022

Rev. Randi

For the past several weeks, we've discussed the traits we should cultivate as disciples of Jesus. Today I want to talk about us as wounded healers.

The psychiatrist Carl Jung originated the concept of a wounded healer in modern society, although it may also have origins in Greek mythology. As Jung expressed it, the analyst is compelled to treat patients because the analyst himself is wounded. However, the concept isn't just applicable to analysts. When we experience a difficult experience, injury, or illness, we often sense a call from that to help others who are experiencing the same difficulty.

Examples of this are peer support groups such as AA and Al-Anon, cancer survivors who encourage others suffering from the same type of cancer, or peer grief support groups. One of my cousins had ostomy surgery while in her early 30s. Even though the surgery was necessary to save her life, she was very nervous about the quality of her life afterward. The morning before her surgery, a trim, young, stylishly dressed woman visited her and revealed that she had the same surgery a few years before. The visit encouraged my cousin, who kept remarking about the woman being able to wear tight jeans and do everyday activities. It relieved most fears about her life after the surgery and gave my cousin the optimism she needed to cope.

Henri Nouwen, a Dutch priest who died in 1996, wrote a book entitled the Wounded Healer. He writes, "The great illusion of leadership is to think that man can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there." In other words, the best person to help us in difficult times is someone who has faced difficult times themselves. With his quote, Nouwen brings Jung's concept squarely into our Christian theology. Jesus, who met difficult times in the desert, on the cross, and in death, heals us. Once we are healed, we go out and heal others. Jesus's healing is sometimes physical but always spiritual and social. Jesus's healing is about making us whole.

For example, Jesus healed the woman who had been bent over for 18 years. She was able to stand up straight after that. She was healed physically. In those times, having a physical ailment also meant being ostracized socially. Curing the condition restored her to her place in her group as a child of Abraham. Being able to look people in the eye and see the clouds and sky lifted her spirit. Jesus made the woman whole again.

Jesus makes us whole, too. We all need to be made whole, even if we've never had a physical health issue. We all have something that binds us that prevents us from fully being the unique person God created us to be. Maybe we tend to spend too much money on some things and then stress about having money to pay our bills or our church pledge. Perhaps we struggle to love others as God really intends for us to do by being intolerant of their differences or weaknesses. Maybe we harbor hurts longer than we should and are reluctant to forgive. Or, we get angry too quickly. Or we take on roles

that aren't truly us just so we can fit in. We all need Jesus to unbind us and make us whole so that we can be the unique person God knew before we were even created in the womb, as Jeremiah says. We need the fire of God to purify us, to take away all that false self from which sin arises. We need to welcome God's presence in our lives. Indeed, we need to embrace it through regular church attendance and prayer so that God's fiery love unbinds us and allows us to look up again. We need to embrace God's presence so we can be God's own authentic creation with all our gifts.

Then as wounded healers, we go out into the world to heal others who are broken. We praise God by sharing God's love. We look compassionately at others who suffer and do what we can to help them become their authentic selves.

When you go home today, I invite you to pull out your Bibles and read today's Gospel in context. One of the disadvantages of the lectionary is that we get snippets of the Bible, often without knowing what precedes the snippet and what follows it. When you look in your Bibles, you'll see that Luke has placed this healing between parables that call for repentance and parables that describe the kingdom of heaven. Wholeness isn't really about physical health. It's about restoring us as full-fledged disciples after we've missed the mark and asked God to help us do better the next time. Then, it is about us working with God to bring about the kingdom of heaven on earth. Working to bring about the kingdom of heaven on earth is serving others and loving others. We help bring about the kingdom of heaven on earth when we use the wisdom gained from our woundedness to help others become whole. We bring about the kingdom of heaven on earth when we become wounded healers.

I invite us to turn again to Nouwen's quote. "The great illusion of leadership is to think that man can be led out of the desert by someone who has never been there."

Jesus has been in the desert, and Jesus leads us out. But we've been in the desert, too, and we lead others out with God's help.

As disciples, we come to God to be made whole – over and over and over again. And then we go out into the world to serve.