

Ash Wednesday
February 25, 2009
Psalm 51:12 and Joel 2:12

“A Wounded Savior for a Wounded People”

Within the field of medicine, there is a specialized focus called wound care. When we experience an injury and receive a wound, we expect that our body will heal. But what happens when that is not the case? Wound care addresses the needs of some 5 million Americans who suffer from chronic, non-healing wounds. The entire wound healing process is a complex series of events that begins at the moment of injury and can continue for months – even years. Some of you have gone through this yourself, or helped a loved one through the wound healing process. Specialists have identified three distinct phases of wound treatment: 1) the inflammatory phase; 2) the proliferative phase; and 3) the remodeling phase. And the goal in all of this is, of course, to heal the wound and get the patient back to everyday life.

Wounds – we’ve all got them in some form. They may be physical, emotional, spiritual. They may be visible to others, or they may be hidden from view. They may be something that happened long ago and far away, or something very recent. During this Lenten season, we’ll be focusing on various wounds – wounds that we inflicted on Jesus: the wound of betrayal, the wound of apathy, the wound of denial, the wound of mockery, the wound of abandonment. Not physical wounds per se, but they most assuredly led to what Jesus suffered in our behalf: scourging, crowned with thorns, death by crucifixion. We have a wounded Savior for a wounded people, and that is the theme for the message on this Ash Wednesday as we follow Jesus along the way of the cross. May the Lord’s rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus’ sake.

People suffering from wounds are usually painfully aware that they need help. That sore on our foot which just doesn’t seem to get better on its own is a signal that we need help. Now we can try to avoid this and deny that anything is wrong. “I’m just fine!”, we may tell others, but it’s pretty obvious that we’re not fine. Living in that state of denial can have very destructive, even deadly, consequences. Lent is about being honest with ourselves and with God that we need help; that we have wounds which we can’t heal on our own; that only God’s healing mercy can touch. As the psalmist writes: **“A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise”** (Psalm 51:17), and as we heard in the prophet Joel: **“Rend your hearts and not your clothing”** (Joel 2:12). A heart that is broken, torn and rent asunder, is a wounded heart. When from the depths of our heart we cry out: “O Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner! I’ve made such a mess of things and hurt others so deeply. I need your help, O Lord. I have wounds that only you can heal. Help me, for Jesus’ sake.” It is then, when we have stepped out of our denial, when we’ve been up-front and honest with ourselves and with God, when we’ve stopped playing games with our Maker and Redeemer, it is then that God can begin the healing process.

God’s healing of our wounds centers on that sacred head now wounded; that sacred head of Jesus crowned with thorns. As Paul the apostle tells us: **“For our sake he [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”** (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus willingly took upon himself the awful burden of our sin: the evil we have done and the good we have failed to do. And in doing so, Jesus became sin incarnate. A hymn that vividly portrays this suffering Savior, this wounded healer, is one which we will sing during distribution of the Lord’s Supper: “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded.” The depth of meaning from the words of this hymn, coupled together with the musical setting, speak

deeply to our soul. Please turn in the worship bulletin and let us read together the words of this hymn.

The people living around us are also wounded in body, mind, and spirit. Jesus loves them also – as much as he loves us, and he gave his life for them, too. During this Lenten season, I invite you to take seriously the needs of your neighbors by praying for them very intentionally. I invite you to join with me and others at St. John's in neighborhood prayer walking; that is, walking/jogging/driving around our neighborhood during these forty days of Lent, and praying for those who live around you. The Spirit may move you to pray for the entire neighborhood in general, or to pray for several households specifically. For those who are not able to walk and do this, you can pray for your neighborhood from your own home. Our purpose here is to combine physical exercise with intentionally praying for the needs of our neighbors. Using Mission India's BLESS prayer model is one way to do this: B = body needs; L = labor/work needs; E = emotional needs; S = social needs; and S = spiritual needs. There isn't a script we're giving out with a long list of how to do this; rather, we will rely on the Holy Spirit to help us. We might only be able to prayer walk once a week; that's okay. If it's once a week, or a couple times a week, or every day, it's all good. The display board in the narthex gives you more information. The point here is to take seriously the needs of our neighbors, and the Savior's desire to heal their wounds.

On the fair linen that covers the altar are five crosses: one in each corner and one in the middle. They stand for the five wounds of Jesus: his hands, his feet, his side, and his head. In the wounds of Jesus there is healing and hope for all who are wounded. That wounded Savior invites us to come to him and receive healing and hope in this Sacrament. As we receive his true Body and Blood in repentant faith, we can rest assured that his healing process in us is underway. How blessed we are to have a such a wounded healer for our Savior. Amen.