

WHAT THE WOUNDS WOULD SAY

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“There is a place in you,” says John O’Donahue, from the Iona Community in Scotland, “where you have never been wounded, where there is still a sureness in you, where there is a seamlessness in you, and where there is a confidence and tranquility in you.”

We call that place, in the Christian tradition, “the peace of Christ.” A peace that passes all understanding.

This peace is the gift Jesus wants to give his disciples in the lesson that is before us today from the Gospel of John. “Peace be with you,” Jesus says over and over. Three times to be exact:

When they have locked all the doors in the house and huddle inside in fear, Jesus enters and stands among them and says, “Peace be with you.”

When their fear turns to joyful exuberance, Jesus repeats, “Peace be with you.”

When they are bickering among themselves about whether or not to believe the resurrection, Jesus appears again, through locked doors, stands among them and says a third time, “Peace be with you.”

“The intention of prayer and spirituality and love” John O’Donahue says, “is now and again to visit” that place within us that has never been wounded, that peace of Christ within us that passes all understanding, that peace Jesus seems so desperate to bestow upon the disciples.

Ironically, however, in order to visit that place that has never been wounded, in order to dwell in the peace of Christ, at least for me, at least for Thomas, we must first acknowledge those places that *have* been wounded, and deeply.

“Unless I see the nail holes in his hands” Thomas insists when his friends seem so full of joy, “unless I put my finger in the nail holes and stick my hand in his side,” I refuse to believe.

Thomas insists – to his credit – that Christ *has been wounded!* Fatally! And all this hocus pocus “think happy thoughts” and get over it religious mumbo jumbo is just not going to cut it.

The same is true for us, is it not? At least for me. I am far less willing to trust the naïve proclamations of a spiritual ingenue than I am to trust the simple faith of someone who has suffered mightily and overcome.

This is what Thomas is demanding, in his so-called “doubt.” Is the Risen Christ you claim has come to offer peace, Thomas is saying to the other disciples, is that Risen Christ the same one who was so fatally wounded that every one of has been traumatized because of it?

Because if he is not, if the Risen Christ is just some glorified version of human perfection, who never really suffered at all, then I want no part of this so-called “Peace.” Because it is not real.

And then he comes ...

Jesus comes ...

The Risen Christ, not in anger, not in judgment, but in love, comes directly to Thomas. To assure him. To assure us.

“Take your finger” Thomas, Jesus says, “and examine my hands. ...Take your hand,” Thomas, Jesus says, “and stick it in my side.” It really is me, Jesus is saying to Thomas and to us. It really is the God Who Suffers With You. Even now, when my physical wounds have healed, but my heart is still breaking on your behalf.

Jesus has become “The Wounded Healer” in the words of Henri Nouwen: one whose “pain and suffering ... rises from the depth of the human condition that we all share.” In the midst of that human condition, Jesus too, has had to find that place where he has never been wounded – that place of tranquility – that place where forgiveness begins – in order to rise above it. In order to invite us to rise above it. In order to pass it on to others who must rise above it.

And so here we are: the contemporary version of those first century disciples of Christ. Huddled in fear in our houses. Doubting the naïve proclamations of any spiritual ingenue in the midst of a global pandemic. But eager to embrace the convictions of those who have lived through worse. And we have a choice to make on this Second Sunday of Easter in the Year of Our Lord 2020.

Are we willing, like Thomas, to be honest about the wounds we are carrying right now? Are we willing, like Thomas, to insist that the God Who Suffers With Us be honest about his own? Are we willing to tell our kids: you know, this is really really hard, but I’m not going anywhere and God isn’t going anywhere, either? Are we willing to cry out to God for evidence that she suffers with us and that she, too, has found that peace that passes understanding and that we can curl up in her arms in the fetal position until she has helped us find that place, as well?

Because this too is the resurrection and the life, on this Second Sunday of Easter in the midst of a global pandemic: trusting God and one another with the wounds we carry; keeping it real in the face of our suffering, as well as our joy; insisting that God walk this lonesome valley with us; crying out “How long, O Lord, how long!”

And hearing in response, from the God who slips through locked doors and doubting hearts, “as long as it takes for you to be well, my Beloved. And for you to be well, my Beloved. And for all manner of thing to be well.”

I pray it may be so.

Amen.