

# *St James United Church*

Message for April 24, 2022  
Second Sunday of Easter



“Healed Through Our Wounds”

- Preached by Rev. James Ravenscroft

Readings: John 20:19-31; Acts 5:27-32; “Walking with my Delaware grandfather” by Denise Low

Each year on the Second Sunday of Easter, it's common to hear about Thomas insisting that he touch Jesus' wounds then eight days later proclaiming, “My Lord and my God.” Now much is made of Thomas' faith after expressing doubt. More still is often made of the next statement about future disciples who won't have seen and yet still believe. Perhaps it's the state of the world but what stands out for me isn't Thomas' affirmation but how it was joined to Jesus' invitation to touch his wounds. We may be the future disciples who haven't seen yet believe, able to because like the disciples we too received the gift of the Spirit, but the pledge that we'll rise with Christ includes a call to die to self, our resurrection coming through a wounded healer.

In one sense this should be obvious. We see a willingness to sacrifice in Peter and the other apostles. They courageously kept speaking about Jesus, finally taking to heart that any who follow him must be willing to carry the cross. The impoverishment and injustice Jesus had challenged, the judgment and division he'd opposed through his table ministry, these weren't suddenly overcome by the resurrection. So, Jesus' disciples continued to heal, challenge evil, forgive, model inclusive fellowship, risky as that was. Why? Because they believed Jesus was “saviour of the world” and not the emperor, trusted in the one who “saved” not by having a big army to bring peace by force, but risking everything for others to heal through love. And how did they do this? Jesus, wounded before them, was walking with them, reminding them of their spiritual birthright and enabling them to extend his peace and healing to the whole world.

That is how it must be with his followers twenty centuries later. There are situations in our world as pressing, if not more so, than in those first decades after Jesus' death, calling out to us to raise our voices even if it means we too could be arrested, lose status, our livelihoods, if not our lives, be threatened. In this Earth Week I think of the man who glued himself to a busy highway in protest of old growth logging, or picketers in Burnaby standing with First Nations opposed to the Transmountain pipeline expansion. You don't need to agree with their tactics or even their concerns to be moved by their commitment to heal the planet. Similar commitment for others was shown by Denise Low's great-grandmother, feeding hoboes in the 30s even though life was tough for her as an Indigenous woman. Like them, we can do what is right though difficult, risking everything to bring healing to others, because Jesus is with us.

As important as it is to sacrifice for others, it's not the only way Jesus calls us to share his cross. In fact, risking ourselves at times can feel quite out of the ordinary, but accepting Jesus'

wounds should be the opposite, especially since fear, sadness and hurt are such a part of our lives. I find it consoling then that at Easter, Jesus appeared at his friends' lowest – Mary crying by the tomb, the disciples locked away in fear, Thomas filled with doubt – that they might accept rather than run from their pain, sorrow, guilt. He comes to us too, showing us that the way we will rise into new life, will experience as well as bring healing, is by passing through our grief and embrace the wounds that shaped us. We rise into who we are called to be, not without reference to the past, but through it.

I think of this in terms of personal griefs. As I shared last fall, I struggled to leave the priesthood though I was unhappy, because among other things I had status - I was well known, served on an advisory body to the bishops on liturgy, had even been part of the planning for the pope's visit for World Youth Day. Leaving Catholic ministry was to leave all that, leave a big part of my identity, and that was harder than I imagined. And it was still hard when I finally left because all I could see was what I'd lost. Thankfully, a friend told me to focus on what I'd gained. He was right. Most important was being authentic. It gave me new energy, and direction. In the United Church I've since focused on interests beyond liturgy, ones integral to my ministry before but had not been a big part of my identity: working with youth, exploring new ways to be church, seeking Indigenous justice. I established a new life but first needed to pass through my grief.

I feel we need to do similarly as a community of faith. We had status for a long time - were the biggest United Church congregation in the area, had thriving children's and youth programs, among our members were movers and shakers in business and politics. We aren't that now and need to grieve it, grieve those who have died, those who don't attend, those who moved away, so that we can embrace the ministry that Spirit has for us. I believe we have a future, but only if we look at who we are now, our neighbourhood as it is, not was, a diverse community right beside MUN. We can take a page from our history and talk to people who live around us, listen to them, respond to their concerns. There's a future for us but only if we grieve our past.

Finally, we need to grieve if we're going to help heal the world. There are many concerns, not the least of which is the war in Ukraine, but being Earth Week, the environment is on my heart. We've known about global warming for decades yet in that time little has been done and time is running out. On top of that a significant number of insect species are in decline, plastic is in the ocean and rivers, biodiversity is decreasing. The issues are overwhelming, but I wonder if our paralysis is as much about sorrow as the size of the task ahead. In our learning together time there was a buzz in the room. We can translate those ideas into action if we shift our grief from guilt and regret into motivation to leave the legacy of a healthy planet to our children.

Friends, Jesus appeared risen yet wounded, a reminder that sharing his resurrection is not simply being born again but includes dying with him. We do just that as we accept our past wounds and go further still to risk ourselves in love for others. Remember, we're not alone in this. We have a wounded saviour, living, dying, and rising through us to bring peace and healing in our world. May we be open to his encouraging presence within us. Amen.