

“The Wounded Healer”

John 20:19-31

The Rev. Joanna Samuelson
Designated Minister

April 7, 2024

From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: home@first-church.org

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

“The Wounded Healer”

John 20:19-31

+++++

Let us pray: O Ever-present and Ever-near God, we acknowledge Your active and felt presence among us at this time. Open our hearts and minds and spirits that we would receive Your Word for us this day. And O dear God, may the words that I have to offer here, this morning, please You and honor You and glorify Your holy name. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

+++++

I. am. curious. Who is *your* FAVORITE disciple of Jesus?

Now, I'm **not** including the female disciples in this question – although we all know that the women were certainly faithful and **often** present among Jesus' closest followers.

But here, I'm asking about the “twelve disciples” who are often named in the stories about Jesus – although the names vary just a bit among the different Gospel accounts – and in the Acts of the Apostles.

- Perhaps you are drawn to Peter and James and John who were regarded as Jesus' inner circle.
- Or maybe you have been inspired by the transformation of Matthew, the former tax collector.
- Or maybe it has been Philip and Andrew – both of whom had significant roles – in the miracle story of Jesus feeding the five thousand.
- Or maybe you are curious and would like to learn more about Nathaniel or Bartholemew or the other lesser known disciples.

But what about Thomas? This one who we have all come to know and refer to as “Doubting Thomas?”

Now, it is of note that *this* story that *specifically* focuses on the doubts of Thomas is only found in the Gospel of John – *and NOT in Matthew or Mark, or Luke.*

However, the other three Gospels **do** include accounts of the post-resurrection doubts of all the disciples.

Now, having said ALL OF THAT, there is *much* for us to reflect on regarding the place for *both* **belief** and **doubt** within our own personal journeys of faith.

However, *that* is another sermon for another day!

.....

For today, I’d like for us to approach this familiar story about faith *and* doubt through a *different* lens – another lens – and that is, I’d like for us to focus on the **symbolism** of **Thomas** reaching out and touching the wounds of Jesus in his hands and in his side – and what **that** means for all of us today.

In recent weeks, I’ve been reflecting quite a bit on that image of Jesus inviting Thomas to reach out and touch his open wounds so that Thomas would be forever changed – in his relationship to Jesus – as well as in Thomas’ ministry among others.

Recently, I read a reflection written by Dr. Francis Clooney, a Professor of Comparative Theology at Harvard Divinity School, and he wrote about this very scene from John in which Thomas reaches out touches the wounds of Jesus.

In his article, Dr. Clooney named the deep, deep pain that often exists in various forms within our own lives, whether it has been caused by:

- the death of a loved one,
- or an illness,
- or a loss of a relationship,
- or a disruption in our career, etc.

However, Clooney then goes on to affirm that however hurt and scarred **we** have been, we *ARE* able to find meaning and connection – and healing and hope – in *our* lives and in the world around us when we, too, reach out to touch the wounds of others through our life together as the Body of Christ.

But how? *How* do we do that?

How do we find healing and wholeness for ourselves and in our lives and, at the same time, offer healing words or a healing presence to others?

.....

As you may know, Henri Nouwen is a favorite author of many among us here at First Church, and he has written quite a bit about what it means to serve one another through the role of what he describes as a “wounded healer.”

In his book, *The Wounded Healer*, Nouwen writes that:

- *First of all, wounded healers are able to recognize the face of Christ in all people.*
- *Secondly, wounded healers are able to help bring into the light that which had been hidden and make touchable that which had been unreachable.*
- *And thirdly, wounded healers are able to articulate God’s transforming work within themselves even as they guide others to a life of freedom and meaning and healing and wholeness.*

.....

During the past couple of weeks, as I was praying and preparing for this sermon today and trying to picture this scene in John 20 – of Thomas

reaching out touching the wounds of Jesus – my thoughts gradually turned to all of you, here, at First Church.

And I was reminded of the various ways that **YOU** offer a healing presence – in my life and in the lives of many.

First of all, our “Open and Affirming Statement” that is included in our Sunday bulletins **every single week** (on the bottom of the last page of our bulletin) speaks to our **healing presence** as a congregation.

It informs our visitors – and reminds all of us who are members and friends of First Church – of our deep commitment to be welcoming and affirming of ALL people.

Our ONA statement is an affirmation of **healing and hope** – *especially* for those among us who have **not** found that kind of welcome and inclusion in other churches or other settings of our lives.

I urge you to read our Open and Affirming Statement again – and read it regularly – make it a spiritual practice. And may it be an inspiration and serve as a reminder of the extravagant welcome that we are all called to extend to ALL people All the time!

Secondly, I am especially grateful and encouraged by the **healing presence** that our deeply dedicated and well-trained Stephen Ministry Team provides our congregation.

As you may know, our individual Stephen Ministers offer emotional and spiritual care and support to our members and friends who are facing transitions or losses or struggles or challenges in their lives.

And third, I see **healing and hope** for *our future* as First Church as we seek guidance and insight and support from the Healthy Congregations organization in navigating these times of significant transition and change, and as we process the losses of the past **and** prepare for Rev. Ahrens’ retirement later this year.

.....
What. about. you?

Where do **you** experience healing in your lives?

In what ways do find meaning and connection, here, at church?

And how do **you** offer hope and encouragement to others here at church, and in other settings of your life?

Now, please understand that these aren't just rhetorical questions. **I really do** want to hear from you!

So please reach out to me, and let's plan a time to get together for a visit or a walk or a phone conversation.

.....

Our Gospel reading from John this morning is much more than a story about the doubts of Thomas. It is a story of healing and hope that invites us to recognize **and** respond to the woundedness in one another – **and** in ourselves as well – through our life together in Christ!

.....

I'd like to close this morning with some healing words of Rev. Jan Richardson (author, artist and retired Methodist minister).

THE HEALING THAT COMES

Jan Richardson

I know how long you have been waiting –
for your story to take a different turn,
how far you have gone in search –
of what will mend you and make you whole.

I bear no remedy, no cure, no miracle for the easing of your pain.

But I know the medicine that lives in a story that has been broken open.

I know the healing that comes in ceasing to hide ourselves away –
with fingers clutched around the fragments we think are none but ours.

See how they fit together,
these shards we have been carrying–
how in their meeting they make a way we could not find alone.

Thanks be to God,

Amen!

