

Healing Wounds

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Holy Wound. Psalter and Hours of Bonne of Luxembourg, Duchess of Normandy. Attributed to Jean Le Noir.

Preaching on:
John 20:19–31

I had a wonderful relationship with my mother, Roberta Sabella Mansfield, who died about a year and a half ago, a little bit more, but I was lucky to have a mom like her, but you know, moms, we didn't always get along. It wasn't always easy. Especially growing up in the middle years, like once I hit puberty and became even more stubborn and wanted my independence and I found my mom to be at times a little bit controlling and smothering, and she seemed to want to stop me to try doing the things that I felt it was normal for a kid to do as he was growing up and trying to figure himself out. She wanted to protect me. She wanted to keep me close.

And I think just genetically, I am an independent person, and especially at that stage in life where those hormones are kicking, and you're trying to figure out who you are as a young man, I began to really sort of resent this and it became the deeply troubled time of our relationship where I wanted to be free and she wanted to hold on as tight as she could. And I didn't try to understand it. And she didn't try to explain it. It just seemed like this was the natural dynamic in our house between mothers and sons. And it caused a lot of pain for both of us.

I was about, I think I was 20 years old, I came home for Christmas break from college and my sister was still in high school. She was home. And we were just kind of chilling in the living room. I remember we were watching TV and my mom came into the room and she said, "Kids I have something I need to tell you." And we said, yeah, like anything your mom ever tells you is worth listening to. And she said, "Well, it's really important." And we just kind of, I think we maybe turned the volume down on the TV. I don't think we turned it off all the way, but we said, go ahead.

And she said, "Well, when I was 20 years old, I became pregnant. And the father of my child took off and I was on my own. And my father was embarrassed by the fact that I was pregnant because of the values of our family, and so he sent me off to a home that was run by the Catholic church, by nuns, for young women who become pregnant. And I went into that home. And the deal in that home was, is that I would stay there and hide out the entire time that I was pregnant. And when it came time for me to give birth, my child would be taken away and given up for adoption. And I tried everything I could figure out as a young woman about how I could keep my baby, but the social workers and the nuns there, they just told me, there's no way that it can happen. You can't do this as a single mother.

And my family wasn't supporting me and the father ran away and I didn't have a job. And I just eventually realized that I had to go along with it. And so I gave birth and I held the baby, it was a boy, and I held him for a few minutes and then they came and took him away."

And as my mom told me this story and opened up this pain to me, it was like my entire life and my entire relationship with her was a giant jigsaw puzzle. Right. And in the middle of that puzzle was one missing piece. Now you could tell by looking at the rest of the puzzle, exactly what that centerpiece

was going to be, right. It was a pain, it was a wound. It was something that she couldn't get away from. Something that had grabbed a hold of her and was influencing our relationship. But I just never really looked at it. I just kept glancing over it.

And now I just felt in that moment, like that middle piece was pushed into place and I understood everything. And it was like, my mom was not just this pathological crazy person who wanted to smother me to death. She was a human being who had been through struggle and pain in her life and was doing the best that she could.

And I sat there just sort of in stunned silence as time kind of slowed down as I was realizing what she was telling me. And she said, "So recently I've been thinking about this and I wanted to find my son. So I reached out to the adoption agency that handled his adoption, and I spoke with them and he actually released his information to me if I ever came looking for him. So they gave me his phone number and I called him up and I spoke with him and I met him for the first time last week. And he's coming over here to meet you in a little bit less than an hour, you should probably know that his name is Josh and by the way, you should probably know that he's black. And like I said, he'll be here in less than an hour." And then she left the room.

Wow. Suddenly my entire relationship with my mom's side of the family made more sense about why she seemed so estranged from people and why there was so much stress and strain in her relationship with her father and why she had the relationship that she had with me.

It reminds me of this moment in our gospel story, where Jesus comes forward into the room with the disciples, especially to Thomas that second time, and he shows Thomas his wounds.

Jesus is resurrected, he's alive, but the holes in his hands and his feet, the spear wound in his side, they are still there. And Thomas says, "I don't know that I can really believe it's Jesus, unless I put my finger in those wounds, put my hand in the wounds." And Jesus comes and says, "Thomas, let me show you something. I'm not ashamed. I know what you need. These are my wounds. And why should I be embarrassed? In fact, I will use these wounds to heal our relationship, to bring us closer. This is not the day of my crucifixion. I have been resurrected and healing has occurred. I am ready to let you touch these wounds and have it draw us closer together."

I felt like that was what happened with my mom that day. She said, "Kids, I'm going to show you the wound that has defined almost every day of my emotional life since it happened. And I'm going to ask you to be a part of this healing with me." We live in this culture that is just so obsessed with image, right? And so much of this image is about being strong and powerful and beautiful. And everything on the social media is about how great your life is about how activated and motivated and successful you are. And we all know, we all know as we look at these social media feeds, and we know it in our own lives, it is all baloney. It's garbage, it's meaningless. And as social scientists and psychologists are

actually studying the effects of social media upon us. They're telling us that it's garbage. It's not doing anything for any of us pretending to be whole. It's not as healthy as admitting to people that we are broken, that we all carry wounds.

And it is those wounds that enable us to be whole people. Not pretending that we've never been hurt, not hiding it away, not the shame and the embarrassment, the ability to show the wound. That's what Jesus is asking us to do.

Don't be afraid of the pain that you carry with you. Don't be afraid of what's been done to you, about what you've been through. Respect it, you're carrying it with you. Respect that, but don't be afraid to let it help you get closer to people. Don't be afraid to help you heal others.

When my mother finally admitted her wounds to us and broke that secret open the healing cascaded through our family. It was healing to me, it was healing to my sister, it changed the course of my relationship with my mom, it changed my mom's relationship with my dad, with our wider family. Nobody knew about this. It changed Josh's life, my brother, it changed his adopted family's life. It changed Josh's wife's life and his children's lives that they had a grandmother and that they are connected to us. It was just a cascade of resurrection healing because my mom finally said, "They told me I should be embarrassed and ashamed about this wound, but I refuse to do it anymore. I'm going to show it to everyone."

Beloved, we all carry wounds. And the question is not how to hide them, but when is the right to time to show them. Not right away, but in time when it comes, when they have healed enough that you can show them to others and to heal others and to draw yourself into intimacy with others, not by being perfect, not by being undented, but by being wounded.