

My sermon begins with a delicate request.

I want you to remember 2 times in your life
when someone has really hurt you.

It could be physical, spiritual, emotional, or some combination.

Maybe a betrayal, an act of anger or selfishness or carelessness.

And please be careful. Not all hurts are healed.

Remember you don't have to go back and live in those hurts.

Just name them to yourself and keep your distance.

Try, also, to remember one or two resentments you've carried.

Resentments are not quite the same thing as hurts.

A resentment can be when you feel angry or jealous
because somebody has success or status
that you think you deserve...but don't have.

Other times resentment comes when you want some person or group
to see you, to respect or welcome you, but they don't.

That gap - between how you see yourself
and how you think others should see you, but don't -
is fertile ground for resentment.

Political and cultural debates are fertile ground for resentment, too.

There's a person Fr. Rhett and I both know and I've told Rhett

I think this person likes me but doesn't take me seriously.

I'm embarrassed to say I struggle with resentment about that.

So, being careful not to let yourself get stuck in any dark places,

try to remember a couple of times someone has hurt you,
and 1 or 2 times you've carried resentment against somebody.

Take your time.

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Now, let's try the reverse.

Now, remember one or two people YOU have hurt.

Again, you don't have to get stuck in that memory,
and you don't have to tell anybody else about it.

Just name it to yourself.

We've all hurt people in our lives. It's part of being human.

We've betrayed. We've shouted an angry word at just the wrong time.
Maybe you've even hurt someone physically.

And see if you can remember when someone ELSE has resented YOU.

When someone felt like you didn't SEE her,
didn't RESPECT or UNDERSTAND him,
and this wall of anger or shame or frustration built up between you.

I've got those memories, as both parent and priest,
those times I came up short
and people I care about resented me for it.

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I ask you to remember those hurts because the hope of the resurrection,
the power of the risen Christ,
speaks to us not only as VICTIM, but also as PERPETRATOR.

The risen Christ, the Good Shepherd, is here not only to heal your wounds
but also to confront you with the truth of your sins.

And best of all, the Good Shepherd is there to show you
the way OUT of that valley of the shadow of death,
whether you were chased in there it by wolves
or ran in there of your own selfish motives.

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Let's start with ourselves as victims.

All of us end up wounded.

Not all in the same way, and certainly not all in equal measure.

But no one gets through life without being hurt.

And whether those injuries and resentments are great or small,
whether they're in your distant past or happening right now,
the memories may recede one day, but they rarely go away.

That's why meeting the resurrected Jesus,
with scars on his hands and side, is so important -
because the risen Jesus shows us
that there is new life after injury, new life after betrayal.

The scars show us that the Easter miracle was not a magic do-over,
that God didn't send Jesus back in time to a life before he was hurt.
No, He raised the very one who was tortured and murdered.

God raised his son's crucified body - with the scars still there -
to show us that even the worst injuries,
even the most humiliating betrayals, don't have to trap us forever.

In order for us to believe not just in what God did 2,000 years ago,
but also what God CAN DO for us now,
we need to trust that both Jesus' scars and yours
can be signs of resurrection life.

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And...none of us is just a victim. We are also perpetrators.

We are people who hurt other people.

Sometimes we even lie to ourselves about what we did and why we did it.

“It wasn’t my fault. What I did was justified.”

“Their resentment is their problem, not mine.”

Whether we’re honest with ourselves about what we’ve done or not,

we need to come to the risen Christ

not just as a victim in need of his healing

but as a perpetrator in need of his forgiveness.

The resurrection shows us that we don’t have to be trapped

in the patterns of violence we fall into,

that there is a way out of our sins.

OUT OF self-deception,

OUT OF guilt and shame,

and INTO what our prayer book calls

the new covenant of reconciliation.

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To be free from this tendency to hurt others,

we need to spend time with the risen Jesus like the disciples did,

on the shores of the Galilean Sea.

John says that after everything that had happened -

the miracles, the Last Supper, the Crucifixion and Resurrection -

that when it was all over the disciples tried to go back

to their old lives as fishermen.

They tried to regress,

to act as if the trauma and violence had never happened,
as if their cowardice and denials had never happened.

Maybe that behavior sounds familiar to you.

But the risen Christ isn't interested in going backwards.

Jesus comes to them and calls them out of the fantasy of the past
and back to the present, back to reality.

They failed their Lord. They were sinners.

If this were a traditional story of justice, of right and wrong,

Jesus would have taken his revenge.

He would have punished them for their failings
and left them to sit in their guilt.

Maybe that sounds familiar, too.

Instead, this is an Easter story of grace.

Jesus cooked them breakfast.

He restored them to their role as his apostles,
he renewed his relationship with them,
he deepened the love between them.

The risen Christ will not ignore your failings, or mine,

will not pretend that we have never fallen short.

But he doesn't come to condemn. He comes to reconcile.

Your wounds will not stop Jesus from leading you to new life.

Neither will your guilt stop Jesus
from renewing his relationship with you.

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This 4th Sunday of Easter is sometimes called Good Shepherd Sunday,
so let me finish with 2 thoughts about our Good Shepherd.

First, remember that us sheep can only be led by a living shepherd.
We can't be led by the memory of somebody who used to lead us.

We will never be healed, never be renewed,
we will never find green pastures
by following the memory of how things used to be.

The Good Shepherd laid down his life for his sheep,
and yet he still lives.

Second, the Good Shepherd doesn't just lead the perfect sheep
to green pastures.

The Good Shepherd is there for all his sheep.

The ones who've been injured by wild animals.

The ones who are neglected and lost.

AND the ones who nip and bite and lash out
at the other sheep around them.

The Good Shepherd lays down his life
that the WHOLE FLOCK might find their way home.

Christ is risen, scars and all.

Follow him. He will surely bring you home.

Amen.