

*"The Wounded Healer"*

Isaiah 40:21-31 Mark 1:29-39

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This passage Lois read for us ... from the prophet Isaiah ... tells us of a wondrous ... powerful God ... the Creator of the ends of the earth ... a God who does not faint or grow weary ... a God who is great in strength ... mighty in power.

Isaiah fairly shouts from the pages: Have you not known? Have you not heard? Have you not been told? Have you not understood?

Isaiah's God rocks ... with power. Isaiah's writes about a God that is BIG ... big enough even for the very worst life circumstances ... .. and that's because Isaiah has some convincing to do.

In this text the prophet is once again ... addressing people who have been in exile in Babylon for generations ... .. people who had been led off in chains from everything they have known. Everything they had cherished had been lost ... .. everything they believed in was taken away ... .. there was nothing left to guide them ... .. there was no one to give them comfort.

And in their suffering ... in all the chaos of their lives ... .. they have forgotten who God is ... they have forgotten their own stories ... their own memories of God's faithfulness in the past.

And so Isaiah is assuring them that even with all the suffering ... that God is still with them. While they are wondering if they can even gather up the strength to make it back home ... .. if they will ever be free people ... .. Isaiah is telling them they have an available source of power that will give them the needed strength.

Isaiah is trying to remind them ... he is trying to convince them ... .. because he is speaking to *faithful* people who for generations have felt God-forsaken ... these people who believed God had turned God's back on them.

And so Isaiah speaks of creation itself ... the covenant is written ... he says ... even in the grass of the fields and the stars of heaven.

He tells them God gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless ... they shall mount up with wings like eagles. They must remember their own stories ... they must wait and trust in God.

Have they not known? Have they not heard?

And then the lectionary also gives us this story of Jesus ... who we are told again and again throughout the gospels ... is full of this same God Isaiah speaks of this morning ... .. Jesus is full of this big God ... as he quietly leans over the sick-bed of a woman ... who is unnamed ... we are only told that she is Peter's mother-in-law.

Jesus ... leans over the bed of that woman ... .. taking her hand and healing her.

This story is intimate ... it is private ... .. and through Jesus ... Isaiah's big God gets personal. Jesus heals this woman ... and she gets up the text tells us ... .. to serve others.

And so we learn two things about God with these companion texts ... two things about the nature of God's work in the world. First we learn ... that God is big ... that God is cosmic ... universal ... the creator of all that is ... to use a theological word ... God is transcendent.

And by contrast ... Mark gives us a story of a personal, immanent God ... the private healing of one unnamed woman. A God who counts the hairs on our head ... a God that knows when a sparrow falls ... a God whose power works through Jesus ... *and Jesus' disciples* ... to bring healing.

As one theologian recently wrote: "Our individual problems are not insignificant ... to the God who tends the cosmos."

Now I want us to be clear this morning about that word "serve" that Mark uses to describe the activity of this woman after she is healed. It's the same word Jesus uses when he says elsewhere in the gospels that he has come to "serve" ... the same word the Gospels use to speak of the angels who "served" Jesus in the wilderness. It is the root word of "deacon."

So it is safe to say that this unnamed woman wasn't healed so she could serve dinner or make the beds ... rather she was healed so she could be a "deacon" ... so she could minister to others ... healed so she can now be a healer and serve others ... the truest form of discipleship.

Later in this same text ... we learn that Jesus goes off alone after this but he has had ... a day of teaching in the synagogue and casting demons out of a man ... healing this unnamed woman and then healing others who came to Simon Peter's house.

Jesus goes off alone to pray ... to regain his strength so he could continue God's work in the world. Both Peter's mother-in-law ... and Jesus ... are restored in this story ... restored so they can serve ... so they can minister to others.

Their own healing ... their own renewal ... is tied up with others.

So where do you take up residence in these stories this morning?

Perhaps there are some of us ... who also need to be convinced this morning ... reminded and convinced ... that God is present with you ... that God is big enough to take on your pain ... your brokenness ... your anger ... your exile from whatever matters in your life.

Perhaps there are others of us who know we are in need of healing ... and are faithfully waiting for a healer to come to our sick-bed ... for someone to notice that we need healing.

Or perhaps this morning some of us are lucky enough to be in a pretty good place ... and that's wonderful ... and perhaps we can also remember a time when that wasn't the case.

So no matter where you find yourself this morning ... we might all want to pay attention to Isaiah's words and Jesus' actions. Because we all know we live in a broken-hearted world ... where real pain causes real people to suffer ... that there are times when ... if the earth had a single voice ... and we had the ears to hear it ... surely that voice would be a mournful lament.

So wherever you find yourself this morning ... you ... as a part of a Christian community ... as a part of the Body of Christ in the world ... you are called to let the power of Isaiah's big God flow through you ... so you can find healing if you need it ... and so you can be an agent of healing for others.

Because the most frequent way God strengthens and restores ... is by working through those all around us.

So even if you are feeling great this morning ... there may well be someone sitting near you ... who does know what exile feels like. It may well be that there is someone you know who needs to hear what these words have to say to her or to him ... someone who knows what it means to belong nowhere ... someone who has seen their life turn into an utter ship-wreck ... someone who knows what it means to have lost both hope and faith.

Perhaps her 40 year marriage is ending ... perhaps he has a terminal cancer diagnosis ... perhaps he hasn't spoken to his child in decades ... perhaps her depression is deepening ... perhaps they are just plain lonely.

There may just be someone you come into contact with this week ... who needs to hear Isaiah's message ... of a God that is so awesome ... so powerful ... so present with them ... hear that through your very presence.

Maybe there is someone in your life ... maybe your own precious self ... who needs to be reminded that God is faithful ... that God is a healer of broken hearts ... that God is big enough for whatever comes.

The Catholic priest, teacher and author Henri Nouwen called such people ... as we are hopefully striving to be ... wounded healers ... and he writes about the circle of light such people can create.

In his book, *The Wounded Healer*, he writes: "The beginning and the end of all Christian ministry ... is to give your life for others. We have to be willing to cry with those who cry, laugh with those who laugh, and to make one's own painful and joyful experiences available as sources of clarification and understanding ... we have to enter suffering before we can help to take it away."

And that's how a Christian community can be a healing community ... can become that circle of light ... not because we have the power to cure disease or put marriages back together ... but because we know how to love each other ... because we know how to include one another ... because we know how to remind each other of our story ... as followers of Jesus ... as sons and daughters of that big God.

Last week I talked about that sentencing hearing of Dr. Larry Nassar ... and about those young women athletes who were sexually molested by him both at Michigan State University and at the USA Gymnastics facility in Houston, Texas ... and how the judge at Nassar's sentencing hearing provided space and time for more than 150 women to tell their stories of abuse ... space and time to tell their stories.

My hunch is ... that that judge was able to do that because she too was a wounded healer ... I suspect when she told those young women they weren't broken ... but rather that they were glued back together perfectly ... she was telling herself that too.

I suspect it was her own healed wounds that made her able to hear their stories with such compassion ... compassion which gave her great authority ... compassion that was so very healing for those victims.

Jesus is very clear throughout the New Testament about where his strength comes from. He doesn't read self-help books or even go for counseling ... even though I've done a lot of both and found them helpful ... rather Jesus is clear his power comes from God.

Jesus is filled with that power ... so that he can heal Peter's mother-in-law ... Peter's mother-in-law is healed and then filled with that power ... so she can heal others ... and we begin to see that cycle of healing ... that circle of light ... that Henri Nouwen writes about.

Some of us have intentionally made ministry our life work ... but all of us are called to intentionally make it a part of our life in this place ... in Christian community ... called to enter into that circle of light ... healing and being healed ... and so become those wounded healers.

Life is difficult and there is no point in hiding from that fact. Our lives have wilderness times, defeats, deserts to be crossed ... and we do not always have the personal strength to manage ... we need healing.

Likewise ... there are opportunities for us to heal others ... because every day they are with us ... the brokenhearted ... the suffering ... the struggling ... the angry ... the sick ... the depressed ... the worried ... the fearful ... the mentally ill ... the outcasts ... they are there in our offices and in our classrooms ... they are there at Cahoots and over at the jail ... they pass us as we walk down any street ... and they are here in this church.

As Henri Nouwen also has written: "Changing our own hearts and lives ... and changing society to truly reflect the kingdom of God ... are as interconnected as the two beams on the cross."

Have you not seen? Have you not heard? Isaiah's big God is at work in you ... with you ... and through you ... to care for the people and world God loves so much. Amen.