

Wounds and healing

Sunday 3rd April 2011 (Mothering Sunday)



Jesus healing by El Greco
(part of a collection of reproductions
compiled by The Yorck Project)

STARTING OUT

Hurts and helpers

When we started out in Lent, we thought about ourselves as creatures who live and will die, whose hope is in our Christian faith and in God's gift of Jesus to us. In Lent, we entwine ourselves with his story, the more deeply to encounter the mystery of his death and resurrection. On this fourth Sunday, we look at the nature of wounds and healing and the part these have to play in our journey through life, in which, God willing, we hope to live useful, healthy, active lives. In thinking about wounds and healing, we also have to reflect on Jesus' sacrifice of his life for us and the healing which he continues to bring into our imperfect world.

As we go through life, all of us suffer wounds. As children we quickly learn about cuts, scrapes, grazes, bangs, bruises and bumps. We all know about the shock and hurt of receiving a wound like this, about physical pain. Minor injuries such as these become part of life, and we also learn as children that blood clots, scabs form, and, if the wound is deeper, a scar can be left behind. Scars become part of our history, and bear testimony to our wounds and our healing. A very few people are born with the inability to feel pain, yet they typically die if they don't check themselves very carefully, because they don't notice when they are injured. Pain tells us to get treatment and take steps to be restored. If we are generally healthy, we know and expect that if we are wounded, we will shortly heal and all will be well.



Our lives are balanced when wounds and healing go together in this way, but we are also aware that the world is a place where some people's wounds can never heal. Some children and adults are abused in their own homes, their wounds constantly reopened or





added to, so that healing is impossible and they die of their ill treatment. Yet other wounds are emotional or psychological, caused by neglect, or emotional abuse from other people, damaging their mental health. Or people suffer horrific injuries in traffic accidents, fires, wars, or natural disasters, which requires the immense skill of doctors, nurses, therapists, counsellors and medical professionals of all kinds to help them heal in mind and body.

Globally, many people never get the chance to be healthy. In many developing countries, people die of simple, uncomplicated wounds because they do not have access to vaccines or antibiotics. A little scratch or cut can get infected enough to kill. People also die of common, preventable, diseases and many, many children die because they are born with HIV infection. Mothers and children may often die in childbirth, while here it is relatively uncommon. These then, are another group of Unreconciled – people who never get the chance to live healthy lives. In the West, we are extraordinarily lucky to have the benefits of modern medicine and we tend to take it for granted that our wounds can always be healed. It is today much more of a shock to us to hear from doctors or surgeons that there is nothing more to be done and that someone we love will die, and sometimes, that death is finally the only healing there is.

On Mothering Sunday, we will also look at the role ‘mothering’ has on binding up our wounds and helping us to heal, and how in our mothers’ love and the love of all who care for us and tend us, we can see more of the loving God whose desire is the healing of the whole creation.

Activity

Choose from the selection below:

If you are using this resource as an individual some activities may need adapting.

- Ask the group to share any experiences of being in hospital. What was it like to be a patient and what was it like to go home again?
- Melanie Reid is a journalist who broke her neck and back when she was thrown from a horse. Since then she has written a column for the Times magazine on Saturday every week called Spinal Column. Have a look online (www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/melanie_reid/article7141687.ece) or in the newspaper about her treatment and the ups and downs of a very slow process. What do you think sustains a person who is so badly injured?
- Ask people to share any stories of living with chronic forms of diseases such as asthma, arthritis, diabetes, etc. What does healing mean in the context of an ongoing health problem? What relationship does living with disease or disability have to healing?



GOING DEEPER

A mother's love

Kieran, aged 22

When I woke up in hospital, I was in the intensive care unit. The doctors told me my bike skidded in the wet and hit the crash barrier. I hit the road and was hit immediately afterwards by the car behind me. When they told me this, I had a flashback to when I was about five, falling off my bike and hurting my arm and my leg. I went crying home to my mum expecting her to be cross with me for going out on the bike when she told me not to. Instead, she picked me up, took me inside and got a bowl of clean water and some plasters. She cleaned all the damage up and put the plasters on. Then she said 'you must always be careful when you ride your bike and wear your helmet'. I thought to myself, she won't be able to fix this in a hurry, but at least I was wearing my helmet. I just wanted her to be allowed to come and see me. I just wanted my mum. When she came to see me, she cried. She sat there holding my hand. The doctors said that if I hadn't been wearing my helmet and leathers I would have been killed. Every day I waited for my mum to come and hold my hand, like I was a little kid again.

Kieran's story digs deep into the experience of 'mothering' we cherish as part of our formative experience if we are lucky enough to grow up in a caring, loving family. Horrendously injured, his mind took him back to a mother's love, care, concern, comfort and nursing. Through the long months of subsequent pain, operations, physical therapy and slow recovery and rehabilitation, he relied on his mother to be there and hold his hand, even though she was no longer able to fix his wounds and had to rely on the skill of medical professionals to help him back on his feet.

The injured person longs to be 'mothered' because that 'mothering' involves much more than just binding up a wound. It involves the outflow and display of love, compassion and the giving of comfort, a feeling of safety and security after the shock of being hurt, a promise of faithfulness and steadfastness in the face of continuing pain. Many of us have profound memories of receiving this enduring love and comfort, and it is this promise of care and concern back home which emboldens to go out and endure the risks of daily living. But Kieran also appreciated that his mother's concern had also had an affect on his behaviour: he was wearing a helmet on the day he really needed it.



Photo: sarae 





Our experience of 'mothering' does not just have to come from our mothers. Fathers, siblings, other relatives, friends, nurses and a whole range of carers can give us feelings of being comforted and looked after when we are ill or in hospital, or in need of care. The psalmist sometimes gives an image of being cared for by God as hiding in the shadow or shelter of his wings (61.4; 17.8) and Jesus uses this image when he says he wants to shelter his people as a mother hen shelters her chicks. The experience of Church too, or Christian fellowship with others can be a 'mothering' experience in which others care for us when times are tough or we are in trouble. It is from this experience of being mothered, the way we receive physical, emotional and spiritual care, comfort and healing, that we learn how to mother others in our turn, to give as we have received.

Those kinds of feelings are often reflected in art images of Mary caring for the infant Jesus. But caring and nursing the sick can carry its own toll, exhausting people or placing extra burdens on them that injures their own health. Sometimes mothers have to look after their children and elderly parents at the same time. It's also worth reflecting that sometimes the 'mothering' roles are reversed and children have to become young carers, often struggling to look after family members and running a household while caring for parents who are ill or who can't cope. Too often, we are not really aware of them, or the help and support they need. When this happens they become a group of Unreconciled people in our own communities, all but invisible.

Stories of young carers

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uupS3FQI6AA> (15 mins)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHQTSCgz5gs&feature=related> (2 minutes)

Activity

- Spend some time thinking about how your church cares for hurt, sick or wounded people. What happens about visiting the sick, lonely or bereaved? How do people in hospital get visited? What other kind of caring and nursing organisations are active in your community and how could you do more to support them? Perhaps you could run a fund raising event, prayer time, or appreciation day for the caring professions?
- What kind of healing ministry is offered by your church? What more could be done to create links with the caring professions in your community?
- Find out some more about the people who are carers for relatives. Perhaps someone in your congregation could talk about being a carer or a teacher could talk about the difficulties faced by young carers. Or you could watch the clips of young carers and discuss together how you could do more to support young people taking care of their relatives.





MOVING ON

Celebrating the Bible

Psalm 23

KJV

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
 he leadeth me beside the still waters.
 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the
 paths of righteousness for his names sake.
 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the
 shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou
 art with me; thy rod and thy staff they
 comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the
 presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my
 head with oil; my cup runneth over.
 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
 all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the
 house of the LORD for ever.



NRSV

The Divine Shepherd

A Psalm of David.
 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
 He makes me lie down in green pastures;
 he leads me beside still waters;
 he restores my soul.
 He leads me in right paths
 for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
 I fear no evil;
 for you are with me;
 your rod and your staff—
 they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
 in the presence of my enemies;
 you anoint my head with oil;
 my cup overflows.
 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
 all the days of my life,
 and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
 my whole life long.

The 23rd psalm is a spiritual reflection on God's love and 'mothering' care for the human person. God guides and cares for the psalmist, so that he can feel safe in a dangerous world. His fears and worries are soothed and God's presence comforts him. Although the risks and dangers of human living do not magically vanish, the psalmist is not afraid, because walking with God offers him another experience – one of the fullness of life. To live in the knowledge of the loving God's care 'restores' the soul and brings peace.

Some questions for discussion

- What do you think prevents people from having a relationship with God like this?
- This psalm is often chosen by people for both weddings and funerals. Why do you think the psalm's words speak to people on those occasions?
- Where have you seen evidence of God's 'mothering' love in your life, in your Church or in the world?





CELEBRATING THE BIBLE

Gospel

John 9.1-41

KJV

They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind.
 And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes.
 Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see.
 Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them.
 They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet.
 But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight.
 And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? How then doth he now see?
 His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind:
 But by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself.
 These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.
 Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him.

Please note: the reading for the day includes the whole passage of John 9.1-41 but below is a shortened extract.

NRSV

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.'

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him,





(KJV continued)

Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.

He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.

Then said they to him again, What did he do to thee? how opened he thine eyes?

He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples?

Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses disciples.

We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.

The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes.

Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.

Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.

If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.

They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?

He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?

And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.

And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.

And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.

(NRSV continued)

'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' They answered him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?' And they drove him out.

Spiritual Blindness

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' He answered, 'And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.' He said, 'Lord, I believe.' And he worshipped him. Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains.





And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.



At the heart of this story is the compassionate healing by Jesus of a man who was born blind and who was willing to accept the ministry of Jesus and respond in obedience. But the passage highlights that such an apparently 'physical' healing, wonderful as it is, is locked into a whole nexus of religious, social, psychological and political issues all of which generate difficult tensions for the blind man and threaten to keep him as one of the Unreconciled from his community. The disciples ask whose sin was responsible for this 'problem'; the neighbours are disturbed psychologically - the beggar is now transformed; the parents are bewildered by the change in their son's condition and the Pharisees realise they have a serious challenge to their authority. Implicitly this story reveals many 'wounds' in these different people. Jesus, however, points away from problem, fault and disability, to possibility, hope and the glorification of God. He finds the man and confirms him as part of a new community. It is the Pharisees who are now Unreconciled, because they refuse to believe what they have seen.

At the heart of this story too is the question of who Jesus is and whether we truly believe in him. This is the real healing for our human wounds (see 9: 35 -38)

Some questions for discussion

- How do those who are 'wounded' in our society challenge our own comfort zones? What kind of afflictions, diseases, disabilities or mental health issues do you find uncomfortable or disturbing? How does this suggest we might be 'wounded'?
- How might we respond more positively to those who are 'wounded' in our society? Think of examples of people and charities who bring healing and help to them.
- What do you think it was like for the parents of the man born blind – bringing him up and trying to take care of him in that society? How do you think his mother felt when Jesus cured him?
- The Pharisees thought there was a direct relationship between sin and affliction. Even today some religious people want to explain disease and disaster as the retribution of God for sinful human behaviour. But Jesus shows here that God's love is about healing not hurting people. What do you suppose Jesus might say today to a person who came to him suffering from the effects of famine, homelessness, poverty, or disease? What do you think he might say to people who said those sufferers deserved what had happened to them? What do *you* think?



Healing of a blind man
by Duccio di Buoninsegna
(part of a collection of reproductions
compiled by The Yorck Project)





MOVING INTO LENT

Following Jesus

As we saw in the Gospel, Jesus lived in a society which had many wounded and suffering people. People did sometimes become renowned as healers, using folk remedies – we see an echo of their practice in the paste made with spittle that Jesus himself uses in the story. People looked to divine intervention and put hope in various ritual and superstitious practices which we see in the episode regarding the disturbance at the sheep pool, the cisterns at Siloam. Healers gained followers and were much in demand.

It is not surprising then, that the gospels record an important part of Jesus' ministry as being concerned with the wounds of those hurt, disabled, mentally ill or otherwise prevented from fulfilling their human potential and they record that people flocked to him asking for healing for themselves or their families, even bringing the sick on their beds and in one case lowering the sick man through a removable roof to get near to him. People thronged to touch him and receive his healing power as in the story of the woman with a flow of blood.

There are some distinctive features of Jesus' healing ministry however. One feature is that he did not seek personal gain or glory through the relief of suffering, but was always concerned to give the glory to God. Also, he was prepared to go out on a limb for people, the communities of the Unreconciled, touching the unclean, even dangerous people who would otherwise be outcast. He showed compassion and emotion towards those who were suffering the torment of physical or mental pain, but was not afraid to challenge those who might not really in their heart of hearts want to get better.

Above all, Jesus makes it clear that health is for a purpose. If we are healthy in mind and body, we can use our energy and ability to become fit for God's use in the world. Suffering drags us down and saps our energy so that we can't see as clearly. So those healed should properly give thanks to God.

But of course, Jesus himself submitted to join the ranks of those wounded and suffering. It wasn't just death he undertook, but torture and weakness and all the emotional confusion and despair that can come with intense suffering. His resurrected body still bore the marks of the wounds and these made him recognizable to others. He becomes the Wounded Healer, the one who reconciles the Unreconciled: 'by his wounds we are healed'.

Activity

Many people remember Simon Weston, who was horrendously burned on the Sir Galahad during the Falkland's war

- Discuss what role wounds and healing have to play in self-esteem and personal identity.
- How do you think Simon Weston's mum felt when her son came back from the Falklands so badly burned?
- How do you think of Jesus at Easter: as the one who is wounded, the one who heals us, or both?





MOVING OUT

Action in the community

Make a list of all the caring organisations in your local area, using yellow pages, word of mouth and/or the internet. Find out more about who they are and what they do and who they serve. You could also ask your local branch of the Mothers Union to talk about the MU's work supporting families and investigate some of their resources on their website www.themothersunion.org. Choose a day and organise a service or time of prayer to give thanks for the work of any or all of these organisations and individuals and to pray for healing in the community.

RESTING ON THE WAY

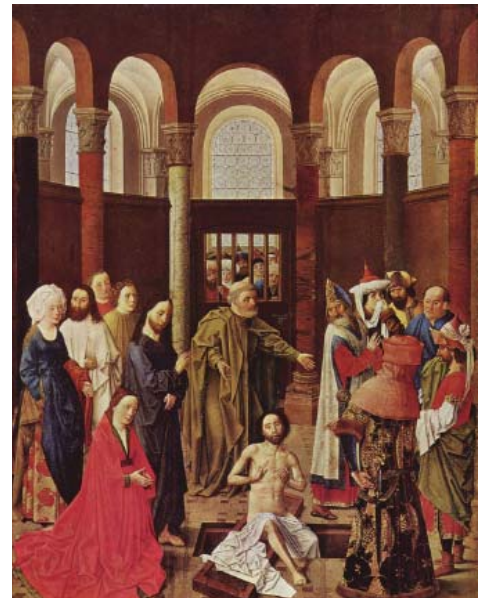
Theological reflection and prayer

On page 2, we looked at Melanie Reid, a journalist who broke her neck and back when she was thrown from a horse.

Spend some time thinking about the place of prayer in healing. Or perhaps you could organise a special time of prayer for the sick and bereaved in your community

*Lord Jesus,
We do not want to suffer alone or for no purpose.
Remind us often that you experienced the weaknesses,
trials and sufferings of being human – and
that you did that to save us.
May your sufferings and wounds bring us life, healing and hope
even now.
We press our open wounds to your precious wounds
That we may be united to you and to your will for us.
May we receive your comfort, compassion and courage
And may we bring comfort, compassion and courage to others.
Pour your healing love into us and through us may it also bless
and heal others.*

Amen
Andrew Brookes OP



The Raising of Lazarus
by Albert van Ouwater
(part of a collection of reproductions
compiled by The Yorck Project)





DECISION TIME

What is going to change?

Now gather up your thoughts and ideas, and with these things in mind, consider these questions:

- **Where is the seed of new life?** What gifts has God given us to offer Christian healing in our own situation?
- **How will we carry it?** What resources will we need to make that healing ministry available in our situation?
- **Where can it be born?** Identify one healing action we can commit to which will help make the Unreconciled ones feel their wounds are being addressed.
- **How can we nurture it?** How can we support that reconciling action and make sure it follows through?
- **What will we hope to see?** What will be changed at the end of this process and what difference should it have made?

Going further

This resource is based on the chapter 'Wounds and Healing' in the book *Unreconciled?* where you can find lots of information, stories, and further ideas you can use for personal study or in a group, including more ideas for activities.

The Daily Service from 4th April -7th April offers more readings and reflections for you to listen to on the theme of Wounds and Healing

The Wounded Healer, Henri Nouwen (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1994)

A Time to Heal: a Contribution towards the Ministry of Healing (Church House Publishing, 2000)

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Photo of *The Unreconciled* (The Cross and broken glass): CTBI / Vicki & Chuck Rogers / Phil Dragash 