

When I was on internship, one of the requirements was that you would meet with your internship committee once a month to evaluate how things were going in your ministry. Part of the process for this was that I had to set goals and benchmarks I wanted to hit throughout the year, and then update the committee with my progress. Well, being who I am, one of the things I put on my list of goals was the books I wanted to read throughout the year—books on preaching, leadership, theology. I remember the head of my committee, Gail, looking at me and going, “My real question is, will you have time to read all of those?” She was right...I didn’t, but I did get some of them done! And I received that reminder this week.

As we were sitting in Bible study this week talking about Jesus feeding the 5,000, a book popped into my head, *The Wounded Healer* by Henri Nouwen. It’s a tiny, little slip of a book, but it was revolutionary when it was published. The whole concept is about how we can only help others, help them heal by being aware of and reflecting on our own wounds. Out of our own brokenness and pain comes our ability to help others through similar situations, *if* we are willing to go there, release that level of vulnerability into the world, and surrender a part of ourself over to another person in the hopes of helping them. This was one of the books on my internship list and I pulled it off of my shelf to find that not only had I read

it, but apparently I had thoughts about it! Look at all of these tabs! Clearly, I thought this was going to be a fabulous reference guide for me, when I'm pretty sure that this week is the first time I've picked it back up since 2010.

As I looked at the tabs, one jumped out to me immediately. I had labeled one of these tabs, "IMPORTANT!" in all caps. I kind of chuckled to myself because I was like, wow, it had to have been important for all the times I've looked back at it since I read it the first time, but then I opened it up, and well, yes, it was important...I just had to wait for the right time for that importance to be needed. This is the quote I found at this yellow tab with a huge exclamation point written in the margins,

It seems necessary to re-establish the basic principle that no one can help anyone without becoming involved, without entering with his whole person into the painful situation, without taking the risk of becoming hurt, wounded, or even destroyed in the process...real martyrdom means a witness that starts with the willingness 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.

Now...I would like to have a little conversation with dear Henri about the use of the word martyr in relation to Christian leadership, because boy is it wildly unhelpful to tell a generation of future pastors that they should be martyrs in their ministry, but besides that little thing...the point he's making is in fact, IMPORTANT! You can't help someone else by standing at the margins and shouting to them, you can't help someone else by not getting

your hands and feet dirty, and you can't help someone else if you aren't willing to take the risk that it might ask you to share a part of yourself with another person, cry or laugh with them, hold them, be real and present with them. You have to be willing to go there...a fact that Jesus himself knew intimately and intensely.

The lectionary tries its best to remedy the fact that it pulls the gospel out of its surrounding context this morning, but it doesn't quite encapsulate everything that is going on here by just saying that Jesus went away after hearing about John the Baptist's death. Even before that, Jesus has been knocked sideways by pain and frustration. Where he was when he heard about John was on the outskirts of Nazareth, having just been rejected and run out of his hometown. He had tried to being the word of God there, and people who had known him his whole life, knew his parents, looked at him and said, "Isn't this the carpenter's kid? Who is *he* to tell *us* about God?!" and they kicked him out of town. Imagine that, people who have known you, cared for you, seen you grow up saying we don't want you here. Imagine the hurt that was piercing through Jesus, that not one person, one family member, one friend stood up for him; they just let him leave, told him to get out and not come back.

So he's already down and the world decides to kick a little harder. It isn't just that he receives news that John has died. He receives news that John was executed, murdered, his own cousin dead at the hands of a tyrant for speaking the truth about God. This had to have been doubly painful for Jesus because yes, on the one hand, this is family, someone he cared about dying which is hard enough, but this is also his messenger, his forerunner, the person who went before him, and if he died...well, Jesus knows what's next. If Herod would kill John, whom he respected, admired even, well then, Jesus' time is starting to slip through his fingers. With that in mind, it makes complete sense that Jesus needs a little bit of alone time to think, process, pray, and just be by himself.

He goes off in a boat to find a quiet place for himself, and when he gets there what does he find, not solitude and solace, but throngs of people and complete chaos. Now there are two options before him, he can do a quick reverse, row backwards hoping that no one saw him, or he can keep going, row towards the shore, and let his own wounds, his own pain evoke in him compassion for these God's beloved children in need of healing and hope and eventually food. As an introvert, I don't quite know how Jesus does what he does, because my oars would have been flying backwards I think, but not Jesus, no, Jesus goes forward, moved by compassion and

grace to bring healing to God's people from his own wounded heart. Jesus' life has been exceptionally heavy as of late, but he doesn't see the crowds as another burden on his shoulders, but as a gift, a way to help ease some of his burdens, because by caring for them, he is also healing himself.

The reality is, this isn't just something that we experience through the words of the gospel, trying to read into the text what it says for our lives today, we experience this, every single Sunday, every single time we gather around this table together. Each of us brings all of our burdens, our brokenness, our fears, our pain to this table and we lay it down, we lay it down before Jesus and he takes it from us, offering us his own broken body given in return. As I say, every week, Christ was broken so that we may be whole...Christ heals us from his own wounds. From this point in his ministry, Jesus could have easily stopped. If my own hometown won't hear me, if people are ending up dead, if I can't get a minute of peace and quiet to myself, then I'm out, I'm done, and yet, he keeps going, offering more and more and more of himself out of compassion for God's children, for us so that we might know healing and grace.

And this...this is the beauty of the gospel, that it works on so many levels, because on the one hand...this is a gift, a reminder, a promise for all of us, that no matter the heaviness we carry, the pain or frustration or worry

we bring to this space, Jesus' shoulders are big enough to carry it, for all of us. We can lay our burdens down and trust that they can rest here, that Christ will keep coming to us again and again with healing and hope. Jesus is enough for all of us, more than enough for all of us; if Jesus can bring wholeness to 5,000 plus people on a lonely hillside in Galilee, he can bring wholeness here to us. So here in this place, at this table, we lay everything we're carrying down and we trust that Christ will make us whole.

And on the other hand...this gospel is a commission, a reminder. Because as much as us and our siblings need Jesus, our siblings also need us to be Jesus to them in whatever ways we are capable, and sometimes that means being vulnerable before them and helping them heal from our own wounds, sharing pieces of ourselves that we might want to keep in the dark, because by bringing them out into the light, we tell another one of our siblings that they are not alone. It's hard, and we all have a lot of days where we just want to row that boat backwards and say, nope, not today, I can't do it. And some days, we're going to reverse our oars, because we're human and it happens, but other days...other days we're going to be willing to keep moving forward and extend a hand and a piece of ourselves and say, I get it, I've been there, I know what it is to be hurting and feel broken and feel lost and like the darkness is going to win. Other days we are going to be

someone's lifeline because we look at them and are so moved with compassion that we can't see anything in front of us except the eyes of God. Other days we are going to be able to the wounded healer and it's terrifying, but it brings the kingdom, because it binds us together, hand in hand, heart to heart, grace with grace, knowing we aren't alone, that we are God's children together, holding one another as best we can.

Being a family of God is hard, we all come to this place from so many different areas and walks of life. We all have our own difficulties and circumstances and it's easy to feel like an island, just here to be here and get what I need and head out, but how much more powerful does the gospel become when it doesn't just impel us outward, but draws us inward to each other? To use it to say, I see you, I hear you, we can be vulnerable and hurting together? You can't measure compassion in baskets filled with leftovers, it isn't quantifiable like that, but it doesn't mean that it can't make all of the difference in the world. Christ is moved with compassion and love when he sees you, and he makes you whole. May we be moved with compassion and love when we see each other, and make we make one another whole, daring to help heal one another from our own wounds.

AMEN!!!