**Coronado Community Church**

“Where Does It Hurt?”

A sermon by Pastor Eric Smith

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Let’s think about healing: what it is, how it works, why we need it, and the many expressions of it that surround us. It’s big, it’s important. It concerns everyone. And it affects our lives in dramatic ways.

We all need healing. Each of us owns some sort of wound, or ill-health, and care is necessary for our healing. Sometimes it is obvious – I’ve been learning that a broken humerus takes a long time to heal. But *other wounds are not-so-obvious to others and even to ourselves.* The symptoms include pain or suffering or lack of vitality; and the hurt behind these problems requires attention so that our lives are renewed and refreshed… so we can live with joy.

Healing has a bigger story, beyond our personal issues. It is the story of our relationship with God. From the beginning… there was brokenness in Adam and Eve. Then stories of suffering – sometimes physical, mostly spiritual… and then connection points where God and humanity renewed the relationship. Those occasions have names like deliverance… salvation… and redemption. Those are names for healing… which move us toward wholeness.

So let’s talk about life.

When we’re born it doesn’t appear that healing is needed. Mothers yes… babies, no.

There are exceptions… but mostly you start off in decent shape. Then things happen. You get wounded. Might be something small at first… but it happens. Infants need love, and they tend to get it… until they don’t. Parents are never perfect - they *want* to be perfect for their kids – they don’t *want* to hurt their kids – but it happens.

 A few years ago my cousin Kathy was visiting. No longer with us, she was a dozen years older than I. At birth, when I was brought home from the hospital, Kathy was there. She knew me all of my life. Our mothers were sisters.

During her visit we shared family stories. Many of them were interesting and fun, others were painful. I heard stories I never had never heard about family members – not bad things – just things that hadn’t been talked about around me.

That kind of sharing helps us to discover more of who we are because we learn from the stories about our families. *When we learn about the wounds they suffered, we understand them better.*

The pain in our parents’ lives affected the way they related to us… and pain in their lives became another kind of pain for us.

My father, Peter, loved his parents, but he told me he never felt close to them. He said they were cold people. Those were his words. He needed more warmth from them than what he got. It was a major wound in his life. What I know about them is that they were first generation immigrants from eastern Europe. Life, for them, had been tough. I was their first grandchild, and my experience of them was nothing but warmth and love.

My grandfather, Al, lived on his own in Brookyln until he was 98. Then he moved to Coronado to live with his son, my father, for several years until he died. Those two men never imagined that they would live together – but that’s what happened. And I got to see it.

One day, in conversation, grandfather Al told me what a fine gentleman he thought my father was. He was quite sincere, and I appreciated hearing it. Later I told my father what Al had said about him. Peter was stunned… his jaw literally dropped. He said, *he’s never said anything like that to me in my life.*

For my own part, I always wanted to be closer to my father – and I felt like he kept that from happening. It became a wound I carried. But when I learned more about his relationship with his father, I realized he wasn’t trying to keep away from me, he had actually *improved* on what he had experienced with his father.

What I learned from engaging with them, and observing both my father and my grandfather,is that *parents are usually doing the best that they can*. If there are wounds that you carry from your parents, there are probably good reasons why, and *you probably don’t know the full story of their pain.* We may not know what the wounds were, or where they came from, but they *were* - or *are* - there.

Now, as a parent of grown children who are parents themselves, *I revisit mistakes I made* in relationship with them through what I did and through what I didn’t do – it wasn’t intentional, but it also wasn’t the best. Our children don’t come with instruction manuals. *The things that wounded my children are not necessarily the things I thought they were.*

We deal with what our parents did and didn’t do for us while they are with us and long after they are gone. So here’s a learning – take a look at your parent wounds … step back and think of their stories… then acknowledge that, even though they really messed up in whatever way they did, *they were probably trying to do the best that they could at the time.* This will bring healing in your life.

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We get wounded in lots of other ways. There are physical wounds, emotional wounds, and spiritual wounds. Often it takes lots of life for us to realize how we were wounded.

Some of you carry lots of hurt and try to ignore it. You’re not listening or you can’t acknowledge the pain because it’s too complicated. You just carry on, often unhappily. Things are the way they are… you don’t spend any time thinking about it, but you should.

You probably know folks who are have a less-than-wholesome relationship with life and with the people around them. They live out of their pain. Sometimes it’s not pretty.

Addictions are often born out of pain. Using drugs or alcohol or whatever in unhealthy ways is usually about trying to escape the pain of life… physical, emotional, or spiritual. Regular medicine can’t take care of it because regular medicine is about treating symptoms, and it often doesn’t look for underlying causes. Medicine doesn’t heal those kinds of wounds.

Some folks stay clean of alcohol or drugs, but escape in other ways. On the surface they look put-together. Underneath the surface, not-so-much. Life focuses on appearances… always trying to look like you have it together to hide how much you hurt.

So we’re all people in need of healing. This is not bad news – this is good news. If you feel messed up, insecure, struggling, hurting, looking to escape from the pain – hey… good news… you’re not alone!

Rumi was a 13th-century Persian poet, whose wisdom has been passed to us through the centuries. He wrote,

*The wound is the place where the Light enters you.*

Acquiring these wounds that so profoundly affect our lives is the start of the process that opens the doors into our deepest spiritual experience.

The most painful things that have happened to you are the same things that make you who you are now. And even if you don’t feel that great…

you are a magnificent spirit…

you are a child of God with the possibility of experiencing the deepest joy of life.

Now consider this…

*Healing doesn't mean the damage never existed.*

*It means the damage no longer controls your life.*

Think of forgiveness. That’s a good example. Forgiveness is one of the biggest, if not *the* biggest methods of healing. It is also our most universally shared healing balm.

*Forgiveness doesn't mean the damage in your life never took place.*

*Forgiveness means the damage no longer controls your life.*

 Most of us can be pretty hard on ourselves. We’ve learned to do that. When we mess up there isn’t anyone who is harder on us than we are. Right? So consider another approach. Have compassion for yourself. Next time you mess up, and it’s just you and God who know… let it go.

Be compassionate. You would be compassionate if it was someone else… so be compassionate with yourself. That’s a healing thing.

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The bottom line is the love of God. God loves you. God’s way and God’s will for you is healing… and wholeness. God wants you to be whole, to enjoy life, to move through the challenges, the difficulties, the tragedies, and traumas. Move through them. Things *have* happened to you, they *will* happen to you, maybe they are happening to you now… no one is exempt. But you are never alone! God goes through these things *with* you. God brings healing balm for your wounds.

On your part, healing requires your spiritual trust. You trust God’s process. You surrender and open the gates to your heart, your mind, and your body. You allow access and entry.

Haruki Murakami is a bestselling Japanese author. He wrote,

*What happens when people open their hearts?
They get better.*

When you open your heart – God brings healing to your life.

I want to tell you a healing story.

I met Bill and Suzi Derby in July of 2002 when Karen and I went to serve the First United Methodist Church of Redlands. I didn’t know them well right away.

They would take their motorhome to Newport Beach and camp out. On this trip, Bill had a heart episode. A big one. He was taken to Hoag hospital in Newport Beach.

As I recall he was there, in ICU for a long time… weeks. The reports were not good.

They were bad enough that, in my experience of folks with heart episodes in the hospital, I did not expect Bill to live.

I needed to go see them and pray with Suzie, so I drove from Redlands to Hoag Hospital.

During the drive all I thought about was Bill and Suzi… didn’t even listen to the radio. I didn’t know either of them well… but everything I knew was good, and kind, and faithful.

When I got to Hoag I walked through the labyrinth of that huge hospital and found Suzie in the ICU waiting room – where she had spent most of her time for weeks, praying for Bill, and reading the Bible.

We greeted each other, then sat across from each other and talked.

I had gone there to help Suzie spiritually prepare for the inevitability of Bill’s death… I did not think he would leave that hospital alive.

She told me all that had happened. From the RV park to the hospital. The complications with Bill’s surgery. What the doctors said… which was not encouraging in any way, and had only grown worse with the passing days. She told me all of this in matter of fact manner.

I remember her speaking with faith. She wasn’t emotional, which was unusual in my experience. She was seriously spiritual.

I can’t remember the precise words now, but she told me plainly, and simply, that Bill was going to make it. *No one else in that hospital thought that… only Suzie did.* It may have been a hope and a prayer, but she spoke as if she *knew* he would pull through. She finished what she had to say and looked at me. So in *response to this incredible assurance of faith I felt through her and with the same certainty with which she had spoken,* I affirmed what she said, *Well then… he will.* And we prayed.

Suzi knew, in those moments, that God was as present in our conversation as we were, and that God would heal Bill.

And Bill lived… he recovered and lived for another 15 years.

One last story… about racquetball. Until Covid, I played a couple of times each week…

Wherever I have served in the church I have looked for racquetball facilities, and people to play with. I always found them. When we lived in Pasadena I played at the Pasadena Athletic Club. Like any sport you play with others, you develop relationships with your partners. Racquetball, like many other sports, is revealing of character, so you get to know the folks.

One of my friends at the gym was a man named Dan. He was then about 50 years old. Handsome guy, well-spoken, and in great physical shape. Dan was a psychiatrist. He was successful. He had multiple offices, many employees, and many grateful patients.

We got to talking about his fitness schedule one day, and this is what he told me, I’m still working on living the truth of it, because I’ve never forgotten it… Dan said… I am pretty busy. I have lots going on, people have problems, there is a business side to all of this and, bottom line is that it never lets me go. But what I have learned is that of all those things that consume me, I can get someone else to handle all of them, every one with one exception… I am *the only one* who can exercise this body. I can’t get anyone else to do it for me. If I don’t do it, it’s not going to happen.

That is the truth of hurt in your life. You have to take care of it. No one else can, no matter how much you are loved. You have to do it.

You ask yourself, *where does it hurt?* And go from there.

*Hopefully… eventually you come to understand that the love of God heals everything.*

May it be so for you.