

**“Tending hurt” - a sermon based on Mark 1:29-39 preached at Knox Church, Dunedin, New Zealand by Kerry Enright, Knox minister, on Sunday 8 February 2015.**

In last Sunday’s sermon, from the midst of the church, we waved our fist at the empire. In the face of systems and thinking that suck us in, we held to the power of Jesus to cast out unclean spirits, to cast out our unclean spirits - the spirits that harm people and planet. We shook our fists and said – you will not conquer us. You will not finally claim us. You will not win. Jesus has the power to cast you out. We were bold. We were feisty. And we prayed we would believe what we claimed, prayed we would live into it, prayed it would be.

The fist is still with us this week, as we move from the synagogue and go home. The fist still waves at the empire in the face of a fever. We wave our fist at systems that cause poor health. We protest at what makes people sick. And indeed, in the face of ill health, we often want, even more vigorously, to wave our fists - to protest, to plead, to cry out.

But today I would like us to see the wounds of the one who comes home with us. I would like you to see the marks of his crucifixion. His hands have nail holes. The skin on his back is deeply scarred. His side bleeds. This is the risen Christ, coming home with us, but he is the risen crucified Christ.

The wounds are no less powerful than the fist, but they are powerful in tenderness.

“He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her.” ...

The home of Simon and Andrew.

At home, whatever home is for us, wherever home is for us, we do not need to put on a brave face. At home we can say what we feel. At home we can reveal our deepest fears.

And we can do it our way. Some are direct and plain. Some want to talk, and some do not want to talk. Some carry feelings deep inside and some don’t know what they feel and some don’t know what they feel until they say it.

I have heard people say things like this –

An older man confined to his home, I visited years ago. “Kerry, I am not afraid of dying. I just don’t want to get stuck half-way.”

Another – I recovered from the fever and I was not sure I would. It was touch and go. Now every day is precious. I am grateful for each day I wake. I want to live fully.

Another – Sir Paul Reeves – when he was most seriously ill, in bed, his family could see he wanted to say something, his grand-daughter leaned over to hear him say one word, “bugger”.

Another – I was in the operating theatre and the operation was delicate and risky. I prayed and I had a vision of Jesus guiding the surgeon’s hand.

Another – from a friend in the midst of chemotherapy last year – I am part of a community of faith where people come and people go. And I am part of a rhythm of life in which we emerge and return. I am not the centre. My ego is not who I am. I am part of the whole, part of the community, part of wider life. And as he continued with this spirit, his wife interrupted and said – “That’s ok for

you to be all theological. But what about us? We love you. We cherish you. We want you to stay. We don't want you to go."

Another – I am afraid because I don't know what this is going to involve. I don't know where it will take me. It's scary.

One Sunday in our congregation in Sydney, a preacher when referring to Psalm 103 asked how many would most likely not be here but for antibiotics. Nearly half the congregation put up their hand, me included.

Today I invite you to imagine a risen crucified Christ coming into your home. A risen crucified Christ who takes us by the hand, who lifts us up, and who enlists us in service.

This risen, crucified Christ is a healing presence, a healing presence in your home.

What might that mean?

The gospels are determined not to present Jesus as a magician. Accounts of the life of Jesus, gospels if you will, are not included in our Bible because they were too magical. They had Jesus performing one startling miracle after another. Jesus is not a magician.

And Jesus does not save people from suffering, as is evident in his own life. Indeed, much of the Old and New Testaments grapple with the reality of suffering. Many of Paul's writings are about making sense of Christ in relation to hurt, including when he says to the Church at Rome:

"I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Paul says this because he knew what it meant to be separated, to be alone, to be threatened by rulers. He writes this that we may know more than separation.

This is the bedrock. The love I have known is never lost to me. The love I have experienced is never taken from me. In all my humanity, I am held. I am invited to accept all the gifts of my humanity by entrusting myself to love, eternally. At times I struggle to believe that and I need to borrow the faith of others, to draw from beyond myself.

The healing presence of Christ has much to do with community. Simon and Andrew, James and John and Jesus came home from the synagogue. Their little band was already a community of heart and hope, of compassion and tenderness. They connected Simon's mother-in-law with the community. She was not left alone. The community made connections that enabled healing.

In community we hold each other's wounds, and hold each other's hope, even when it is hard.

In this community, we welcome Margaret Jane and we farewell Eileen, and we bear the marks of living with mortality and new life.

Deborah van Dusen Hunsinger is a Princeton teacher who was here just before Christmas. She tells us about the theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff.

When Nicholas Wolterstorff lost his son, he entered a long night of grief. He was assailed with questions about God's goodness, the mystery of evil, and the incomprehensibility of suffering. He wrestled with God. Finally a day dawned. He saw that "to believe in Christ's rising from the grave is to accept it as a sign of our own rising from our graves."

This is what he wrote:

"Slowly I began to see that there is something more as well. To believe in Christ's rising and death's dying is also to live with the power and the challenge to rise up now from all our dark graves of suffering love. If sympathy for the world's wounds is not enlarged by our anguish, if love for those around us is not expanded, if gratitude for what is good does not flame up, if insight is not deepened, if commitment to what is important is not strengthened, if aching for a new day is not intensified, if hope is weakened and faith diminished, if from the experience of death comes nothing good, then death has won. Then death, be proud. So I shall struggle to live the reality of Christ's rising and death's dying. In my living, my son's dying will not be the last word. But as I rise up, I bear the wounds of his death. My rising does not remove them. They mark me. If you want to know who I am, put your hand in."

"Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them."

We can have in our homes the healing presence of the risen crucified Christ, whom we know through his wounds and ours.