

“Witnesses on the way” a sermon based on Luke 24:36b-48 preached at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand by Kerry Enright on 15 April 2018.

We don't always know what to do with wounds. The Australian cricket team in South Africa. One of their bowlers was caught roughing up the ball to get more of a turn off the wicket. The captain and the vice-captain and the bowler owned up to planning this tampering. They were sent home. There were tearful apologies on television.

Commentators, including former Australian cricketers, were scathing.

- The low point in Australian cricket history;
- Unprecedented;
- Poor leadership.

The wounds were evident. Yet the cricketing community didn't seem to know what to do with the three and their apologies. Many wanted to keep reminding them of wrongdoing.

They had made a serious mistake. They had broken the rules of cricket. They had damaged its reputation.

What do we do with wounds?

Last Monday as part of Pride week, the Student Christian Movement hosted an evening in which people spoke of their experience of being gay and Christian.

One person said how he had come out when he was 47. In acknowledging his sexuality he felt the need to resign from the Christian boards on which he served. Eventually he found churches where he was included, an Anglican church, a Baptist church and a Community church. He is a well-known Christian leader.

He knows how people can struggle with being Christian and being gay because of how the Church often presents its views. So he makes his phone number available for people to contact him. He described some of the calls he gets, and sometimes the abuse is such that he has to ask someone else to deal with the call.

He described how he was wounded by people and by churches, including our own Presbyterian Church, and yet he was determined to help people get to a different understanding, to help the church get to an inclusive accepting place.

It was a holy night as people described wounds in the context of their faith.

Last year, our Presbytery hosted a night in which women spoke of their experience of the church. Stories of discrimination told plainly, directly, painfully, tearfully.

A holy night.

Jesus stood among the disciples and asked them to look at his hands and his feet. Where the nails had pierced. He was not a ghost, not a spirit, not an idea, not a word, not a metaphor, not an ideal, not a goal, not an example even.

No ... he was a body. And not a muscled, toned, shaped, manicured body - a wounded body. Look at my hands and my feet, he says. We carry wounds in our body.

Cutting words heard when we were children. Physical violence inflicted that still awakens our fear. Situations that left us broken and bruised. Or bodies wearing thin.

What do we do with wounds?

We cannot hide them. It does not take long in a relationship or a marriage or a church or a group or a college or a flat, any kind of real community, to discover people's wounds.

How we relate to each other has much to do with what we do with our wounds and what others do with theirs.

What we do with our wounds can destroy us and can liberate us, can undermine community and nourish community, can break relationships and build relationships.

Our shared wounds can open us to each other or close us to each other. The hardness of the cricketing commentators digging in to the wounds.

The compassion of the Christian leader, not wallowing in woundedness, but using his experience of wounding to help even those who do the wounding. See my hands and my feet.

Those who do most damage in cars are those powered by testosterone, who imagine themselves invincible. The most destructive communities are those with hard edges and resistant surfaces – as we are learning from some of our law firms.

God speaks through our bodies. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Love became wounds in a body. Our bodies say, pride comes before a fall, as my

parents taught me. We get cocky and trip. We imagine independence and tear a ligament. We think we are right then make a public mistake.

Wounds remind us of our humanity and save us from self-righteousness. Wounds remind us of our need for others and community and God.

We long to be touched in love - sensitively, compassionately, carefully. Which is why the abuse of touch is so damaging because it abuses a holy longing.

Barbara Brown Taylor, US writer and preacher:

“My body is what connects me to all of these other people. Wearing my skin is not a solitary practice but one that brings me into communion with all these other embodied souls. It is what we most have in common with one another. In Christian teaching followers of Jesus are called to honour the bodies of our neighbours as we honour our own.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, murdered by the Nazis at the end of World War Two:

“The Bible directs us to the powerlessness and suffering of God; only a suffering God can help.”

All around us in this church are reminders of our bodies and what they need. Most of all this table of our Lord, the eating table. The table reminds us we need food to live. We receive food to live. We are part of a system of food. The table reminds us we are bodies, flesh and blood, bone and sinew, stomachs. The table signifies our body-life, the body of Christ, what God is making us to be.

“Have you got anything here to eat?” Jesus asked.

It wasn't his self-sufficiency that revealed his presence. It wasn't his independence that revealed his presence. He comes with us to this table as one who hungers with us.

Years ago our church surveyed people who had not participated in worship for some years. One recurring comment was that people imagined themselves not good enough for church. They thought of church people as people who had got their lives together, who had worked things out, who could turn up with well-behaved children, on time and fresh-faced. They least needed, they said, people telling us how to live our lives, expecting us to do this or that, expressing disappointment in who we are. They most needed, they said, the solidarity of humanness.

Leonard Bernstein wrote a mass in memory of John F Kennedy. Toward the end of the work, the priest, richly dressed in splendid liturgical vestments, is lifted up by his people. He towers high above the adoring crowd, carrying a glass chalice. Suddenly, the human pyramid collapses and the priest comes tumbling down. His vestments are ripped off and his glass chalice falls to the ground and is shattered. As he walks slowly through the debris of his former glory, wearing only jeans and a T-shirt, children are heard singing - "Praise, praise, praise."

Suddenly the priest notices the broken chalice. He looks at it for a long time and then, haltingly, he says "I never realised that broken glass could shine so brightly."

Surely, the mystery of my life, your life, our life, our bodies, the body of Christ, wounded bodies. He stood among them and showed them his hands and his feet. "You are witnesses of these things," he said.

KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

growing in courage to live the Jesus way



Knox Church

449 George Street

Dunedin

New Zealand

Ph. (03) 477 0229

www.knoxchurch.net

Kerry Enright: 027 467 5542, minister@knoxchurch.net