

Woundedness and Resurrection

(John 20:19-31)

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Jack Kornfield, a Buddhist teacher and psychiatrist, tells a powerful and moving story of a young man who came to him for counseling. The man was twenty-four years old when bone cancer forced the amputation of one of his legs. When Kornfield began to work with him, the young man was consumed with bitterness and resentment. In one counseling session, the young man drew a picture of his body as a broken vase, with a jagged, black crack running through it. He redrew the crack over and over, grinding his teeth in despair and rage. The young man's grief was so great that it took several years for him to come out of his darkness and to heal. His personal transformation did not really begin until he took up a practice of reaching out for other people who had also suffered severe physical losses. He began to visit cancer patients in the hospital, to be with them in understanding and compassion. The turning point in his life came when he visited a young woman, a singer, who was severely depressed over the loss of both her breasts to cancer. The nurses, to cheer her up, had turned on some lively music on the radio in her room, but the singer lay curled up in her bed, completely silent. The young man tried talking to her, but she responded to nothing. Finally, in desperation to reach her, the young man pulled off his artificial leg and began hopping and dancing around the room in time with the music. The young woman watched him dumb-founded, and finally dissolved into laughter and tears. "Man," she said, "if you can dance, I guess I can sing." After hearing this story, Kornfield showed the young man the picture of himself as the broken vase that he had drawn several years earlier. The young man took the picture and ran his finger along the black jagged crack and said, "You see here? This is where the light comes through." Then he took a yellow crayon and drew rays of light streaming through the crack into the body of the vase. He smiled and said, "Our hearts grow strong at the broken places." [Jack Kornfield, A Path With Heart. New York: Bantam Books, 1993, p. 48]

This story – the story of a dancing one-legged man, the story of a broken pot whose cracks invite in the rays of the sun – is a story of woundedness and resurrection. And it helps us find our way into today's stories from scripture. Because these stories are not just accounts of the resurrection of Jesus after death. They are also accounts of the resurrection of the disciples in life. And they are the stories of the new life that is offered to all of us.

As this story from the Gospel of John opens, the men and women who formed the community around Jesus have suffered a terrible trauma – the unexpected and horrible death of the one who was their leader and their hope. But here's the crucial point: these men and women are not dead themselves, but they have chosen to act as though they are. They have shut themselves up in a tomb of their own making. Huddled inside locked rooms, they have drawn tightly around themselves the dark walls of their own grief and fear and despair.

We, as individuals and as a community, can be so much like those disciples. All too often, the despair or grief of our present situation, of our losses and our wounds, whispers insistently to us that there is no hope, that these bones that are our lives cannot live. And these are the whispers of despair that Thomas has given into in this story. Thomas doesn't doubt that *something* appeared to Mary and the other disciples; he just cannot bring himself to believe that the living, loving, forgiving presence that came to them is actually the same life that he saw nailed to the cross. Thomas' human experience tells him that some things are just too terrible, some people are just too broken and too hurt, for them ever to receive new life.

But in these locked rooms of grief and despair, something extraordinary happens that exceeds all the limits of ordinary human expectations and ordinary human experience. The divine spirit of transformation and of new life enters in. The vision – no: the experienced, living reality -- of new life and new hope appears before these women and men, and breathes its life-giving spirit onto them and into them.

And something equally extraordinary happens to Thomas. He had demanded physical, irrefutable, almost scientific proof of Jesus' reality. But he backs off of this demand and never probes Jesus' wounds – because suddenly he feels no need to. Because he opens his eyes and his heart to what is standing before him: the living, vibrant reality of a dancing, one-legged man. Thomas is touched, and moved, and transformed, by this experience of the risen Christ, the experience of a life that has redeemed by the divine gift of new life, a life that loves and celebrates and reaches out to others in compassion and joy, despite and with his wounds.

Thomas learns, not just with his head, but also with his heart and with his very being, that there is no reality so terrible, no present so bleak, that it cannot be brought back to life in the transformative reality which is God. And Thomas also learns is what it is that is required of us in order to experience this new life, this resurrection of our own lives. And that is faith. It is through faith that we receive new life. And not faith as “belief,” as many English language versions of the Bible unfortunately mistranslate these passages. But rather, faith as trust, faith as openness. Faith, as Marcus Borg puts it, as an open heart. For faith *is* a heart open to giving and receiving love. Faith is openness to the breath-taking possibility that what lies at the very core of existence is a healing and transformative force that shines through the brokenness of our lives and begins ever anew the creation of new life.

But if faith is openness to new life, what relationship does that have to brokenness? Why, in this account, is Jesus resurrected with his wounds? What does that strange reality mean for us?

In the course of experiencing new life, of growing into new life by and in the divine spirit of transformation, many of our wounds are healed, and healed fully. Thanks be to God, the wounds scar over, the scars are replaced with new, living skin, and the scars – both internal and external – eventually disappear. From these wounds, we are fully healed.

But some wounds are too terrible, or too deep, or simply too profoundly formative of the persons that we are today ever to fully disappear. What happens to these wounds in the process of resurrection? What these stories, and the story of the dancing, one-legged young man, tell us is that our wounds themselves are resurrected, our wounds are redeemed. And we are resurrected and redeemed along with them.

Now the original meaning of redemption, as you may recall, referred to a person being purchased out of captivity; a person who was redeemed was literally a person who was freed from slavery. So more broadly speaking, a redeemed person is one who is freed into a new way of life, and is no longer captive to the old.

When we open our lives and our hearts to the transformative power of the divine spirit, our deepest wounds may not be fully healed, but they are transformed. Our wounds and our selves are redeemed. Our wounds are no longer our prison-keepers, and we are no longer enslaved to them. Just like the dancing, one-legged man, we find that our wounds and our suffering become the doors and the windows that open us to God and to the world, and they connect us in love and compassion to our brothers and sisters around us and to all of humankind. Our wounds teach us, in our sorrow and our helplessness, that we are not self-sufficient, but that we need one another. They teach us, in joy and humility, to accept with gratitude the love and

the help that are offered to us. Our wounds also teach us, sometimes almost against our will, to be open to the movements of divine grace in our lives. And they teach us, in compassion, to open our eyes and our hearts and our lives to the woundedness of those around us, so that we may be the bearers of grace and forgiveness and new life to others.

These stories of woundedness and resurrection also have one more lesson to teach us about transformation. New life in God is not a sudden miracle – there's no flick of the magic wand and *presto-change-o*, everything is great. No, resurrection is an ongoing process and a continuing choice. It is the choice to have a heart open to new possibilities, and a life open both to the transformative spirit of God and to the love of our fellow creatures. It is a choice that must be reaffirmed in our hearts and practiced in our lives every day. And it is not always easy. Our locked rooms of anger and resentment, of hurt and despair, can be really difficult places for us to leave. But the closing chapters of the Gospel of John recount the spirit of the risen Christ appearing again and again to the disciples, pushing, prodding, coaxing and loving them toward resurrected life. And just so, the vision of new life appears to us as well, ever and again, breaking into our locked rooms, and beckoning us onward in hope and in love. That vision carries the promise and the assurance that new life awaits us, as individuals and as communities. It is up to us to open our hearts and our lives to it, every week, every day, every moment, so that we and our wounds and our world may be transformed and redeemed.