



Risen with Christ, Our Wounds yet Visible

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Only the Risen Christ can raise us up as His witnesses. United in His life, we can authentically testify of the true wholeness emerging out of our broken lives. His broken body overcame the power of our brokenness. He lives, and His resurrection assures us of new life, a life exceeding the pleasures of sin and the pain of our wounds.

We can only know that life if we face our brokenness. Jesus frees us to do so. For the Risen Christ still bears His wounds. As such, He grants us the freedom to behold our wounds in the light of His Life. The Light reveals and overcomes the darkness of our lives, liberating us to proclaim His power to transform us. Only the Church of the Risen Christ, whose wounds are yet visible, will be able to testify powerfully of real healing. Only that Church will overcome the darkness of our day in regards to gender and sexuality.

This last season of Lent was tough. Gay marriage surfaced in our country, alarming concerned church leaders, and stepping up our call to equip them aright. The battle for truth intensified, and we gave it all we had. All the while I pondered afresh His willingness to be broken for my brokenness. (I was assisted by several viewings of "The Passion", Mel Gibson's amazing account of the crucifixion and the events leading up to it.) I asked the Lord to reveal any wicked way in me. He was faithful. I faced with eyes wide open some weaknesses in my marriage and the ways I had contributed to them.

Easter dawned at last. During the morning church service, God spoke simply to me: "I did not suffer in vain." He invited me to consider the greater power of His Risen life, and the awesome possibilities that awaited me in His victory. The price paid, He called me to consider and partake of the spoils of that victory.

The week after Easter, Annette and I took some time off work. Together we enjoyed the provision of God in our marriage. I delighted in her! Freed from racing around the globe, we partook of the good gift of each other. The beauty of Life prevailed over our familiar weaknesses; rest overcame the weariness of the battle. The Risen Christ shone on us and testified of His goodness to us. Gratitude replaced grouching as I considered how His life in me is far more powerful than my brokenness!

Wounds Without Shame

While reflecting on this with Nick Wise-Rowe, he commented offhandedly on how the Resurrected Jesus is still unashamed to show His wounds. He lives and yet we still can behold His scars, the marks of His dying. Why? I searched the scripture, and found John the Apostle's description of the Glorified Christ as "a Lamb, looking as if it had just been slain" (Rev.5:6). Even in His victory, Jesus testifies of His humiliation.

Perhaps the wounds that remain in the Risen Christ remind us of His suffering. As such, the death marks enhance the value of His rising. His humiliation lends essential contrast to His victory. Without

His wounds, His triumph threatens to become abstract, hollow. His wounds yet visible remind us of what He conquered-the domination of our sin and its deadly consequence.

And we are His witnesses, raised with Him out from the domination of sin and death. And also like Him, traces of our wounds remain. These scars, these marks, these reminders of sin's former domination in our lives, serve a purpose not unlike that of Jesus' wounds.

Yes, they remind us of our suffering. But more than that, these wounds invite us to consider His powerful love that has surpassed our suffering. The Risen Lord has become the stronghold of our lives. His Life now dominates our existence, not dismal, recycled emotion or misdirected desire.

Becoming a Good Gift

Raised in life, our wounds yet visible, we become a gift to others who struggle similarly, often without the Hope of Resurrection.

This involves two crucial realities. First, that His Life has surpassed our suffering, that He in truth has become the stronghold of our lives. Without His Hope alive in our hearts, our gathering together with others becomes deadly. We gather to commiserate; we invite despair and perversion in our midst, not the Presence of the Risen One.

Secondly, in the light of His Resurrection, we who seek to serve others must make peace with our wounds. That means identifying and accepting the vulnerabilities that remain. We can praise Him for the scars and marks, as now they serve to remind us of His greater, all-prevailing love. Our weaknesses do not separate us from His love; they highlight it.

Such acceptance has another purpose. If we cannot make peace with our flaws, we may tend to judge others harshly those who bear similar flaws. We transfer our self-hatred onto them; they become unacceptable to us, a threat that mirrors back to us what we have not yet reckoned with.

God is faithful. As we are raised with Him, our wounds identified and accepted, rich and deep compassion flows from us. I shall always have a heart for the homosexual struggler in our midst. I behold men and women who are vulnerable in that way and I feel what God feels-a profound desire to mediate His Life and so close the gap of their shame and alienation. I long to see them reoriented according to the Father's good will and purpose for their lives.

You see, I was once alienated as they were. I know what it is like to feel like an alien. And I heed Moses' words to the Israelites when he commanded them to "love those who are aliens because you were once aliens in Egypt" (Deut. 10:19). Annette feels the same way about the wives of men struggling with sexual problems. She pours out her heart to them. Having received much, she gives much. Raised with Christ, our wounds yet visible, we become a great gift to those who struggle as we have.

This is precisely how the Church becomes a healing community. We gather with the whole body, alive to the Risen One in our midst. And we dare to reveal our wounds. In every church, silent strugglers are waiting to hear the stories of Christians who can testify of the hope of resurrection, their wounds yet visible. That means we must be as hopeful as we are authentic.

We can thus speak freely about miracles and the mundane process, the leaps forward and the steps back, the joy and the sorrow, the way we like Paul "always carry around in our body the death of Jesus so that His life also may be revealed in our body" (2 Cor.4:10).

Being a Community of Healing

Such a witness is essential to the Church becoming a living, breathing community of healing. Only such a Church can reveal the raised Jesus, His wounds yet visible, to the broken ones. Laws alone will not do it. Nor will a naïve mercy. Only the Church that is authentically being raised up from the toxic ground of our corporate moral decay will have anything meaningful to say to those seeking real answers.

This must begin with us as church leaders. Unless we grasp how profound and real the brokenness is in our land, beginning with ourselves, we will not be able to adequately address the people awaiting release in our midst. It must begin with our lives then extend out corporately.

As I mentioned earlier, I have had the privilege of equipping church leaders as they have sought answers to the homosexual crisis in our midst (gay marriage, etc.). My response? We as leaders must seek to understand the broken same-sex struggler in the light of the greater brokenness in our land, e.g. marital breakups, pornography addiction, and sexual and spiritual abuse. Not to mention the rampant consumerism in the American church that causes us to shy away from "controversy" for fear of losing numbers. We as leaders must first ask the Lord to show us our brokenness and so discover His life.

Raised with Him, we can now reveal our wounds, and make clear paths in our churches where broken ones can be raised similarly, all according to God's glorious image and design for their lives. This must begin with the shepherds. If we repent, He will raise us up from the dead of our striving and addictions, the selves we present to the flock that differ from how we live. Wounds yet visible, we can then proclaim real hope to our people with integrity and authority.

Offering Ourselves

One temptation we may face in this proclamation is to hide our wounds behind priestly garb. The longer we are in Christ, the stronger this temptation becomes. Annette and I are not exempt. We recently received an invitation from a secular TV show that wanted to highlight our ministry and our marriage. This included allowing them to film us in our home. A part of us wanted to deny such an invasion into our privacy, to defend ourselves from intimate questions about our hope and our struggles.

Jesus challenged us. Would we stand in His hope, our wounds yet visible to testify of His way? We submitted to Him (and the film crew). How else will others know the hope, those who doubt that such a marriage could ever make it?

We the Church must offer ourselves to a doubting world. Jesus did. Thomas did not share the other disciples' enthusiasm upon greeting the Risen Christ. The doubter mused: "Unless I see the nail marks in His hands, and put my fingers where the nails were, and put my hand in His side, I will not believe it..." (Jn 20:25). Jesus responded boldly: "Put your fingers here; see my hands. Reach out your hands and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe" (v.27).

Today many doubt. We are bombarded by false images, photos of newlywed gays, beaming on the steps of city halls throughout the land. Many wonder: "What is the true image of God in humanity? Can Jesus really heal broken lives?" God is not discouraged. He is resurrecting His image through broken ones like you and I.

Raised with Him, our wounds yet visible, let us boldly proclaim His story through our lives. May He give us courage to be His witnesses. For the bride. For the world. For such a time as this.

