

SERMON: So I Send You
TEXT: John 20:19-29

They were all locked up in the house, out of fear. John says, “for fear of the Jews,” but one commentator suggested that they might also have been afraid of Jesus. For they had failed him.

We are living in a time when we understand more than ever what it’s like to be locked up in the house out of fear. I don’t think any of us are afraid of Jesus. But we are afraid of getting sick. And we are afraid of the increased potential for spreading a deadly disease. We are not only protecting ourselves. We are protecting others. Those we know and love. And every person with whom we might come into contact.

More than ever, we need Jesus to appear and share the words he shared with his disciples in hiding. “Peace be with you.” Three times within the eleven verses we read, Jesus shares these words. He knows they are afraid. “Peace be with you.” He knows they are confused. “Peace be with you.” He knows they need some reassurance. “Peace be with you.”

After this greeting, the first thing he does is to show them his hands and his side. His wounds. This seems a bit strange to me. I understand the reason he does it. He wants them to know that he is not a ghost. This is really Jesus. The friend they had known and followed for three years. The one who was crucified on the cross. The one whose hands were nailed to the cross. The one who was stabbed in the side by a soldier, to make sure he was dead before they took him down to bury him in the tomb. Personally, I don't need to see the wounds in order to believe. I don't want to see the wounds. I don't want to be reminded of his suffering.

When I was pastoring in Springfield, I led a weekly Bible study which gathered about 6-8 women on a regular basis. One of these women - I'll call her Valerie - was the type who described everything in great detail. From injuries to surgeries to the giant spiders her grandson encountered in Afghanistan. Another woman, who I'll call Jane, was the type who had a very low tolerance for such detail. I don't know that I would call her squeamish, but she often had to change the subject. I sat across the table from her and I could see the discomfort and frustration in her face. She couldn't stand hearing about how long the scar was and how much blood was lost and how the spider was in Valerie's grandson's sleeping bag. She tried to be polite. She tried not to interrupt. She held her tongue for as

long as she could. But then she had to put a stop to it. The other women around the table - including me - were grateful she did, as we had also reached our limit.

So, thanks anyway, Jesus. But we don't want to see your scars. Time out.
Too. Much. Information.

On the other hand, I'm reminded of the words written by the prophet Isaiah:
"Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him
punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our
transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us
peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:4-5)

Sharing our pain and our sorrows with others can be a powerful way for
healing to take place.

You may have heard the term *wounded healer*. It is said to have been coined
by psychologist Carl Jung, who defined a wounded healer as a person who is
compelled to treat psychological or physical illnesses in others because he himself
is similarly wounded. Research has shown that nearly 75% of counselors and

psychotherapists have experienced one or more wounding experiences leading to their career choice. (en.wikipedia.org)

Henri Nouwen was an ordained Catholic priest, a professor of psychology, and author of over 40 books on spirituality and the spiritual life. One of those books, written in the early 1970's, is titled, *The Wounded Healer*. Nouwen developed the concept of a wounded healer as an approach to ministry. It was his contention that ministers must be willing to go beyond their professional role and leave themselves open as fellow human beings with the same wounds and suffering - in the image of Christ. Not only is this an effective way to connect with and heal others, but it also serves to heal the minister.

Jesus showed his wounds to the disciples to connect with them - and all of us - in our humanity. Even as the Son of God, he suffered pain. His wounds were real. And we can trust that he understands our pain, because he has also felt pain. Physical pain and emotional pain. Wounds of the flesh and wounds of the heart. And "by his wounds, we are healed."

In our society, many of us are raised to be strong. To show strength even in times of weakness. When someone asks, “how are you?” the expected answer is, “I’m fine.” Big girls and boys don’t cry. We must always keep a stiff upper lip. And never let them see you sweat. But one of the most effective forms of ministry and healing I’ve seen comes from people who are willing to be vulnerable. People who are willing to show their wounds. Like the risen Jesus did.

Magic Mustard Seeds is a Jewish folktale about a widow whose son died in a tragic accident. The woman was so overcome with grief that no one was able to provide her any comfort. Finally, a friend took her to the house of a holy man where she made a sobbing plea. “Use your powers to bring my son back to life,” she begged. “Surely you are able by prayer or some magic to induce the Almighty to lighten my grief.”

The old man spoke kindly to the woman, “Bring me a mustard seed from a home that has never known sorrow. I will use that seed to remove the pain from your life.”

So, immediately the woman set out in search of the magic mustard seed. "First I will visit the home of a wealthy family," she thought. "Tragedy is less likely to strike them." She approached a beautiful mansion, knocked on the door, and spoke to the woman who greeted her. "I am in search of a home that has never known sorrow. Is this such a place?"

"Never known sorrow!" cried the woman who had answered the door. "You have come to the wrong house." She began to sob as she described all the tragedies that had touched her family. She invited the widow into her home to explain in greater detail what had taken place. The widow remained in that home for many days, listening and caring.

When she left to resume her search, the widow visited a modest home. Her experience was the same. Wherever she traveled, from mansion to hut, she was greeted with tales of sadness and sorrow. Everyone found her a willing and careful listener.

After months of travel, she became so involved with the grief of others that she forgot about her search for the magic mustard seed, never

realizing that it had indeed lightened her own grief, as she had requested of
the holy man. (William R. White, *Stories for Telling, A Treasury for Christian Storytellers*, Augsburg
Publishing House, 1986)

“After Jesus showed them his hands and his side, he said to them again,
‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, **so I send you.**’”

We don’t very often hear that Jesus calls us to be vulnerable, but I believe he
does. At the right times and in the right places, of course. But we are sent to
continue his ministry. We are sent to show our wounds. And to show that new life
is possible after the suffering.

As we do so, may we bring healing and peace to others and to ourselves... to
the glory of God!

AMEN.