

HEALING THE WOUNDS OF THE HEART

I wonder what happened to the younger son that made him want to leave? We are not told these details in the Gospel reading for today. All we are told is that a man had two sons and the younger son wanted his portion of the inheritance immediately and when his father gave him the money, he left.

Why do you think he wanted to leave? Was he tired of measuring up to his older brother? Was he tired of being teased about being too short or too fat or too dumb? Was he tired of being put down, belittled, made to feel he was no good? What wounds did he suffer as a child or a teenager?

When I was growing up I had a friend who was just a neat kid and we had lots of fun together. But he carried some pretty big wounds. His father was an alcoholic and very strict and demanding. His parents fought a lot. Kids at school made fun of him; he was short and stubby, not athletic at all. He was smart, but that isn't something junior high kids admire. He wanted to be tough and he spent years trying to prove how tough he was. He rebelled, dropped out of school, and got into trouble.

At some point we all face the same decision - what will we do with our wounds? However they come, whether through loss or abandonment or abuse, the wounds tempt us to run, to run away from the hurt. Think of the wounds that have pierced your heart. How have you handled them? Have they caused you to run? Are you still running?

Sometimes we literally run away, like the younger son did in today's Gospel reading. He took the money and left town. At other times we don't leave town, we stay put, but the wounds tempt us to run in other ways. Outwardly, we may look like we got it all together, we go to church, read the Bible, do good things. But inside, we run to whatever promises to cover up the pain - alcohol, sexual fantasies, late-night videos filled with violence, sports, gambling, losing ourselves in our work.

The wounds of the heart are devastating. They tell us, "You've got to look out for yourself. You are on your own. No one cares about you." It is a deadly message and we are quick to believe it. Deep down we promise that we will never allow ourselves to be hurt like that again and so we build walls around the hurt. Our wounds have a huge impact on our lives - on our actions, on the decisions we make, on our relationships with other people.

We don't have to keep running, though. That's the message of today's Bible readings. You can stop running! And when you do, God will be there with open arms, ready to embrace you and welcome you home. In fact, even before you stop running, God is reaching out to you, whispering in your ear, inviting you to come home.

God knows the wounds that you carry. God knows how your heart has been pierced. And God wants nothing more than to heal your wounds and bind up your broken heart. He came in Jesus to do that. The ancient prophet declared, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5) Yes, Jesus came to heal you, to take your wounds to the cross, to bury them, and raise you up, healed and whole!

In contrast to what your wounds tell you, God says, "I love you. I want you. I care about you. You are special to me. I know you are hurting. I know you have made mistakes, but I accept you. I want you here with me. I don't want anything to drive you away."

God doesn't stop with that. God goes on to say, "will you let me heal you?" God wants to heal your heart. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," says Jesus. He doesn't force his way in, he asks permission to enter your life. There are rooms in your heart you keep locked up, places where you have been deeply hurt and wounded. He asks permission to enter those rooms to bring healing and wholeness.

The work of Christ in healing the soul is a deep wonder, more amazing than open-heart surgery. When you give him access, he takes the broken parts of your heart in his hands, holds them tenderly and loves them with all his heart. These wounds are often isolated from the love of God. Jesus reconciles the estranged parts of your heart. He draws the wounds, the emotions, the memories, the brokenness, back into the presence of God and bathes them with his love.

Are you tired of running? Are you ready to come home to God? Are you ready to return to the Father who loves you? Open your heart to the Lord. Open your wounded and broken heart and let the Lord heal you and make you whole.

The younger son ran away, but the passionate love of the Father drew him home. God is just as passionately in love with you. "Come home," he says, "come home!"