



CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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## HOW DO I SHARE MY WOUNDS?

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### **Texts:**

**Acts 3:12–15**

When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, “You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified the servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.”

**Luke 24:36b–40**

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet.

Words matter and yet they can also feel so insignificant. Let us pray together in a moment of silence:

*May our prayers be uninterrupted by our own voices. Amen.*

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And the little child, wiping away tears, said: “Papi, I don’t like when you raise your voice to me.” And I had. It was one too many mini-tantrums in a short amount of time and I lost my cool. I rarely raise my voice because I know both my size and my voice can be big and scary to someone so much smaller. In this moment, though, I did become angry and I raised my voice. And then we talked about it and we hugged and I apologized and she apologized. Then we laughed and reminded each other of our love.

To be honest, though, she didn’t make me angry. I was already angry. The day before this, Daunte Wright was killed by a police officer, by a person on the civic payroll, someone sworn to protect the community. I was angry at our society’s continued disregard for Black-bodied lives. An acquaintance from college said this on social media: “As a Black man, it is unnerving knowing every time you leave your house you could be killed for no reason. Your family won’t be compensated. Your reputation will be dragged through the mud after you’re dead. And your killer will be seen as a victim.” His truth makes me feel angry. I was already angry at this unnecessary loss of human life. I was already angry at this film playing on repeat in which Black bodies are broken by state-sanctioned violence. I am angry because my friend and artistic partner is carrying a beautiful little baby boy in her womb, and that baby will one day be a beautiful Black man. We don’t need more crucifixions.

To be more honest though, the killing of Daunte Wright didn't create the anger. I was already mad. I recorded a video for the Racial Justice Initiative's *This I Believe—Racial Justice Is Personal* project, which was released a week ago. (If you haven't seen this video series yet, please do watch your fellow Plymouthites tell their stories. If you don't know how to find it, please contact me and I will help you.) In my video, I said this:

I do not like to be lied to. And I have realized over time—with the help of courageous and insistent teachers—that I feel lied to by the society I was born into. These toxic myths and lies are numerous and insidious and they stink. We give this stench the name of progress, and instead of dealing with it we build new ways to block out the smell. I have been lied to and I dislike being lied to. And then it was revealed to me that I benefit from those lies. My anger boils. . . .

And I go on for another minute.

I hope that my anger doesn't scare you. Despite the false and destructive narratives that we are to be afraid of angry Black people, it is angry white men who have proven themselves far more worthy of our fear. So, I do not wish to present my anger as something to fear, but I do want you to hear it. I need to express it. And I want to remind you it is okay to be angry. It is good to be angry. And if you are not angry, I would like to know why.

I am angry like the disciples were angry. In the passage from Acts that Confirmation student Rowyn read so well, we see an angry Peter. He is full of the kind of language that we use when we feel mad—you handed over, you rejected, you killed. These are not the 'I' statements that we are taught to use in tense moments. Peter is angry and he is yelling in the public square of the Temple in front of crowds. His friend, the person he had dedicated his life to following, was just killed by the state in a highly visible way with crowds of witnesses who seemed to not care. How would you feel?

Your clergy team are talking about stewardship right now, and today we will hold tenderly in our hearts the stewardship of our anger. Our anger is our own. It may be similar to another's, but it is unique to each of us and represents what we feel may be important and sacred. We don't usually get angry unless we care deeply in one way or another. I have named one of my angers to you. What are you angry about? At whom? Where do you feel able to express it? When and why do you hold it back? What do you do when you feel it?

We all get angry; it is central to our very humanity. It is an important part of being a person. It is generally connected to pain—the memory of pain or to avoid pain. Anger is also a normal and important part of any grieving process. We most often associate grief with sadness, but anger is almost always manifest in one way or another. Anger is there to protect us, to keep painful things from reaching us.

Anger comes from woundedness. It is connected to the wounds and scars that we carry with us throughout our lives. Every one of us carries wounds and scars, none of us are immune from life. This influences the ways that we hold relationships, the ways that we stay in community, the ways that we treat our own selves. It is our own scars and continually-healing wounds that root much of our anger. We are reticent to show our scars. We easily pretend that we have no open wounds that need attention and healing. We so often try to hide our pains away, even from our own selves. And then the anger that springs forth might feel surprising or disconnected because we are not connected to the source.

So, how do we remain stewards of our own anger? Now remember, to steward doesn't mean to exert control, but rather to care for and about. We work to identify, understand, and make meaning from our own woundedness. We find ways to share our wounds with those who have earned our trust. In the Luke text read earlier, Jesus showed his wounds on his hands and feet. He didn't show them to everyone, but he did share with his close friends and companions. These wounds were his now; we can't pretend that they didn't exist.

What wounds do you carry? What scars do you hide away? With whom can you share your wounds so that you do not try to heal them alone? It is my firm belief that, whatever your wounds may be, there is someone out there who will love you and feed you, just like Jesus' friends did when he showed them the holes in his body. Whatever your wounds may be, God has always and will always love you abundantly. Showing our wounds to someone—or even to ourselves—can feel overwhelming at times and possibly even terrifying. But if we are to become stewards of our anger, we must do this inquisitive and compassionate work on our own selves.

But that is only half of this stewardship. Anger is a reaction, and not only must we know where it comes from but we also must know where it goes. What does your anger create? Is it destructive or constructive? And remember, we don't get to steward other people's anger, only our own. Culturally, we often see anger as being negative. Recently someone asked me how I was doing, and I said that I was feeling angry. They responded, "I'm sorry." We do not need to be sorry for our emotions, but we do need to ask for forgiveness when they hurt others. But we can try and use them for betterment and change. Anger is a source of incredible energy and motivation.

The Dalai Lama reminds us that "suffering should make us angry." He goes on to say, "This type of anger moves us toward a wrathful compassion to take action to end suffering." Our anger can participate in the cessation of suffering. It is not our only tool, but it can certainly get us moving. Remember that story in Acts that we talked about earlier? When Peter got angry at the crowds in the public square? The story right before that, the spark of his anger, is that the disciples came across a person outside the gates who was born lame and was asking for money. They healed him. The anger they were carrying motivated them to act in healing, to see someone as a whole human being and help them. These disciples were angry at the murder of their friend, and their response was to show compassion and love for a person who had spent his life being cast away. They went to Galilee to witness a resurrection, as DeWayne preached. Just like in the aftermath of the killings of George Floyd and Daunte Wright, we see incredible displays of love to the marginalized and most affected parts of our communities. Volunteers from everywhere come together to deliver food and diapers, art and prayers, companionship and a safety net. We can use our anger to create spaces of healing.

To do this we need to return to our own internal sources. Are we acting out of hatred or compassion? The Dalai Lama again says: "Hatred expressed as anger will lead to destructive action, compassion expressed as anger leads to positive change." What is your internal motivation behind your anger? This goes back to the wounds and scars that we all hold. Do we hold our wounds with compassionate tenderness or grip them tightly with hatred? What would it take to treat other people's woundedness with love instead of judgment?

I am angry at our systems of violence and the lies that try to justify them. I promise you that I am never expecting that my feelings of anger need to become your feelings, but I do wonder if these systems of violence do not make you angry, why not?

Our emotions can be an incredible source of energy. Like Peter, our anger can bring us to act in ways of healing. But first, like Jesus, we must recognize, identify and show our wounds to those who have earned our trust. Our own scars are the roots of our anger, and if we are to become stewards of our anger—and it is vital to remember we can only be stewards of our own anger; other people's anger is theirs to steward—we must also hold tenderly and not hide away our pains. If we are to be stewards of our anger we must continue to practice a cultivation of compassion over hatred. If we are to be stewards of our anger, we cannot do it alone. May we, each of us and as a community, use our individual and collective wounds to direct our anger to healing and not more wounds. May we steward our angers together to breathe into being the world that God is asking us to create. May we live it.