

## **“The Road Back to You: Core Wounds and the Work of God”**

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*I just want to say something about last Sunday . . . WOW! It was a big and blustery Sunday, but it was a good one, and I don't know about you, but I'll remember it forever! Thank you again to everyone who made it such a grand day in the history of our church and city. And I also want to say how grateful I am that Rev. Stephanie Kendell is with us today. We had such a wonderful ordination service for her yesterday and we are so proud of her today!*

*I want to shift into summer mode this morning, and I am excited about what we have planned. Laura and I are going to do a tag-team sermon series this summer that we've titled: “The Road Back to You.” And that means a couple of things . . . the word religion literally means to bind back together. The word religion and the word ligament share the same derivation. It's the idea that any experience that brings us back to our true self, our deepest self, is a religious experience.*

*God is not something out there, like a satellite orbiting the earth. God is not out there, as if something separate and apart from our humanity. Jesus said it best when he said: “The kingdom of God is within you.” And that means anytime we attend to our mental health, or we pay attention to the richness of our psychological life, or any time we undertake a spiritual journey, we are in the territory of God. In fact, I would argue that you cannot not have a spiritual journey. God is that close to our experience. And so we can either pay attention to it or not, but in the end, we're all on a journey.*

*And so this morning I want to offer a concept for you to consider and it's the concept of core wounds. Core. Wounds. The idea is that we all enter the world whole and good and pristine, but at some point as we emerge from our childhood, we discover that we have been wounded.*

*Now, some of us were really wounded in our childhood. Seriously wounded. And that's tragic. It might be severe neglect or abuse. And one of the great justice issues of our time is to make sure every single child has at least a chance for a whole and happy life. Others of us were wounded in a less severe way. Nevertheless, and this is important to understand, every human being has a set of core wounds, and these wounds keep getting triggered or poked throughout our adult life, and for many of us, these wounds create an enormous amount of pain.*

*Or they get us into a lot of trouble, because we do all kinds of ridiculous things when we're wounded. Or these wounds get in the way of our relationships, including our primary relationships with those in our families. I'm talking about core wounds. You know you have a core wound when you keep creating some of the same dynamics over and over again in your life. And what most therapists will tell you is that in marriages, it is the same core fight that keeps happening for years and years. It all goes back to the idea of a core wound.*

*Let me try to explain what I'm talking about, and I might as well do it in a personal way. I loved my mother. My mother loved me. I want to make that clear. My mother was in the top ten percent of the world's good mothers. Nevertheless, my mother wounded me when I was a little boy. And so did my*

*father, but that's for another sermon. My mother didn't wound me on purpose. She never tried to hurt me, and certainly she was never abusive toward me. No.*

*But she herself was wounded in certain ways. And so she did the best she could as a good mother and as a wounded human being. I then entered my adulthood and I had children, and of course – guess what? – I wounded them! And now my son has a child, and another on the way this summer, and as much as I love my sweet Caroline, who will be in first grade this fall, she too will be wounded by life. In other words, wounding is the circle of life that keeps on giving. (Don't get depressed yet! I'm just getting started!) Wounds are part of life.*

*But here's what I mean in a specific way . . . my mother was always busy. Very busy. She was always doing laundry. And always cleaning the house. And always folding clothes. And always getting ready to go to her job. And always fixing food. And always cleaning up dishes. And always getting me ready to do this and do that.*

*She was busy and in a hurry and lived most of her life rushing from one thing to another. I can still hear her walking through the house on a typical day, and she didn't just walk in the house, she almost ran from room to room. To this day if I hear someone walking quickly on hardwood floors in a house, it creates a little trauma for me. A core wound happened.*

*Now, you may think, what's the big deal? Well, in a way it's not that big of deal . . . on the other hand as a little boy . . . five years old . . . blonde hair and blue eyes . . . an adorable smile (I might add) . . . and enjoying being a kindergartener . . . I wanted my mother to pay attention to me, to play with me, to be soft and gentle and nurturing with me.*

*I wanted the goodness of her spirit. The beauty of her body. I wanted to be next to her and with her and enjoy her. And she was with me. A good bit of the time she was with me. But a lot of the time she was not present. She was too busy. Busy rushing and working and hurrying from one thing to another. That wounded me. I don't blame her. But it wounded me at an unconscious level.*

*It's been a core wound I've carried my entire adult life. It's a wound of feeling neglected or abandoned or not valued. It's a wound that feels like I don't matter or I'm not taken seriously or I'm not fully embraced. Did my mother abandon me? Of course not! But core wounds are not rational. You can tell when you have a core wound, because when it gets poked, you are feeling the same kind of pain you felt 20 or 30 years ago.*

*And so what that means for me . . . and this is just a little thing . . . but if I send someone an email . . . and then I don't hear back from them in a timely way . . . every now and then a little alarm goes off inside my soul . . . and the person could be busy, or maybe out of town, or maybe their computer is broken, it doesn't matter, my core wound gets poked and suddenly I am that wounded five-year-old little boy wondering why his mommy is so busy and why she doesn't have time for him.*

*I feel hurt and angry and confused as a human being. I feel badly about myself as a human being. Now, it's nothing more than an unanswered email, for goodness sake, but it pokes the core wound. Or if I hear of a friend having a party, but I don't get invited, suddenly that core wound gets poked. Now, I don't even want to go to the party. I don't really like parties. I would much prefer to stay home. I*

*just want to know that I was thought of, invited and taken into account when they made the guest list! Does it make sense? Of course not! But that's what a core wound does to us. It's deep inside the psyche.*

*Now, does this sound ridiculous to you? Well, there's a reason for that. It is ridiculous! But core wounds are like that. You forget an important anniversary, and your spouse or partner is hurt. Why? It's not about the gift. (Well, maybe it's a little bit about the gift.) But the hurt comes from that place of a wounded child who at some point felt discounted by a family, or didn't feel worthy of a mother's love, or who wasn't given the right amount of attention as a child.*

*Or you're a woman, sitting in a meeting, and a man just keeps explaining and explaining and explaining, and you sit there and you get madder and madder or you start feeling worse and worse about yourself. Why? It's because that goes back to being wounded as a little girl, perhaps by a domineering father or a mother who doted more on the older brother and you just feel less-than. It's an awful feeling to feel less-than. That's a core wound.*

*Here's how you know you have hit the mother lode of a core wound – A little thing happens, a stupid little thing, a small sleight, a small neglect, a small criticism, but suddenly you're taking the express elevator of emotion all the way up to the penthouse! It's a complete overreaction – but it's real – because a core wound has been irritated.*

*So, what does God have to do with any of this? Well, I come at this from the perspective that Christ wants to help us find our way home. Home to ourselves. And if we can come home to ourselves – perhaps not perfectly – but at least truly come home to ourselves – and become a little more comfortable in our own skin – healing can begin to happen. We make peace with ourselves. We make peace with others. We make peace with those parts of our lives that vex us and that seem so unfair. And what I find is that the more I am home within myself, the better human being I am to everyone around me.*

*And so Christ becomes a kind of touchstone for me. When I focus on his presence it helps me realign my inner thoughts and feelings. When I pause and pray, or when I merely contemplate that I am loved by God – completely / utterly / unconditionally – it's okay for someone not to reply to my email. In fact, it looks so silly after I pause and allow divine love to shine on the situation. When I can trust that God loves me and accepts me, it doesn't really matter if I get invited to the party. (I didn't want to go in the first place!) Divine love provides healing to the core wounds of life.*

*Now, this may not be true for you, but I think it's true for most of us . . . most of us carry the same wound within us, and we may try to change the cast of characters around us, but the core wound just keeps troubling us until we face it with honesty and find some healing for it. I'm going to tell you first hand . . . you can have a partner in a marriage, and you can go on and find another companion, but if you don't face your wounds, and take some responsibility for them, the wounds just keep traveling with you.*

*Or as the old Ziggy cartoon used to say: "The problem with life is that everywhere I go, there I am."*

*If we're lucky, we'll learn a little something about ourselves so we don't keep inflicting our wounds upon our spouse or kids or fellow church members or friends. My hope this summer is that you'll allow that inner presence of Christ to touch some of your core wounds.*

*Our reading today from Matthew reminds us that if we will ask God for healing, God will respond with just the right gift, the right touch, and the right insight we need to be more whole human beings. What is your core wound today? What is the argument that keeps happening in your family or marriage? What is that terrible feeling that keeps rushing in like a storm? These are the soul questions we need to ask. Maybe not every day. But we need to ask them every now and then.*

*I celebrate today that there is no wound beyond the touch of God's love. But just to make sure . . . if you're having a party this summer . . . please invite me . . . and I promise not to show up! I love you all. Let's love one another. And let's do a little soul work together this summer. Amen.*