



25 Main Street, P.O. Box 61, Grand Bend, Ontario N0M 1T0 * (519) 238-2402
huronshoresunitedchurch@gmail.com * www.huronshoresunitedchurch.com

30 June, 2020

The Wounded Healer

"My help comes from God, the maker of heaven and earth." Psalm 121:2

Dear Ones,

Have you ever found yourself in a situation and thought, "How on earth did I end up here???"
Welcome to my world! I am about to begin a month of medical leave from Huron Shores – actually, from ministry itself. For the first time in 20 years I won't be anyone's minister.

When I was ordained I knelt before the leadership of the church, while my supporters laid hands on my head, and special words were spoken. I was "set apart for the ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care." Set apart. My journey had brought me to that special moment where, although still part of the body of Christ, the church, I was going to move to a different place within it. Leadership. Mentoring. Preaching and proclaiming the gospel. The same – but different.

And I have loved my ministry. I have loved every minute, even the hard ones. It has become so seamlessly a part of me that I have not known where the "minister" part ended and the "me" part started. They were continuous.

Until now. At some point last week I came to the realization that I just can't function right now. It was quite sudden, and of course it is tied up both with the pandemic, and my father's continuing health struggles. A crisis in his condition led to a breakdown in me.

Anyone who has had a breakdown will be able to tell you that it is like an out-of-body experience. You have a brain. But it won't work. You have skills, but you can't use them. You have competencies – or used to – but they are unaccountably gone. It is like borrowing someone else's body and trying to make it work for you. It just doesn't. I am now under a doctor's care, and being well supported not only by our own Council, but also by Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council, through their staff.

The great Dutch-American theologian, Henri Nouwen, wrote a book called *The Wounded Healer*.¹ In it, he talks beautifully about how the minister's weakness and vulnerability are the true gifts for leadership:

Who can save a child from a burning house without taking the risk of being hurt by the flames? Who can listen to a story of loneliness and despair without taking the risk of experiencing similar pains in their own heart and even losing their precious peace of mind? In short, "who can take away suffering without entering it?"

Well, I'm in it now!

¹ Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*, Second edition. Toronto: Image Doubleday, 1972 and 2010), p. 78.

I called The Rev. Kevin Steeper, who is sort of like the minister to ministers in our area. After we had talked a while he reminded me that sometimes we have to allow the body of Christ to care for us. And this is true as much of ministers as of anyone else. I was struggling with letting everyone down, and he was saying – let us care for you. It is our vocation now.

So for the next couple of months (medical leave will be followed by holiday leave) until August 17 I am not your minister. Or anyone's minister. Or even a minister at all. I am not "set apart" any longer. I am your sister-kin. A member of the body of Christ – maybe a fragile and vulnerable member, but still attached, through the grace of God.

I hope to be able to join with you for worship, because that is where all of us members of the body get and stay connected. Taking strength from your strength. And courage from your courage. And hope from your hope.

One last thing. While on the phone, Rev. Kevin asked if he could read scripture with me and offer a prayer. I was so grateful! And then I heard words which only the Holy Spirit could have guided him towards, and knew that I was in God's hands:

I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
*My help comes from God,
the Maker of heaven and earth.*

God will not let your foot slip—
The one who watches over you will not slumber;
indeed, the one who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

God watches over you—
God is your shade at your right hand;
the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.

God will keep you from all harm—
God will watch over your life;
God will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.

Psalms 121

Grace to you, and peace.

Kate