



## Gaudete Sunday/Advent 3



### Lectionary Readings:

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Isaiah 12:2-6

Philippians 4:4-7

**Luke 3:7-18**

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**WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA**

**SATURDAY**

For Luke, primary integrity is shown in your relationship with money. Note the financial focus in the instructions to both Tax Collectors and Soldiers:

*Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him,*

*“Teacher, what should we do?” He said to them, “Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.”*

*Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what should we do?” He said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages.”*

Luke’s gospel is written forty years after the events it is describing. For the writer, the events being foretold in the mouth of John the Baptist have already occurred: Jerusalem is sacked. And what will be left in this? People who support people, people who are not rich, but who are good to each other while recovering from the ravages of war.

This is less about conflict resolution, and more about the kinds of behaviors that will keep people alive in the aftermath of conflict, or the kinds of practices to help us survive conflict. As a *Gaudete*, it is not cheery, but it is true and is the kind of civic reciprocity that will keep us alive long enough to form the joy of human community together.

*Last week I got caught up in ‘historical background’ of the Scriptures. Today, the above, is short.*

### **STORY.**

**Loving costs a lot, but not loving always costs more.**

"Does it hurt?" the Rabbit asked the Skin Horse

(about "becoming real").

"Oh yes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful.

"Sometimes it hurts a lot. But when you are real, you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," the Rabbit asked, "or bit by bit?"

"It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse.

"You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, **because**

**once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."** (The Velveteen Rabbit)

Craig and Irene Morrison, in their late 80s, are the heart and soul of *Still Mine*, a lovely film with great North Atlantic scenery. Living outside the village of St. Martins in New Brunswick, Canada, they are keenly aware that after spending 61 years together and raising seven children, their time is running out.

Trouble begins when Craig decides it is time for them to downsize, to abandon the sprawling farmhouse in which they raised their children. To something more suitable for Irene, whose Alzheimer's is getting worse.

Craig announces his intentions of building the new home himself--only to be met

with bewilderment. And his children doing their best to stop him. "Isn't it time for a retirement home?" he is asked.

Unfortunately, in the years since Craig built his previous home, regulations have proliferated, as has the willingness of government officials to enforce them. So, when one particularly dogged bureaucrat gets wind of Craig's project, he does everything in his power to shut it down.

From generations of shipbuilders, Craig knows wood; and he knows his wife, so he doesn't need anyone else telling him how to do things. This tough-mindedness also adds emotion and power to the film's best scene, in which Craig runs his hand over a large pine dining table, worn and scratched after years of use and abuse.

"Do you remember when I built our dining room table?" he says to Irene.

"It was on the saw horses for so many years I'd given up. My Father helped me mill the boards. It didn't help when Ruth spilled ink. I wasn't that upset; you were table proud back then. A very nice piece of carpentry. First few years, every nick that table absorbed, I took it personally, it's all I could see. Scratch from a skate blade, a ghost of handwriting pressed through a single piece of paper.

There were a lot of times I regretted not making the table out of oak. But as the years went by and **the scars added up, the imperfection turned that table into something else.** Because that's the thing about pine; it holds a lot of

memories."

As he talks, his hand continues to touch the table surface, his face now part tenderness, part pride, part gentleness hewn from stories and memories.

What a strange web we weave.

We hate (well, let's just say we are downright uncomfortable with) our "brokenness." Our woundedness. Our imperfections. You know, those parts of our self (just like that pine table) that are flawed, skewed, damaged, beat up, wearing the marks of a full life... that feel not quite "together."

I guess if we 'fess

up, "woundedness" is the curse of ordinary folk. For the rest of us (the educated and mature and enlightened), we can "get a handle" on this, "figure it out" or somehow "rise above." Lord knows there are plenty of people who offer us solutions and secrets and illumination. (For a small donation, of course.)

But what if?

**What if weakness, woundedness, brokenness is not a "fixable problem,"**

**but an opportunity for grace, and love, and passion, and ministry?**

We're inundated in a world where everyone wants the quick fix, or the "key," or the five steps, so it's a good day when you realize that arrival isn't everything. We live in a world that shows deference, and gives better press, to whatever is strong (or dominant, or powerful, or influential). (I don't remember, was there ever a TV show called "The Lifestyles

of the Poor in Spirit?")

And yet. Irvin Yalom reminds us, "Only the wounded healer can truly heal."

In our modern lexicon,

"wounded healer" is some kind of an oxymoron. And yet. What if it is enough to give this self... to give a call when someone is lonely, or buy a dinner when someone needs a friend, or stick by someone when they're down, or celebrate with someone when they're up, or become a haven for someone when they feel disenfranchised.

We too easily assume that woundedness labels us. (I've heard people say pejoratively, "You know, they're very wounded.")

The problem is this; whatever we label, we dismiss. And we don't welcome the gift or find value in the wound.

So, this is a **paradigm shift**. The wound is real, but it is not an impairment.

Let's be clear: we're not playing make-believe or posturing for pity. We are taking a necessary pause. To embrace this sacrament. This part of my life scarred by becoming real (our woundedness).

**Where gratitude wells up and invites tears of wholehearted gladness. Where gratitude allows me to enter into a life where I wholeheartedly get loose and shabby in the joints.**

Yes. I can tell you that this week I needed to hold my own wounds gently as a sacrament. Knowing that in the holding there is healing, and the permission to spill redemption to those around me.

Many of us live under the illusion that some "expert" has

created a life to "die for," or to be emulated. Well, if that's the case, knock yourself out, but just remember that there's no one to complain to when you find out that, in the end, you—yes, you, the flawed and broken you—can be a pretty trustworthy guide on this expedition we call life.

Here's the deal: When our wounds cease to be a source of shame, and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers.

I found solace watching George HW Bush's funeral. A reminder of the difference between resume virtues, and eulogy virtues. His were the later... Kind. Gentle. Courageous. Principled. Gentlemanly. Dignified.

### **Quote for your week...**

Nobody escapes being wounded. We all are wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. The main question is not "How can we hide our wounds?" So, we don't have to be embarrassed, but "How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?" -

**-Henri Nouwen**



Annette will play at First United Church of Christ, Richmond on December 23.