# SERMON SERIES: BY HIS WOUNDS

# “Wounded By Abandonment”

Ash Wednesday

## *Isaiah 53:1*

*Jeremiah 17:13-14*

Tonight we begin the journey of Lent, one we’ve taken many times before. It’s not as exciting as Advent nor as brief as Pentecost. It’s a long, hard season in the church’s life that takes us to places we’d rather not revisit, and forces us to look deeply inward every step of the way. Tonight also marks the launch of our Lenten sermon series. It’s called “By His Wounds,” and each week we’re going to explore different ways in which Jesus was hurt and wounded on his road to the cross. We’ll find that they are the same ways in which you and I are hurt and wounded as well. Each message will center on a verse from Isaiah 53:1-7, a chapter that’s often referred to as “The Suffering Servant.” We’ll use a second Scripture reading to look at specific kinds of woundedness.

In Isaiah 52, God promised to deliver Israel from their alienation from him, so that they could become his servants in the world. In chapter 53, God told them the means by which he would effect that deliverance: through a suffering servant. *Who has believed our message? To whom has the Lord revealed his powerful arm?*

Who’d ever heard of such a thing? Certainly not the nations around Israel. As for Israel herself, she’d seen some of God’s mightiest miracles and acts of deliverance. And yet, *Who has believed our message?* Who could believe that when the arm of the LORD delivered his people, it would look like a lowly, humble servant?

Like one unnoticed and unimpressive.

Like Jesus Christ.

Israel had strayed from God’s commands. She had allied herself with other nations for protection and power. She’d tolerated the worship of false gods. There was little justice in the courts and the poor were routinely exploited. God’s chosen people had pushed him aside. Sadly, it wouldn’t be the last time. Israel would fall away again and again. They’d turn from fresh, living water to mud puddles. They’d trust in their strength of arms rather than God. They’d assume that God wasn’t paying attention so they could do whatever they wanted.

***Sounds a lot like our country today, doesn’t it?***

Jeremiah exclaimed *13O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who turn away from you will be disgraced. They will be buried in the dust of the earth, for they have abandoned the Lord, the fountain of living water. 14O Lord, if you heal me, I will be truly healed; if you save me, I will be truly saved. My praises are for you alone.*

 Israel drifted away from God more times than we can count. You and I have drifted away from God more times than we can count. Jeremiah said…*they have abandoned the Lord.* And each time that Israel abandoned God, they wounded him. Israel said that her way was better―that she knew more than God―that he wasn’t important. And like a heartbroken parent, God watched his beloved willingly reject him. Like the Prodigal Son who demanded his share of the farm and disappeared into a life of sin, God had to let Israel suffer the consequences of her decisions.

 Tonight, we come before God in the same way that Israel did when those consequences finally caught up with her―the way the Prodigal Son did when he realized how wretched his life had become. God has been wounded by our abandonment. Like Israel, we too have put God in a corner. We’ve said “Hey, I can do this on my own, thanks.” We’ve ignored his Word when it was convenient, his commands when they didn’t line up with what we wanted.

 ***Most of us probably haven’t had to experience being abandoned by someone we love. Some of us have, and we know the anguish and suffering it brings.***  ***Being abandoned is a frightful, painful experience. You’re surrounded by relentless thoughts: Why? What did I do? What could I have done differently? What’s wrong with me? Am I still loved? Was I ever loved?*** Now stop and consider that God asks those same questions when we abandon him.

 ***Why? What did I do to make them turn away? What could I have done differently? What’s wrong with me that I’m not enough for them? Am I still loved by him? Was I ever loved by her?***

 Ash Wednesday marks not only the beginning of Lent; it’s a time when we stop our frenzied running and doing, and take time to assess the condition of our souls. We talked about this on Sunday. How much is your soul worth? What else can compare to it? How is it with your soul this night?

 It’s time to recognize the ways in which we’ve wounded God by abandoning him, the ways in which we’ve said he isn’t sufficient or good enough for us. That’s what Ash Wednesday is for. We begin the Lenten journey by confessing and repenting of our sins―all the ways in which we’ve wounded God―humbling ourselves before him and seeking his mercy.

 Jeremiah also said *14O Lord, if you heal me, I will be truly healed; if you save me, I will be truly saved. My praises are for you alone.* Our God is gracious and long suffering. He waits for his children to come home, whether from a far country or from the depths of our own hearts and minds. He’s promised to heal and restore us, to make our lives *“…brighter than the noonday [sun, so that]…even darkness will be as bright as morning”* (Job 11:17). All we must do is recognize where we have abandoned God and repent.

 Tonight, the ashes we use symbolize the transience of this life. They are symbols of our mortality. But they also mark us as those who have turned from our old, sinful ways, and embraced a new life. They represent the ways we have wounded God by abandoning him, and his fierce love that draws us back to himself. Prepare your hearts. Cleanse your souls. Confess and repent, and be saved. Amen.