

Good morning! Thank you so much for having me in the pulpit today as we try to tackle this terrible truth of trauma. And thank you so much to Phil for so vulnerably and powerfully sharing your own story on this topic. That is a difficult thing to do, especially as most of us like to hide those parts of ourselves.

We live in a traumatized world. We know this. We study the history of humanity in our classrooms. We look at the news every day on our devices. And we each have lived through or at least witnessed the unimaginable at some point in our lives.

However, some of us, like Phil and so many others, go on to carry the residue of trauma in the form of mental health challenges.

So this leads to the question, "Is everyone traumatized?" Yes and no. Yes, we all certainly experience some form of trauma in our lives—all we have to do is look at the collective trauma of the pandemic we have all just lived through. However, only in some does trauma lead to or exacerbate more serious mental health challenges that may need clinical treatment. 13 million people experience PTSD in a given year and this is just one form of the lingering manifestation of trauma.

Now, we don't often like to talk about trauma. It hurts and we may not even have the words to describe it. We are not patient with trauma or the residue of trauma. We want it just to end and be done with. We want to move past it and even forget it. We humans are extremely good at jumping too quickly over trauma in order to talk about healing and hope—to feel comfortable again. However, when we do not

truly surface and face our traumatic experiences we cannot move into authentic healing, and I argue, even authentic praise of our risen Christ, for we have not truly known him.

So why do we need to openly talk about it in the church? The church must talk about trauma for two main reasons. First, as our scripture passage alludes to, trauma is at the center of the Christian story. Jesus was nailed to a cross and left to die. Jesus suffered in an unimaginable way. Furthermore, and perhaps most curious and compelling—as we also read in our passage from John, Jesus still carries the marks of his wounds even in resurrection.

Second, even from his woundedness, Jesus sends us on the same mission as his—that with the help of the Holy Spirit we may work to vanquish the sins of the world. We are called to work against those experiences, ideas, and structures that cause trauma in each other and our world. We are all called to be healers.

So what exactly do I mean when I talk about “trauma?” There are many varying definitions of trauma, but here is what *I* mean: Trauma is a distinctive form of suffering that disrupts 3 particular experiences: body, word, and time.

So first—our bodies. Trauma is not just psychological. Trauma is a full body experience. Physiologically, trauma is your body’s protective response to an event. Your body may respond in different ways that we typically think of as fight or flight, but can also include freeze or fawn—fawn meaning that one gives in to the trauma

by trying to please or apologize to an abuser. Everyone's body responds in these ways all the time to regular threats and stressors. However, when one experiences trauma, the body keeps responding. Trauma dysregulates the body and its necessary functions over and over and over—even long after a traumatic experience has occurred. Thus, "trauma" is not one event or experience; it is also what lives on in our bodies. For this reason, many doctors, psychologists, and trauma theologians believe that trauma must also be worked out through the body—that even talk therapy may not be enough. This can include breathing practices, prayer, and lament, and even more physical activity, such as yoga and tai chi.

In similar ways, trauma also affects our words—meaning language production. Trauma can be unspeakable. Sometimes a traumatic experience is so disruptive that one cannot even assign language to talk about it. It is unspeakable. Thank God this is one reason we have art and dance and music—to express unspeakable pain.

Finally, trauma disrupts *time*—and this is where I really want us to focus today.

We often have the idea that time will ultimately make trauma go away. But, remember, that's not how trauma works. This is what makes trauma distinct from other forms of suffering. Trauma breaks time—there will always be a distinct before and after a traumatic experience or event. And trauma doesn't get melded *into* time, meaning that one is not able to live and interact with the world the same way as before. Trauma disrupts time. We see this *very* clearly in those who, like Phil, experience PTSD. When someone with PTSD is triggered, it is not like experiencing

a regular memory—rather, the person’s mind is transported to the place and time the traumatic experience occurred. Time isn’t linear anymore. Time jumps around, making it difficult to move and act in the world of linear time as one did before.

Because of this traumatic residue, we can see that life does not necessarily overcome death in the way we typically view the Christian narrative. I have a hard time with that. Rather, as trauma theologian Shelly Rambo puts it, in the experience of trauma, “death haunts life.”

This happens *even* in the most triumphant story in Christian scripture—Jesus’ resurrection. The scripture that Nate read for us details that the resurrected Jesus showed his disciples the wounds on his hands and his side. But he is resurrected at this point! Shouldn’t he be fully healed and transformed into some image of bodily wholeness? This is how we so often think of resurrection—both Jesus’ and our own. Our liturgies and hymns are full of it. “The lame will walk, and the blind will see!” But here in this passage, Jesus offers us a more nuanced, and I think profoundly hopeful, vision of healing.

Just as the study of trauma shows, we will always carry some residue of traumatic experiences. Again, in this way, “trauma” is not a single event or experience that has a clean endpoint. And that makes *healing* so frustrating. How can I heal if I can never lose this pain, this disease—it may sound bleak and unhelpful.

But Jesus shows us its not. Jesus shows us that healing is more complex than we sometimes want it to be. Jesus shows us that we *can* be healed, that we can be our whole envisioned selves made in the image of God even as we continue to show signs of our pain.

And this is such a nuance. This is such a nuanced, yet I think, *crucial* understanding of the resurrection. The ultimate hope of our faith is that we can experience healing even as we carry the marks of our wounds. Perhaps these wounds remain open for a long time, but they can, with psychological, physical, and spiritual help, eventually turn into scars. The “after” of trauma certainly means that we are forever changed, but that does not mean we cannot be healed. Death will certainly continue to haunt life, but the truth of resurrection is that we can see our wounds and show our wounds and yet still be healed and whole. This is what Phil has shown us in his testimony today. In fact, as Jesus shows us, authentic resurrection, authentic healing, perhaps *only* occurs when our wounds are surfaced.

Furthermore, the story and the promise of hope doesn't even end there. At the end of our passage from today, the resurrected Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on his disciples and says, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” The work of resurrection is not just a supernatural event between God and Jesus. The work of resurrection is not just something that happens after a literal point of death—Jesus’ or our own. Rather, we are swept up in the resurrection *here and now*. We are called to, with the help and strength of the Holy Spirit, also to heal the

traumas of the world. We have been commissioned by Jesus to expose the lies and break down the structures that cause communal trauma. We have been commissioned by Jesus to be a healing presence for each other as we experience trauma and move into the afterlife of trauma. With the help of each other and the Holy Spirit, we can live a life not just *after*, but *beyond* trauma that does not ignore or vanish the wounds, but rather integrates them into our bodies, words, and time in *new* ways so that in the disruption the hope of new life bursts forth. That is the hope and truth of the resurrection. This is the recognition that it is not in spite of carrying the marks of our trauma, but *because* we continue to carry the marks of our wounds, that we are able to truly heal and offer that healing to each other, our communities, and the world. Amen.