

“Radical Forgiveness”

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Holiday UCC, Florida
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Ezek. 18:19-27

Mark 2:1-12

Luke 4:16-20

‘Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness
they have committed and do what is lawful and right,
they shall save their life.’ Ezek. 18:27

Let us pray...O God,
Teach us to forgive just as we have been forgiven
so that we might be truly healed. Amen

Seems like we really have a hard time remembering that forgiveness
is possible and accessible.

We do a very good job convincing ourselves that we cannot undo
what has been done – which of course we can’t.

But that often means inner turmoil
which can be expressed as physical ailments.

The psychosomatic connection of body and mind
has a third component – spirit.

And the nature of healing is about spirit, then body and mind.

The following is an excerpt of Corrie ten Boom’s book,

The Hiding Place, recounting her ordeal

at a German concentration camp during WWII.

Corrie and her older sister, Betsie, were standing with other prisoners
for roll call, when they witnessed a retarded girl being punished.

‘It was always more terrible when one of these innocent ones
were beaten.

Still the *Aufseherin* continued to whip her.

It was the guard we had nicknamed “The Snake”
because of the shiny dress she wore.

I could see it now beneath her long wool cape,
glittering in the light of the lampas she raised her arm.

I was grateful when the screaming girl at last lay still on the cinder street.

“Betsie,” I whispered when ...The Snake was far enough away,
“what can we do for these people? Afterward I mean.

Can’t we make a home for them
and care for them and love them?”

[Betsie answered,]

“Corrie, I pray every day that we will be allowed to do this!
To show them that love is greater!”

Willard, p.2

And it wasn't until I was gathering twigs later in the morning
that I realized that I had been thinking of the feeble-minded,
and Betsie of their persecutors.' [ten Boom, p.190]

This passage provides a powerful insight as to what forgiveness
can mean for the sake of our world as well as our own lives.
If anyone can be forgiven, then this is characterized
as a 'radical forgiveness' that goes beyond retribution
to rehabilitation and reconciliation.

There are many ways that people are in need of healing –
that is to say, of body, mind, and spirit.
For our community, this is generally in terms
of the body due to illness, injury, or infirmity.
And sometimes, our minds can be broken like an arm or a leg,
leading to emotional distress, depression, or dementia.
There is also a need to be healed from spiritual woundedness – or sin,
which is rooted in its own kind of pain through shame & isolation,
leading to prejudice, fanaticism, sociopathic behavior...
Forgiveness serves as a strategy for healing
that seeks restoration and renewal of mind, body, and spirit.

It is God's expectation that we can manage our sin
by radically forgiving one another and accepting forgiveness.
Otherwise, why would Jesus get angry against the Pharisees?
Why would God say to Cain the first murderer,
'...you must master [your sin]'?

In the scripture readings tonight,
there is the hope that we can be forgiven–
and therefore healed of anything.
Sin, like sickness, is part of being human and the antidote
is forgiveness offered and accepted.
Healing is not the same as a cure, but in the story from the Gospel of Mark,
the paralyzed person gets a cure, too.
This story magnifies Jesus' principal conflict
with the religious authorities of his day over priestly control
in determining what was right and wrong.
Collecting food to eat or healing on the Sabbath were considered
infractions of divinely ordained rules by the Pharisees.
But Jesus introduced a new bias for that which is good
for the sake of humanity.

Willard, p.3

Forgiveness was another tradition proscribed by religious authorities that Jesus broke away from, to give that responsibility to us – because we are sinful and sick, and therefore, in constant need of the healing that comes from forgiveness.

And the passage from the Book of Ezekiel tells us – even with some humor, that no matter what we do, if we turn our hearts around, we can be forgiven, and even more so, that we ought to follow God's example in being able to forgive.

Perhaps, it is especially with humor that we can find healing from disease, freedom from oppression – even a cure.

In the Gospel of Luke,

Jesus has come out of the desert after confronting temptation to find his own voice and resist the powers of evil and despair.

He returns to his hometown to preach on the Sabbath day and set forth his mission through the words of Isaiah to bring good news to poor people as someone who was anointed – not with oil, but with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of compassion to show them that love is the cure.

Forgiveness is a comprehensive vision of healing that is possible for any of us to receive.

But it is also a vision that must be offered to others in order to make our own healing complete.

Amen

Ezek 18:19-27 [NRSV]

[The LORD said,]

‘19 Yet you say,

"Why should not the son suffer
for the iniquity of the father?"

When the son has done what is lawful and right,
and has been careful to observe all my statutes,
he shall surely live.

20 The person who sins shall die.

A child shall not suffer for the iniquity of a parent,
nor a parent suffer for the iniquity of a child;
the righteousness of the righteous shall be his own,
and the wickedness of the wicked shall be his own.

21 But if the wicked turn away from all their sins
that they have committed and keep all my statutes
and do what is lawful and right,
they shall surely live; they shall not die.

22 None of the transgressions that they have committed
shall be remembered against them;
for the righteousness that they have done they shall live.

23 Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked,
says the Lord GOD,

and not rather that they should turn from their ways and live?

24 But when the righteous turn away from their righteousness
and commit iniquity and do the same abominable things
that the wicked do, shall they live?

None of the righteous deeds that they have done
shall be remembered;

for the treachery of which they are guilty
and the sin they have committed, they shall die.

25 Yet you say,

"The way of the Lord is unfair."

Hear now, O house of Israel:

Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?

26 When the righteous turn away from their righteousness
and commit iniquity, they shall die for it;
for the iniquity that they have committed
they shall die.

27 Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness
they have committed and do what is lawful and right,
they shall save their life.

Mark 2:1-12 [NRSV]

2:1 When he returned to Capernaum after some days,
it was reported that he was at home.

2So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them,
not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them.

3Then some people came, bringing to him a paralysed man,
carried by four of them.

4And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd,
they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it,
they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay.

5When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic,
'Son, your sins are forgiven.'

6Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts,

7'Why does this fellow speak in this way?

It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?'

8At once Jesus perceived in his spirit

that they were discussing these questions among themselves;
and he said to them,

'Why do you raise such questions in your hearts?'

9Which is easier, to say to the paralytic,

"Your sins are forgiven", or to say,

"Stand up and take your mat and walk"?

10But so that you may know that the Son of Man

has authority on earth to forgive sins'—

he said to the paralytic—

11'I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.'

12And he stood up, and immediately took the mat

and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed
and glorified God, saying,

'We have never seen anything like this!'

Luke 4:16-21 [NRSV]

4:16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up,
he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom.

He stood up to read,

17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.

He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

18 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

because he has anointed me

to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me

to proclaim release to the captives

and recovery of sight to the blind,

to let the oppressed go free,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

20 And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down.

The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

21 Then he began to say to them,

'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'