Inner Healing

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Date: 04 July 2021

Preacher: Rev. Robert Krech

[0:00] So let me open with a prayer adapted from the Book of Common Prayer.

Heavenly Father, giver of life and health, comfort and relieve those among us who hurt and give your power of healing to those who minister to their needs, that those for whom our prayers are offered may be strengthened in their hearts and have confidence in your loving care. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

So this morning's sermon is the second in a four-part series on the Holy Spirit and what it means for us to have more of the Holy Spirit. And this morning's sermon specifically talks about inner healing. You will see, I think, in the Friday newsletter, an invitation to send in questions. I'd love to be in conversation with anybody who wants to be in conversation on these topics. If you have a comment or a response to either last week's sermon or any of the sermons coming up or want to pose questions, the questions will come to, I think, Natalie and to Deborah and they'll come anonymously to me so you can ask your question as bluntly as you want. Challenge anything you hear in any of these sermons as straightforward as you want and we'll figure out a way to reply back. So I just want to invite people into that.

I'd love to be in conversation. For this morning, I want to start with a story just to get us into the topic of inner healing and then talk about Jesus' heart for us when we're in our pain and then talk about inner healing itself and how it works. And so to begin with this story, a couple years ago, I had what I think is the privilege of sitting with someone who, after many years of not walking with the Lord, was going to have her very first conversation with God again in many, many years. She grew up in faith. She grew up in a very conservative church and there were a number of, a combination or a number of hurtful experiences while she was at that church and being told sometimes not to ask questions about hard things and not to challenge simple answers. And through some of the hurt she experienced, she walked away from this church.

And in time, she walked away from her faith. And the crisis moment that led to this evening where we were sitting together and she was going to have this first conversation again after a long time was watching her partner die in a hospital bed in deep pain. He was screaming as he died.

[2:48] He didn't know the Lord and by her account, he was an amazing, brilliant, and wild man who was incredibly talented. And all of this amazing image of God shone through his brokenness and she loved him.

And his pain and his death was devastating for her to watch. And so when we were gathered there, we heard her story and what led to this moment and why she was there. And so she quieted herself and she closed her eyes and turned to God just to begin praying. Her very first prayer after a long time was actually a scream. It made me jump. I didn't expect it. I was thinking there would be some kind of words, some kind of going over the past, but it was actually a long scream. And the scream turned into heaving, sobbing cries and yelling at God. There was some salty language in there. I'll leave it up to you to decide what those salty words were. But they were there. There were questions and accusations. Why God? And how could you? And where were you? And as I prayed and I reflected and sat in this moment, I realized that these were not the screams of a person in rage or rebellion against God. This is not somebody who is defiant and who hated God. This was the heart cry of someone who deep down believed in God, that God is good, who expected more and better from God. But the way her church had treated her and her experiences, the way they lived out faith to her, and then watching her partner die, had wounded her and made her question whether God was in fact loving or good or fair. So this moment that night didn't spring up spontaneously. It came about through a pastor friend's long, patient friendship with her.

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He had invited me to join them for this first prayer in a long time. And over the course of this long friendship the two of them had, they could talk about Jesus and he could portray Jesus in a way that was different from how she knew him growing up. And they could take time to talk through stories of Jesus from the Gospels and see him for who he is in the Scriptures. And as well, they could talk about all the things that you read about in Scripture where we don't understand why God did something and it's confusing.
This conversation, this first prayer of hers was as every bit tender, as it was angry, heartbroken, as it was combative. It was raw, it was authentic, and even sacred. And Jesus felt very close in that moment. And I'm thinking of Psalm 147 verse 3 that says he heals the brokenhearted and binds up to their wounds. Jesus is close to the brokenhearted and he felt present that night.
So after that night, that first conversation, she started walking with God again. She chose to do so, but not because she had all the answers and everything was sorted out or because she had no more pain left, but because a pastor friend and eventually a community had walked alongside of her and loved her to a place where she was able to see Jesus and give Jesus a chance. A Jesus that she had met anew or maybe for the first time. In John 11, we read about Jesus raising Lazarus to life.
[6:24] And this unbelievable miracle happens and is described in two verses. But in the 42 verses that precede it, other important things happen. And mainly in this time before this miracle happens, Jesus is simply with people, Martha and Mary in particular. So after Jesus gets word that Lazarus is sick and dying and he should come and he mysteriously waits for two whole days and doesn't come, he comes. And when he's on the outskirts of the village, Mary comes out to meet him. And when she comes up to him, she is as every bit real and authentic with Jesus, as this woman I talked about in the story just now. And she complains to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And Jesus, for his part, speaks words of truth and hope and life to her. And he offers himself to her as the very salve for her pain.

He is present to her. He is with her. And then after Martha talks to him, Mary comes and she meets him in the same spot. And she also complains to Jesus in the same way. If you'd been here, my brother wouldn't have died. And she begins to weep. Jesus, this time, he doesn't say anything. He's just there with Mary. He lets her weep.
And he's present to her. But there's even more going on before Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. We read at some point that Jesus is deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And the ESV translation that we use, and even the English translation, is a little bit dry on these verses. The Greek words that underlie it mean to feel something deeply and strongly. And in its extra-biblical use in non-biblical Greek literature, it literally means to snort.
It gets used to describe in one place in an ancient Greek writing, a war horse at the moment right before battle, snorting and stomping the ground. It connotes a sense of anger and indignation.
[8:32] And it's important to know that it says in the verse that Jesus felt these things when he saw Mary and those with him weeping. That's how he responded to her and those with her.

And these deep feelings that Jesus felt were not just anger and indignation, but grief also. Because a few verses later, Jesus is standing before Lazarus' tomb, and he weeps.
He knows that he can raise Lazarus from the dead. He knows what's about to happen. He knows how the whole thing ends. And yet, he still wept. Jesus' response to our pain and our heartache, our suffering, our grief, is to be with us and to let us feel the things we feel without judgment.
But his response is also to be deeply, deeply moved to sorrow and grief and anger for the things that have happened to us and the things we're going through. So what we see in John 11 is we see Jesus living out what's called compassion.
And in the Hebrew, in the Old Testament, that word is chesed. It's a visceral, overwhelming, emotional love. And this word is used over and over again, almost constantly in the Old Testament.
[9:48] Every time you read something like, God is abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, or the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, this is that word coming into play. This describes God's heart. He doesn't just love. He has an overwhelming, emotional love. And so we shouldn't be surprised when Jesus describes his heavenly father in the parable, the prodigal son, this way. So after the whole parable plays itself out and the younger son is coming home, Jesus says that when this father saw his son still a long way off, he felt compassion. He felt this overwhelming, emotional love for the younger son. And he runs to him and embraces him and kisses him. This is how God feels about people who've completely messed up their lives and life's been hard on them. He's just

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glad to see us, to hold us and welcome us home. Words always come later. And Jesus himself is described this way in the Gospels over and over again as a person with that kind of compassion, that overwhelming, emotional love every time he encounters someone who's sick, grieving, or tormented. Just one example from Matthew 29. When Jesus leaves Jericho and sees the two blind men who wanted to see again, it says that Jesus was moved with compassion. And he touched their eyes and they regained their sight.

Over and over again, Jesus is compelled by this compassion he has inside of him to literally stop and teach and heal and forgive or cast out demons or raise the dead, even when it was awkward, when it was inconvenient, when he was misunderstood, when he was ridiculed, when the crowds were around him pressuring him, or even when to do so put him at risk of being arrested or put to death. Right after he raised Lazarus from the dead, Lazarus's family lost it. They were overjoyed. The people who are watching lost it. They were amazed. And there were another group of people who lost it and immediately held a meeting to decide how to best kill him. It was, it was, he was willing to put himself at risk and he was literally, and he is literally willing to risk death to help the people who are hurting around him.

This kind of compassion was passed on to the apostles and we read in the reading from Acts 3, what compelled Peter and John to minister, to reach out and pray for the person at the gate, was that same kind of compassion.

So most of us don't need to have explained to us what is an inner or emotional wound. Too many of us have experienced hurt or disappointment, shame, rejection over our lifetime. We've been hurt by the words and actions of people around us. And the wounds that, the wounds that hurt the most are the ones that come from the people we're most open to emotionally, that we most expect love from. Childhood wounds are especially hurtful and damaging. In part because we're so open to the people around us who we expect love from, but also because as kids we don't have a solid foundation of truth about ourselves yet.

We believe people in authority when they say things about us and to us, because we believe they have authority to speak truth. And some inner wounds are hurt or caused by things or events that happen to us.

[13:13] I've been thinking about this past year, 15 months, an intense year of COVID, lockdowns, fear, social tensions, an overdue racial reckoning, extremely intense political season. We all experienced at least one of these and probably more than one of these in combination. And inner wounds are stored in us.

Things that are said and done are stored in our memories. And the emotions that come with these memories are literally the felt reality of our inner wounds. And as adults, we cope with these things. We have rationalizations, we justify, we disassociate, or whatever we need to do to manage and suppress hurt. But it never gets resolved that way. It always comes back on us. And I don't know if anybody knows the expression, the body keeps score. Our bodies keep things that happen to us emotionally can play themselves out physically. Research has shown that unforgiveness and bitterness is linked to cancer.

Now, if you have cancer, it doesn't mean you have unforgiveness and bitterness, but they've been linked together. So can we be healed of our inner or emotional wounds? Does Jesus do that? Yes. We're told in Scripture that when Jesus, Jesus in his lifetime, and especially in the last hours before the cross, he suffered everything that we ever have. Not that he experienced every literal form of suffering that ever was or will be, but he experienced everything that we can experience. Shame, degradation, humiliation, fear, he experienced it all. And when he was on the cross, he did more than just take our sin and more than just pay for our sin. He took all sin, the sin that we've done and paid for it, and the sin others have done that have wounded us. He took it all on himself. Evil, suffering, disease, affliction.

[15:12] Isaiah 53 makes it really clear that this is what he did on the cross. He took all this, what we've done and what was done to us on himself. And when he heals, he comes to take away those wounds. He comes to deal with those memories and the feelings sometimes, and he comes to bring truth that sets free.

Jesus goes into those places of wounding when we pray for each other. And by his love and with truth, and by what he's done for us in his suffering and cross, he resolves. I want to give you two examples from praying with people of what this might look like. So I had a friend once come and ask me for prayer, and she told me that she felt ashamed when she was around specific people that

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she perceived to be of a higher social standing than herself. Whether it was by education or job title or wealth, she just felt a sense of shame. So we met for prayer, and I asked her just to talk about this, and talk about a recent time when she felt this shame, and she told me about an interaction at work.

And so I asked her, and I first explained to her how this kind of prayer works about our memories and emotions and where they're stored and things like that. And we agreed that we would pray about this and ask Jesus to start showing her where this comes from. And so as we did, we kind of went through an unpeeling of layers of different memories where she had experienced shame like this and unhelpful interactions with people. But eventually the Lord led her to a place where that felt like a core memory. And if any of you have ever seen Inside Out, that animated film, kind of think of that. There was a core memory. And in this core memory, what she was recalling was that her parents had immigrated to the U.S. And she was born here, but her parents had immigrated.

And back home, her dad was highly educated to PhD level in a very technical field. But when they moved here, he was looked down on for his skin color, his accent, and his credentials just weren't taken seriously. So he ended up driving a taxi to support his family.

Now, she didn't think anything of this until a few years later when she was a girl. She applied for and was accepted at a very prestigious private school on a scholarship basis. They couldn't afford it, but she earned it. And so her dad would take her to school in the morning in the taxi and drop her off.

[17:50] And that was fine for a while, but as she made friends at school and got plugged into the school community, she became aware of the spoken and unspoken social dynamics at her school. She became aware of her skin color, her clothes and her lunch, her hobbies and sports and interests, and even where they did or didn't vacation. It all was in view and being constantly talked about and compared among the friends. And she became especially acute of being dropped off in front of the school by her dad, her immigrant dad, in his taxi. So nothing came to mind specifically about being mocked or made fun of.

So it wasn't about a key moment. It was just a broad sense of shame about how it all looked and how the kids in her school thought of her. And with the Lord's help and this core memory, with all these feelings, she became aware of the things, the beliefs that she'd taken on board about herself that were associated with the shame, how she felt that she was less than the other kids and that her dad was less than the other dads. And so with this memory and an awareness of the beliefs she had about herself, we asked Jesus to come into this memory. And as we prayed, she suddenly saw herself sitting in the back of the taxi, her dad taking her to school, and her asking her dad, as she normally did, please drop me off a couple blocks back around the corner from the school so she could get out and walk to the school without being seen. And in this prayer moment, Jesus climbed in the back of the taxi. She saw him in this memory climb into the back of the taxi with her. And she heard Jesus speak words of truth to her about who she is and who her dad is and how she's okay and how much he loves her. And as they had that time, she felt the shame melting away. She felt the beliefs she'd carried about herself losing their hold. And she felt herself in that memory in a place where she was willing for her dad to take her up and drop her off in front of the school. And so in her mind, she kind of pictured her dad doing that. And she got out and she felt good. She felt better.

And then later, after this prayer time, I asked her, you know, how are you? How are you doing? What's changed for you? And she was telling me about new freedom that she felt from shame when she would interact with some of the people that had originally triggered the sense of shame.

One more example, just to give you a sense of what else it can look like. I had a friend who asked me for prayer about anxiety attacks he was having. And these things would be triggered in by lots of different things. It was really hard to pinpoint what it was about. But we prayed in the very same way, and the Lord took him back to a memory he had when he was a boy. He was caught in an earthquake while hiking in a hilly and wooded area. So he told me he'd received prayer for this already, but he discovered that sometimes we have experiences that wound us in lots of different ways. And there was still a fresh wound associated with it. And it needed more prayer. And the Lord showed my friend in our prayer time that his anxiety was coming from a sense that during the earthquake, everything around him, like reality itself, was coming apart. And he had nowhere for himself to stand. The ground was moving under his feet. Buildings nearby shook. Trees fell down. There were rock slides. And the noise of it all was deafening. He had a sense of being in utter

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danger with nothing to protect him. The very earth was giving way beneath him. And he thought he was going to die.
And we asked Jesus to come into the memory, like that in the other example I gave. But my friend didn't see Jesus come into the memory. But so we asked Jesus instead just to say, where were you, Jesus, during the earthquake when this, all this was happening? And my friend heard the Lord say that he helped him keep, reach a place of safety during the earthquake. And he knew in a deep way that the Lord was his true rock and foundation of safety in that moment, in a way that was deeper than his experience of the earthquake, in the sense that the very foundation of himself was giving way.
[22:04] And so, and like this other friend, I checked in with him a little later and said, how are you? And he said, the anxiety attacks are diminished. They're not totally gone, but they were diminished. So with these two examples, I want to encourage us. Jesus longs to be able for us to live like his children. He wants us to be able to receive his love and his delight in us, to trust him to provide for us, to trust him to protect us, and to know that he loves us and is good and faithful. But of course, our inner wounds damage our trust receptors, making it hard for us to believe these things and receive these things from Jesus, and including receive the healing we need for that damage. But I can tell you from based on experience praying with others, but probably more importantly, having received my own inner healing for things, Jesus always finds a way. There isn't anything, literally anything, that he can't heal. There's no suffering, no loss, grief, or trauma that's too much for Jesus.

There's never a point where you're going to be praying with Jesus, and you're going to hear the Lord say, I'm sorry, I'm just, you know, I don't know what to do with this. He's always has an answer. The cross is always sufficient. He is able to heal every bit of our hearts, our souls, and our minds, even our bodies.
So I want to invite you, invite all of us, like the person that I, whose story I told at the very beginning, to press into Jesus, into who he is in the gospels, to trust that he has an overwhelming emotional love for you, that he'll risk everything to come meet you and heal you, that he's moved by grief and indignation at your pain, and he has healing for you. Let me pray for us.
Lord Jesus, you know the things that have happened to us, the things that even sometimes we haven't even told others. And Lord, you know what those things are, and you long to heal them. You long to bring light and truth, and with your love to heal us and make us whole. You don't want us to carry those wounds anymore. I thank you that you do heal. You do bind up our broken hearts. So come, Lord Jesus, by your spirit, move among us powerfully to give us the courage and the willingness to take another risk with you, to take another chance with you, and come with our wounds to see you heal us.
We know it could be fast, or it could be a journey, but Lord, you're here for us, and you'll do it. So help us, Lord, connect with you and find you, and find the healing you have for us. Amen.
[24:42] Amen.

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