

yLuke 22:47-51

“Broken . . . Sinful . . . Healed”

When you are a minister, it is very difficult to lead worship and actually worship at the same time. It usually happens for me when the choir is singing. Their *anthem* is MY sermon. It is what feeds me each week.

However, last time we had Communion here, the Holy Spirit gave me a gift. For some reason, I just didn't worry about whether the bread tray would run out or if someone would spill their juice or if the Elders would remember to serve the pianist or if I would forget something important in my prayer. I guess it has taken me 17 years of Ordained ministry to realize that, those human ideas of what worship is made up of are not really that important. What really matters is what God does with our hearts. And I felt so completely wrapped in God's love and grace that I was able to worship and reflect on what the bread and the cup mean to me. The Holy Meal became a truly Holy moment.

As I took the small square of bread and bowed my head in prayer, a word came to my mind . . . BROKEN. As many times as I have taken and served Communion, this one day I became powerfully aware of the symbolism of the bread that I held in my hands. It was a reminder that Jesus was physically broken for me. I thought of the pain that I can only imagine that he felt in his hands, his feet, his side, but most of all in his heart as he hung on the cross. I imagined the brokenness that he experienced seeing his mother witness his pain. I imagined the utter aloneness that he felt when he realized that his disciples couldn't stomach seeing what had happened to their Lord and watched either from a safe distance or not at all. But I will tell you

that even with the vivid imagination of one who tells stories for a living, I knew that my mind was nowhere close to understanding his sadness. His brokenness.

Then I began to think about the brokenness of our lives today. I reflected on the sickness and grief that we deal with here in our own church, with aging parents and loved ones who have died. I began to think of the brokenness of the world that seems so unsettled. I pondered how many children would go off to school that week wondering what they will have for lunch and never finding out because of another school shooting. Then, I prayed for all the people that I know personally who are dealing with brokenness. I prayed for each one by name and I thanked God that He truly understands pain and fear and rejection.

The story that we just heard contains brokenness as well. A soldier's ear literally broken from his head, the brokenness of the betrayal that Jesus experienced at the hands of one of his own friends, and the brokenness of the society that could not accept the King that God had chosen. And surely the hearts of those who had followed Jesus for three years were breaking as they finally began to understand that his predictions of his death were unfolding right before their eyes.

When the cup was offered to me and I sat down to pray once more, the word that entered my mind was sinful because the cup represents the blood that Jesus shed to cover our sins. I thought of my own sins, that are too numerous to name and that I would prefer to keep just between me and God any way. I thought about the sinfulness of others whose actions have shaped my own life and indeed the life of our world.

And again, I prayed for the forgiveness of my own sins, for the faith to deal with others' sins in a Christ like manner. And I was thankful that God understands that sin is so easy for us and that the only way to overcome it is with such a precious sacrifice.

And as I wrote this meditation, I thought of Peter and the wide range of emotions that he had had to deal with in the last few hours, including the stark reality of *his* own sinfulness. Peter had not expected the Lord to ask him to prepare the Passover meal, as Luke records earlier. He certainly had not expected to see his master take the form of a servant and insist on washing his feet. He did not expect to see Jesus so grieved in the garden. And now he had been rebuked for his own sinfulness for what he thought was an act of courage when he defended the Messiah by attacking someone in the crowd that came to arrest him.

I know you are wondering how in the WORLD I had the time to think ALL THIS STUFF while Communion was served! But the truth is that the thoughts came to me almost like butterflies that light for a small amount of time on a flower and leave. Or like the pictures of popcorn that blow up on the movie screen in the theater before the previews start. One after another, the images lighted in my mind and then left. And after praying over the bread and the cup, my mind was filled with the words broken and sinful.

But I realize that if that were the end of God's message to me that day and even the end of Luke's story tonight, I would not be offering much hope. So I need to include the THIRD word that entered my mind as I savored my holy meal and it is healed! By the brokenness of Jesus' body and the spilling of his blood into our sinful world, we are healed! This is the message of Maundy Thursday. This is our hope. That through the sacrificial love of our Lord, healing comes to our lives and our world!

Sometimes healing is immediate and miraculous like that of the soldier in tonight's story. Luke tells us that as soon as Peter swiped his sword through the ear of the man in the crowd, Jesus touched his ear and healed it. Why? Why would Jesus heal someone that he didn't even know, that could obviously be counted as his enemy, and that he knew he would have not have

time to win over to God's side. Why would the last miracle that Jesus performed before his death be for an unknown adversary?

Well, friends, I believe that Jesus healed simply out of his compassion. He saw someone in need and he did not care about their actions at the moment. He only felt the soldier's pain. His last action with his disciples was simply in keeping with his character and offers us the possibility of immediate healing too. Perhaps even tonight you will experience healing from the meal that WE share.

But the story also teaches us that *often* healing does NOT take place immediately. Instead, it occurs in God's time. Peter is a prime example of this and his story can strengthen our faith when we think that God has stopped listening to our cries. Jesus rebuked Peter for resorting to violence by crying "No more of this!" Jesus' last words to Peter were words of reprimand. Then Peter had to endure the next hours when he denied Christ three times and when he stood at a distance during the crucifixion rather than at the foot of the cross, knowing how much he had disappointed his closest friend. And he, like all the disciples, would be left in grief as they watched the body of their Lord lowered from the cross and placed in a tomb.

And friends, three AGONIZING days would pass before Peter encountered the resurrected Jesus on the beach and understand that, not only did Jesus still LOVE him but that he still COUNTED on him to be the rock on which the church would be built. For in his resurrection, Jesus did not ask Peter WHY? Why did you deny me? Instead he instructed him to love and feed his sheep – something one would only ask a trusted friend to do in his absence. Something he asks each of us to do right now. And in that moment, Peter's healing took place.

And while some of us experience immediate healing like the soldier and some of us have to wait for healing in God's time like Peter, many feel that healing never comes. But that is

when we hold on to the hope that sometimes healing comes in the form of PERFECT healing when a loved one enters into Heaven and is delivered into the arms of God. This is the healing power of resurrection.

So tonight, as we celebrate the Holy Meal, I invite you as you return to your seats to pray for the brokenness of the world. To pray for your sins and the sins of others. But most of all I invite you to cling to hope. Hold on for three days or three months or three years or whatever is needed in your life. Remember that because we live in a fallen world, there will always be brokenness and sin but that by the grace of God, there will always be hope and healing. Tonight, we eat and drink the healing meal that was made available to you and me at the price of the cross and by the gift of the empty tomb. Amen.

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