



From wounds to scars

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Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7, Luke 17:11-19

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I once fell out of friendship with someone who I counted as a close friend and ally. At a time of great vulnerability in my life, this friend made decisions that hurt me a great deal. So much so, that I withdrew from the relationship entirely. Years passed and the pain remained. It felt as if the open wound would never heal.

And then a chance meeting occurred, and I suddenly noticed a change within myself. I had imagined the angry bitter things I would say to this person many times. I imagined how good it would feel to tell this person how much they hurt me and how they ruined our friendship and ruined my life (yes, my emotions love to run wild with hyperbole). In those fantasies, I always felt powerful, as if inflicting hurt on another person would somehow bind up my own wounds.

And yet, when the chance meeting occurred, those negative bitter emotions which I had nurtured over many months seemed to vanish. Reaching down inside myself I was amazed to find that the open wound was no longer there. In its place there was a scar. It was a very ugly scar, but it was a scar. Time had passed, and when I was not paying any attention at all, God's love had been quietly binding the wound together. And realizing that, I discovered that I had a choice, either open up the old wound or find a deeper level of healing.

I did not say, "I forgive you." Those were not the right words, even if that was what was occurring. What I did say was, "I miss you and I miss our friendship." Those words felt much more hopeful

than the angry bitter words I had imagined for so long. They were words that affirmed the reality of the scar which had replaced the wound within me, and they spoke to the wound which resided within the person I had withdrawn from.

I think of this story in light of today's gospel reading in which Jesus noted that having healed 10 lepers, only one returned to express gratitude for what had happened. It was another two years before my friend expressed their gratitude for my attempt to restore our relationship. It took that long to really appreciate how deep the healing ran. I'd like to think that maybe a few more of those lepers also came to appreciate what Jesus had put right for them, even if they didn't say so at the time. Because there is a deeper truth in the story of the 10 lepers: God's healing is freely offered, even to those who don't recognise that it is taking place.

Experiences of reconciliation help us to understand the gospel healing narratives in a new way. Many of us find healing stories challenging because the church has sometimes weaponized them, telling desperately ill people that their faith simply wasn't enough to produce a miracle. I've known too many faithful people wounded by such theology.

Scholars like John Dominic Crossan are helpful in making a crucial distinction between cure and healing. Crossan suggests Jesus wasn't making diseases miraculously vanish but was restoring excluded people to community and relationship. In first-century Palestine, conditions like leprosy resulted in social death—exclusion from family, the temple, and economic life. Jesus healed people by offering them radical inclusion: his key point being that illness or disability should never disqualify people from belonging.

This interpretation protects us from the harmful idea that faith functions as a magical power. Rather, healing is about restoration of relationships, removing barriers that separate

people, and coming to terms with hurt and vulnerability. Or to use more biblical language: healing is the binding of broken hearts.

Now that is not to say that I have not prayed for the miraculous. When loved ones have faced illness, I am never above praying for a cure. But the difference is that I do not believe my loved one's health outcomes are somehow linked to how much I do or don't love God, or how much I believe I have power to influence their physical wellbeing. I believe that when such prayers are offered, the love which binds this universe together deeply understands that even my most unrealistic and unreasonable requests are born of love and concern. Or to put that another way, God listens, and God understands, because God understands what it is to be human.

The story I began with today was not a story about a cure, the hurt that had been caused on both sides of the relationship was not magically erased. But it was a story about healing. Wounds became scars, and scar tissue fades with time. Scars can remind us of the hurt that was caused, but they are not the wound itself. To see a scar is to see a wound that has been transformed into something else. Something that can be carried into a new future. Scars do not erase history, they transform it.

In a similar way the story of the ten lepers is not necessarily about a cure, but it is about healing. Healing that was freely given, without expectation of acknowledgement or appreciation. Perhaps the difference for the one leper who did thank Jesus, was simply that they were the person who managed to grasp the healing taking place in the moment. Time and again Jesus took time to praise those who are able to appreciate something good in this world as it was taking place. So perhaps that is the challenge to us. Perhaps we need to be on the lookout for moments of healing and restoration in our world, and to be thankful that even when we are unaware, the movement of love in this world continues to recreate, restore, and heal. Amen.