

Binding Up the Betrayed Heart

‘The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me; He has sent Me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty for the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the Lord and a day of vindication from our God’ (IS. 61:1, 2).

I just read an essay in the New York Times with an all-too-familiar narrative: man divorces pretty good wife and kids in order to hook up with others, in this case, other men. His adventures, including ripping the clothes off a new friend, are framed as freedom. Our heightened awareness of the impact of sexual assault (‘me too’) apparently does not extend to the no less devastating assault of adultery upon families: male and female spouses who betray loved ones continually through illegal bodily offerings. Adulterers impoverish and imprison the ones who love them most in their quest for a better orgasm.

Adultery and divorce jackhammer human hearts. No spouse or child is left unshaken; the bad choices of another create a fault line that quakes like seizures over the course of many lifetimes.

Until Jesus binds up their broken hearts. I love the above-mentioned verses from Isaiah which Jesus cites (LK 4:18) when He announced His public ministry. He comes to heal the betrayed heart! His healing Presence is how He vindicates those fractured by the folly of others. How? He opens His flesh to assume our lacerations. And our shame. I believe that the shame of adultery is greater upon loved ones than upon the perpetrator; spouses and kids now live under a shadow they neither chose nor can grasp.

The betrayed ask themselves: ‘What’s wrong with me?’ Jesus takes His advantage. He draws the broken-hearted to Himself where His wisdom, His steadying hand and His peace that surpasses understanding and circumstance elicits good grief. He speaks the healing Word: ‘This is not your fault; I bind away your accuser and confirm the truth--you are wanted, you are mine, and I will never leave you nor forsake you. I close the gap in my spousal devotion to you!’

These would be mere ideas if we as members of Christ did not do our part. We are the ones who Jesus calls to be His hands and eyes and words and heart for the betrayed. As our culture reframes shameful acts as ‘freedom’, we must welcome the shamed into fellowship. We are the ones Jesus calls ‘to give greater honor to the parts of the body that lack honor’ (1 Cor. 12:24-26). Honor is slaughtered in persons betrayed by adultery and divorce. It is our job to champion the dishonored and to help them exchange another’s sin for a double portion of blessing. We can help them to realize ‘the year of God’s favor.’

We must also note that betrayers can exchange their shame for honor too. Just after reading the Times essay, I heard from a married friend who committed a string of adulteries. Broken by the impact of his sin, he repented and now makes every effort to reconcile with his wife. Having

devastated her, he now encourages her healing by living the truth-in-love. Only Jesus can cancel out adultery by provoking and sustaining one's lifelong repentance. Once an adulterer, no longer an adulterer! Jesus opens prison doors for the betrayed and betrayers.

May this Advent, a beginning unlike any other, become your 'year of God's favor.'

'Instead of their shame, my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace, they will rejoice in their inheritance; so they will receive a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs.' (IS. 61: 7)