

Discovering the Cross in Our Wounds

During Holy Week, we pause to consider Jesus' cross and the smaller one He asks us to carry. The goal? To know Him more. Perhaps He will invite you in these days to 'keep watch with Him' in His suffering. We take another step toward Calvary by considering the ways we have been sinned against. He has not suffered only for our sins and foolishness; His cross-walk had as much to do with the gaps and gashes we bear due to others' sins.

Isaiah 53:4, 5 says it best: 'Surely He bore our grief, and carried our sorrows...and by His wounds, we are healed.' He wants us to come to Him as readily with our wounds as with our sins. Why? Because He loves us; He wants what He has suffered to have its full effect—to alleviate our suffering.

He also knows that the wounded heart, unattended and seeking to heal itself, will naturally harden and defend itself against the damage done. We in our hurt become ugly; one infected wound can make us hateful and indiscriminate in transferring that hate onto innocent ones who represent our 'wounders.'

Remember yesterday's entry in which I recounted my slander of a colleague? The revelation of my sinful response to him began a long process of meeting with Jesus and a trusted brother. Behind the rage and self-vindication, I was hurt beyond words. Jesus was intent on laying claim to that wound as the basis for new life in me.

Let me explain what happened. We as a family and ministry were preparing to move to Kansas City; it was a dynamic, difficult time full of good prospects ahead. A former colleague of mine—a good friend whom I valued—wrote me to express his concerns about our moving there. That was his right, and I responded, agreeing to disagree on some of his concerns.

About two months later, I received a blistering email that changed my life. He had shot off a several page list of accusations against me; he blasted me in a fashion that could only be described as a rant, and sent it simultaneously to all my international Living Waters colleagues. He raged not only at the decision to go to Kansas City, but more painfully at my character, and arbitrary events that we had experienced together that I barely recalled but to him made me monstrous.

After the shock, came rage (and slander, as I already confessed). The only place to go was down, down beneath self-vindication and pity into grief and sorrow. I had to give myself a lot of space to just feel pain and to surrender as best I could to the God who knew pain, the afflicted Lamb 'who did not open His mouth.'

(Is. 53:7)

I have never experienced that kind of solidarity with the suffering God. I remained in prayer for extended times, at times weeping and always clinging to Him. I placed a large cross on my chest

and just asked Jesus to bear the bleeding, to assume the wound as I poured out my heart to Him.

I also appreciated the prayers of my friend to whom I entrusted this process; I needed to stay present to him, the body of Christ. But the richest communion came in solitude.

I arose on shaky knees from this wound, still hurting but being healed. The only guidance God gave me was to forgive my offender, and to contact all those who received his email and to ask each how I had wounded them in any way.

About a third responded with minor grievances. I was ready to hear them. I was broken. Regardless of my colleague's terroristic methods, he was God's instrument. Isaiah describes the God who allows His enemy to wreak havoc and so fulfill holy purposes. God used my colleague to level me. Yet according to Isaiah, these weapons of warfare would not prevail against me, e.g. they would not make me bitter and hateful. (Is. 54: 16, 17)

In God's hand, this wound possessed power to make me more whole.

Jesus used my wound to draw me near to Himself, and to humble me so that I could hear hard things from loved ones who spoke lovingly.

The timing was right. I was starting a new life in Kansas City, and that meant my heart had to be broken and made malleable, able to be conformed to what Jesus had in store for us.

Surrendering to Jesus in my wound was my response to this invitation: 'Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds...Whoever serves Me must follow Me; and where I am, my servant also will be.' (Jn 12: 24, 26)

Jesus gave this invitation to His disciples on Holy Week. May we heed it. I can now attest to the fruit that has come from following Jesus to where He is: at the cross, ready to bear our suffering.

I bless you, beloved colleague, for wounding me. You were God's instrument in breaking my 'husk', which then released many seeds of truth and mercy. You made me more fruitful.

'As You have shown us mercy, O God, in the desert places of our lives, would You show mercy to the beleaguered state of marriage in the USA? As the Perry vs. Schw. case wends its way to the National Supreme Court, prepare for Yourself a victory. We shall render to Caesar what is Caesar's but we shall prayerfully fight for what is Yours, O God. Prepare the hearts of each justice, especially Justice Anthony Kennedy, to uphold marriage according to Your merciful design. Remember mercy, O God.'