

“GET REAL! (#2): HEALING FOR THE WOUNDS FROM OUR PAST”

(Luke 4:16-21)

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[East Cobb U.M.C.; 8-7-11

–I–

1. [BOTH Services (9:30am MSG; 11am NRSV):] Read Text: Luke 4:16-21 and Pray.
2. If we’re honest with ourselves, every single one of us in this room knows what it’s like to be hurt by life.
  - A–Maybe it was caused by the death of someone dear, or from a friend or family member who we feel betrayed us.
  - B–Perhaps it was caused by a job contract that wasn’t renewed after we worked hard and were promised it *would* be, or because a doctor gave us bad news about our health.
  - C–Maybe it was caused by a spouse that asked us for a separation or divorce, or when our house was robbed, or we got in a car accident, or when a storm destroyed our home, or when we were the victim of random violence.
  - D–Perhaps we were hurt by being made to feel unwanted as a child, or unloved as a teenager, or misunderstood as an adult.
3. Whatever the cause, the wounds of life can hurt deeply.
  - A–Now, sometimes we find a way to address these, find healing, and move on.
  - B–But at other times, the pain is so deep that we *don’t* address them right away, and so (left untreated), they become deep and lasting scars that burn and fester deep within us for a long time after the events that caused them.
  - C–And for some people (perhaps some of you here today), the trauma from our past can feel as fresh and as painful *today* as if it just happened yesterday. <sup>1</sup>
  - D–Well, as we continue our sermon series called “Get Real!” – in which we’re exploring how we can become more authentic with ourselves, others and God – I want us to look at how God can help us find “*Healing For The Wounds From Our Past.*”
4. To do this, though, the first thing I want to do is **address two myths** we often hear when we start talking about spiritual and emotional health. (*Find these in bulletin sermon notes*)

–II–

5. The **first myth** says that “*We don’t need to talk about the past in order to be healthy in the present.*”

A—And on the surface, this makes sense. After all, some people say, “*Why drag up the past when it’s already long gone? Let the past be past; let by-gones be by-gones!*”

1—Well, the problem with that thinking is that who we are in *present* is NOT as disconnected from our *past* as we might like to think – most of you have heard it said that, for better or worse, we *are* who we *are* today because of the experiences of our past.

2—So, if we want to fully understand who we are in the *present* (and why we act and behave the way we do *now*), then we need to have some sense of our past.<sup>2</sup>

3—In fact, that’s what we find in Verse 18 in today’s scripture, where Jesus (quoting Isaiah 61) says that he’s come (MSG) “*to preach the Message of good news to the poor, [to] announce pardon to prisoners... [and] to set the burdened and battered free.*” (NRSV) “*to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives... [and] to let the oppressed go free.*”

4—He’s saying here that whether we recognize it or not, many of us are “*prisoners / captives*” of our pasts, “*battered / oppressed*” by the hurts and wounds we’ve experienced in life, and that only GOD can bring healing to these things.

B—[TELL STORY OF BREAK-UP IN COLLEGE...]

When I was in college, before Trish and I met, I was dating someone who I thought was “the one” I was going to marry. But during the Fall of my Senior year, she found someone else she liked better, and dumped me like a lead brick! I can’t begin to tell you the pain and heartache I remember feeling for months after that!

1—And while this experience made me stronger in many ways, at the same time it also severely effected my emotional and relational life for a while.

2—For one, it caused me to have a harder time trusting others with my heart and my soul – I learned to be more guarded in my relationships.

3—And it wasn’t long before this – plus other similar experiences – helped me perfect the fine art of hiding my *real* feelings and needs behind an emotional “turtle shell” – to wear the mask of “Togetherness” that I talked about last week.

6. Now, most of us can probably tell similar stories like this of having our hearts broken by someone that we loved dearly (and if you haven’t yet, I’m sorry to say... you will!).

A—But as hard as this was, some of you have experienced *far worse* than a broken heart:

1—Some of you have been molested or abused physically, sexually, emotionally, or spiritually.

2–Some of you grew up with overbearing parents who set such unreasonably high expectations that you didn't feel loved or wanted.

3–And some of you have experienced fluke tragedies: a doctor's misdiagnosis that left you permanently disabled; a freak storm that took the life of a loved one; or the graphic memories of sights, sounds and smells of a battlefield in a far-away land in which you fought.

B–And all (or some) of these things from your *past* may have left you angry, bitter, cynical, and pessimistic here in the *present*.<sup>3</sup>

C–And my point again is that we can't become who God wants us to be *today* if we don't first recognize and know how we've been shaped by our *past*.

7. So that leads me to the **second** (and shorter) **myth**, which says that “***Time Heals All Wounds***”– that if we just ignore the pain and/or hurt long enough it'll just go away!

A–Again, this sounds great on the surface! But again, unfortunately it's just *not* true!

B–Time does *not* heal all things, and can sometimes, in fact, just make things worse!

C–You see, ignoring our pain and hoping it'll go away by itself often simply drives our hurt *underground* for a period of time (taking on the form of some of the “masks” from last week), but then they often resurface later in a much more potent form.

D–Time, you see, is *not* the great healer that it professes to be!<sup>4</sup>

–III–

8. So, what do we do, then, with the wounds from our past? **HOW CAN WE RECEIVE GOD'S HEALING?** In the time we have left, I want to suggest two steps:

9. **First**, we don't need to be afraid to **acknowledge *what the hurts and wounds are*** – to admit that they're there, and rather than trying to hide or ignore them, to instead make the difficult *but necessary* choice to face them head on.

A–I think this is exactly what Jesus means in Verse 18 when he says that he's come “*to bring recovery of sight to the blind*” – as if to remind us that some of us have grown “*blind*” to our own wounds and hurts, & that he came to help us “*see*”/address them..

B–In one of his books, Christian psychologist Larry Crabb says we should “*Be open to looking at everything in [our lives]. Don't run too quickly from disturbing events and insights into a [phony] affirmation of our faith that's more contrived than real.*”<sup>5</sup>

C–You see, when we can identify and acknowledge our hurts, it takes some of their power away, and prepares us to do the second step, which is...

10. ...to Give the Hurts and Wounds of Our past to Jesus.

A—Again, today’s scripture in Luke 4 reminds us that *Jesus* is the one who fulfills all of God’s promises of wholeness and healing:

1—HE’S the one who “*bring[s] good news to the poor,*” who’s been sent “*to announce pardon to prisoners / proclaim release to the captives....*”

2—HE’S the one who’s come to “*set the burdened and battered free / let the oppressed go free*” and “*to announce [that] This is God’s year to act! / to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.*”

3—In other words, it’s in and through Jesus that the wounds from our past can be touched and healed by God *for good!*<sup>6</sup>

B—So, if we want to find healing, we’ve got to take all our wounds and pains and give them to Christ.

C—A while back, songwriters Phil Johnson and Bob Benson explain it this way in one of their songs... . [TRISH & I SING: “GIVE THEM ALL TO JESUS”]

(Verse #1:)

*“Are you tired of chasing pretty rainbows? Are you tired of spinning round and round? Wrap up all those shattered dreams of your life and at the feet of Jesus, lay them down.*

(Refrain) *Give them all, give them all, give them all to Jesus;  
Shattered dreams, wounded hearts, and broken toys.  
Give them all, give them all, give them all to Jesus;  
And He will turn your sorrows into joy.*

(Verse #2:)

*He never said you only see sunshine, He never said there would be no rain.  
He only promised a heart full of singing about the very things that once brought pain.”*

(Refrain)<sup>7</sup>

11. You see, when you and I (first) acknowledge our wounds, and then (second) choose to give them to Jesus, we can *then* begin to find “*Healing For The Wounds From Our Past.*”

12. [PRAY: “*Lord Jesus, we confess to you that lurking deep beneath the masks that we wear, many of us -- even as your followers-- are still experiencing the pain and hurt of unhealed memories. Some of them we may have simply forgotten about, while others are memories so painful that we’ve chosen to ignore them and hope they’ll go away. But they don’t, and they continue to eat away at our hearts and souls, often driving us to do things we don’t want to do and be people that we don’t want to be. So, Holy Spirit come and not only reveal the wounds of our past, but also help us to acknowledge them as such, and to then give them to you to begin the process of healing. Lord, make us whole once again. In the name of Jesus, our Master Healer, Amen.*”]

13. [Invite Congregants to Altar to Be Prayed for and Anointed for Healing by Pastors and Stephen Ministers...]
14. [Traditional Service Closing Song: UMH#367 "He Touched Me"]

### ENDNOTES:

1. I'm amazed (though not really surprised) at the amount of unhealed pain that many good church members, leaders, and even pastors carry around with them. Oh, we may be deeply religious on the outside, but inside we not only still carry around heavy burdens of pain, but we usually feel guilty for doing so! Does our hurt and pain mean (we wonder) that we haven't truly forgiven, or that we aren't really trusting in God? Sometimes. But not necessarily. It can simply mean that though we're trusting in God and walking in forgiveness, we're still dealing with feelings of unhealed pain.

In fact, sometimes the existence of these unhealed parts of our lives is only discovered (or more accurately... *uncovered and acknowledged*) after we allow God to do what we talked about in last week's sermon... (when we allow God to help us to identify and take off the "masks" that we consciously and unconsciously wear which cover up/hide the "real" us). Once the masks are off, we may now be free to discover the existence of wounds from our own past that we'd either forgotten were still there, or that we somehow thought would disappear if we ignored them long enough.

2. Author and Christian songwriter Annie Chapman once wrote that, "*Having traveled full-time for 14 years doing concerts, I should have packing down to an exact science. But it's simply not so. Our family of four always leaves home loaded with a humiliatingly inordinate amount of excess baggage. It's possible to go through life with excess emotional baggage as well. Hurts and memories can make us unable to move toward emotional intimacy. It is vital to our spiritual and emotional growth that we identify these hurts, because Christ cannot heal suffering we insist isn't there. And without his healing, the weight of excess baggage will wreak havoc on our capacity to love and be loved*" (Annie Chapman, Today's Christian Woman, "Heart to Heart").

3. What's more is that even though some people's experience with hurt makes them spiritually *stronger*, for many people, these things simply push them *away* from God. I know people today who're still mad at God for something that they think He did or caused years ago, and they never can seem to get on with their life! And they simply can't seem to comprehend the paradox that while God is always a God of love, He nevertheless sometimes *allows* things that He doesn't *will*.

4. Christian psychologist and author Larry Crabb explains that when we try to ignore our past wounds to let time "heal" them, "*The ache simply goes underground where it can't be dealt with effectively while it continues to press for relief with increased, and more subtle, urgency*" (Larry Crabb, Inside Out, p. 101).

5. Crabb, Inside Out, p. 115. Along the same lines, Henri Nouwen once wrote that, "*The paradox of [Christianity] is that the way out is the way in, that only by entering into communion with human suffering can relief be found*" (Henri J.M. Nouwen, The Wounded Healer, p. 77). This is precisely what Paul Stevens did: In 1969, Paul's 19-year old daughter Cindy was stabbed to death by a neighbor in Evansville, Indiana. He spent nearly a decade tortured by the memory of his daughter's killer. The memories proved so hard to bear, in fact, that Paul moved his family from Evansville to a new home near Dawson Springs, Kentucky. His daughter's killer was released after seven years behind bars, and that knowledge gnawed at Paul's mind, to the point where he simply wanted the man dead. But at a religious retreat in 1978, Paul finally grasped that his hate couldn't restore his daughter, and He vowed to try something radical: he would overcome his tragedy by devoting his time to working with violent criminals. Between that time and his own death in 2003, he spent two days each week working as a counselor and lay minister at Eddyville State Penitentiary, a maximum security prison in Kentucky. In his time there, he came to call some of the 29 prisoners on death

row his friends, a number of whom were led to Christ before their execution. Of this experience, Stevens said treating violent criminals as human beings helped him lose his hatred and made him a happier person (Story found in Robert Russell, "Releasing Resentment," Preaching Today, Tape No. 136; this story is also found on a number of internet sites by doing a simple internet search for "Paul Stevens AND Evansville). In other words, he began to receive his healing as He faced his wound "head on."

So then, how do we know we even *have* things from our past that need to be addressed today? Obviously, some hurts and pains from our past we'll consciously know about – they're things that happened to us that we *know* we've refused to address. However, there are often other things that may lie beneath the surface of our conscious thoughts and feelings. They may be repressed memories or hurts that were never dealt with at the time. Here are some symptoms that we might manifest today which could indicate that we have wounds from our past that need to be dealt with: feelings of shame and/or guilt about something; a feeling that you can never "measure up" to the demands, expectations, or intimidations of others; an awkwardness or refusal to be around someone else, which might indicate the presence in our hearts of bitterness, resentment, and unforgiveness towards them.

6. By giving God the wounds from our past, will we forget that they ever happened? Usually not. But as we give them up to him, they no longer are sources of fragmentation and struggle in our own being. They become instead sources of hope and healing not only for ourselves, but also for others.

7. Words and Music by Phil Johnson and Bob Benson, Sr., © 1975, BMG Song, Inc.