

Proper 21B'18  
30 September 2018  
James 5.13-20; Mk. 9.38-50  
St. Luke's Episcopal Church  
North Little Rock, Arkansas  
The Rev. Carey Stone

*Almighty God, you made a world that contains both beauty and brokenness: Grant us spiritual power and compassionate hearts that we may continue the healing work that you began through your Son, who is the Great Physician, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

One Sunday while at the altar rail for communion a parishioner motioned for the priest to lean in so they could tell them something. So the priest leaned in and the parishioner said, "Please pray for my hearing." With than the faithful priest laid his hands on their ears and said a prayer for their hearing. The priest leaned in again and asked, "How's your hearing?" The parishioner replied, "I don't know the hearing is not until Tuesday!" Literal interpretations sure can get us into to trouble! Today's gospel is a great example, "If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off, If your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out!" Jesus' use of hyperbole is there to get our attention about dealing decisively with our human brokenness.

We are all broken in one way or the other and are in need of healing. Author Henri Nouwen noted, "We live with broken bodies, broken hearts, broken minds or broken spirits. We suffer from broken relationships."<sup>[1]</sup>If anyone needed any more evidence for the fact that humans are broken we certainly got it this week. From the hearing for Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh with very powerful testimony from Dr. Christine Blasey Ford and an impassioned defense from Kavanaugh to the conviction of comedic legend Bill Cosby for sexual assault, it's been quite a week.

To hear the retelling of Dr. Ford's ordeal has filled many with outrage and has reactivated the past traumas of millions of survivors of abuse. Then to see a living legend like Bill Cosby being led from the courtroom in handcuffs after being sentenced to up to 10 years in prison was chilling. Here was a man so gifted and creative, who had caused so much laughter but as we now know was also causing a lot of pain. Behind the facade he had some broken parts in his soul that had never gotten healed and because of it he has permanently damaged innocent women. I'm sure he wishes now he could have cut off his offending hands that drugged and assaulted those many women.

From the earliest story we have of human existence in the book of Genesis we hear about the brokenness of a brother, Cain, murdering his brother, Abel.

Following Cain is a long cast of biblical characters who are anything but perfect. Besides murders there were instances of the abuse of power and exploitation of the most vulnerable of society, and the breaking of all ten of the commandments many times over.

But running parallel to the stories of brokenness we also find stories of God's power to forgive, heal, and restore and prophecies of a future messiah who would bring healing: *"The wilderness and the dry*

*land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus...Be strong do not fear! Here is your God, who will come with vengeance...Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.*"<sup>[2]</sup>

In Luke's gospel we find Jesus in the synagogue serving as a lector and the reading that day just happened to be another prophecy from Isaiah: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*<sup>[3]</sup> He then sat down and informed the listeners that he was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

After this pronouncement Jesus sat out to usher in the Kingdom of God performing many miracles of healing and establishing healing as one of the hallmarks of this new and inclusive community of faith that was springing up in the wake of his travels.

This healing power has continued in one form or another to be a part of the central message of the Christian faith – in Christ there is healing for body, mind, and soul. Clinics, hospitals, and medical missions have been established in the name of Christ across the globe. This healing movement within the Church has not been without its charlatans and televangelists asking people to lay their hand on the TV set in order to feel the power and not to forget to send their money. For everything genuine there are always counterfeits but in James' letter we are reminded of our heritage of authentic healing. James writes: *"Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise them up..."*<sup>[4]</sup>

When I became an Episcopalian I was thrilled to see that healing prayer was held in high regard and practically every priest and deacon had special containers called "oil stocks" that contained olive oil that had been blessed by the bishop. Through the outward and visible signs of holy oil and the laying on of hands the Holy Spirit gives the inward and spiritual grace. It's not magic, and it doesn't always work and following this procedure is no guarantee that sick person will be healed. But as we follow these directions we are being obedient and God will honor our obedience.

Another healing directive in James' letter is prescribed and based on my earlier remarks would seem to be most timely: *"Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed."* Just think, If Bill Cosby could have opened up about his problem years ago to brothers and sisters in a caring Christian community he might have been spared from so many dark days and prison.

Confession is indeed good for the soul and in the Episcopal church we provide three ways of confession. The first way is the way we do it each Sunday called the general confession it is when we pray out loud with our community of faith confessing and asking God's forgiveness. Another way is to contact your priest and go to him/her in private and confess the sin that is so troubling. Forgiveness, pardon, and absolution is granted in name of God and in the name of the church. A third way is informal confession with a trusted friend in the Christian community. I have used this form of confession

before and it has been a great blessing to my life of faith. The gifts of anointing with holy oil, healing prayer and confession are crown jewels of the church that are available to all of us and are available to anyone who hungers and thirsts to know God's healing presence.

The political lens that we each see our world through may look different from each other but through the lens of Jesus the wounded healer we can look upon ourselves and our neighbors with compassion, to see them and us as ones who are in need of healing. As we experience healing from Christ we are able to share gifts of healing with those in need of this good news that our bodies, minds and souls can be touched by the power of the Holy Spirit through our own human prayers.

We are each and every one of us broken in some way or another and we can all feel the sting of remorse and shame of our brokenness. But when we embrace our brokenness and offer it to God rather than running and hiding from it – God binds up our wounds and transforms our pain and suffering into gifts that we can share with others who may be suffering with the exact same thing – we can be sent into the world as wounded healers, to be safe people in a safe place (the church) and from this place we can offer our brokenness as the raw materials for healing for those whom we meet on the path that are in need of that same healing. There is an old African-American spiritual that reminds us the true treasure the church has to offer to our wounded world:

There is a balm in Gilead  
To make the wounded whole;  
There is a balm in Gilead  
To heal the sin-sick soul.

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[1]Nouwen, Henri, *Bread for the Journey* (HarperOne: San Francisco, 1997) July 15<sup>th</sup>

[2]From Isaiah 35

[3]Luke 4.18

[4]From James 5