

The Wounded Healer

On the last Sunday in July I preached about reconciliation; being reconciled with the past; being reconciled with yourself; being reconciled with someone you don't want to forgive, or someone who might not want to forgive you. We need reconciliation in order to live a truly blessed life. I was given good feedback after that church service; it was gratifying to hear that my message touched so many hearts. And then I found it challenging to practice the message on my own. It's easier said than done, I know. Personally, two persons come to my mind when I think about reconciliation.

One is my father and the other is my brother. I once told you about my difficult relationship with my father. Please forgive me as I share my personal stories once again. I don't have many memories of my father, because I grew up without him. He left home after my mother gave birth to my older brother, five years before I was born. My father wanted to be a successful businessman, and he put his career above his wife and his three children. All three children in my family were born in a manse which was just beside my grandfather's church. Traditionally, in Korea, the first son and his wife are supposed to live with the husband's parents and support them. I don't know what happened to my uncle, the eldest son and his wife, but I think both of them refused to live with my grandparents. My father, being the next eldest son out of seven children, was expected to take over the eldest son's duties. When my father abandoned his wife he left her a very difficult, almost impossible task; serve his parents, look after his younger siblings and raise three children - alone. That was even harder for my mother as she was the daughter-in-law of a well-respected minister, expected to bear her burdens as an example of her faith. I can't imagine how my mother did everything. She often told me that because of her faith in God, she did not give up her life, even as she endured many difficult challenges. She said that she experienced the Holy Spirit profoundly when she was pregnant with me. My faith came from my mother, and so did my pain and anger with my father. I need healing.

I also once told you about my older brother's death. He passed away with a brain tumour three and a half years ago. He was just thirty-nine years old. He left a wife and two young children behind. One month after his brain tumour was diagnosed, he died. Sharing my father's story makes my brother's death sadder, because he was a true helper to my mother, and a true parent to me. Before he died, I was planning to give him a healing touch, and I wanted to say how much I love him. But just before I arrived in Seoul, he passed away. I have been seeking the answer from God, why God did not allow me to say 'good-bye' to my brother. I was angry with God. I need to be reconciled with God.

A few weeks ago, I got an emergency phone call from my mother in Seoul. She said that my father was in an intensive care unit in the hospital, waiting for surgery, and he is in need of support from my mother, my sister and me. I was grieving in my heart once again, thinking that it could end up like my brother. Without delay, I made a phone call to my father, for the first time in two years. I wished him a quick recovery, and promised him my support and prayers. A few days later, I had a dream. I don't usually dream, or I don't usually remember most of my dreams. But I do remember a few very significant ones, and this dream is one of them. I dreamed of my brother. I made a proclamation in the dream - I think I spoke in English. I said with a loud voice "I thank God for the life of my brother". It took me three and half years to get there. When I woke up, I know that I was healed. Healing comes unexpectedly.

It is an irony that the ones who can truly hurt you, in most cases, are not strangers but those who are nearest and dearest to you. And that makes it more difficult for you to forgive. The more you love and trust, the more hurt you can feel. It's the same among Christians; you know well how painful church conflict can be, and some have left the church out of a sense of betrayal and protest. You might say, "We might have conflict in our family, workplace, or school, but how can we endure it in the church? We're supposed to be Christians!" In today's Gospel reading, however, Jesus seems to assume that there will be conflict among his followers. What makes us Christian is not whether or not we disagree or wound one another, but how we go about addressing and resolving issues.

Jesus begins by instructing his followers to attempt to reconcile face to face. I think this passage talks more about the importance of community's role and involvement rather than a specific action plan you must implement in case of discord. A community of faith has to be there to listen to your stories. The Bible says that the Church is the body of Christ, where one part of the body cannot say to another part of the body, "I have no need of you." The church is a place where the suffering of one is the suffering of all, and where the honouring of one leads to the rejoicing of all. Your pain is our pain, and your well-being completes our well-being. Because of this mutual interdependence, we need to get together, to talk, and to remain in a relationship.

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk and peace activist, talks about three sentences for reconciliation. This is how he and his community practice in Plum Village, France, when they are upset with someone. The first sentence is "darling, I am angry. I suffer, and I want you to know it." With loving speech you tell the person the truth, that you suffer, that you are angry with him. When the other person comes to ask if we're all right, if we're angry, we may say, "me, angry? I'm not suffering at all". That is the opposite

of the practice. Instead we say, “Darling, I’m angry, really angry. I suffer. I want you to know it.”

The second sentence is, “I am trying my best”. It means that I am practicing. It means that every time I get angry I mustn’t say or do anything. But I go home to my breathing; I practice mindfully embracing my anger and looking deeply to see its roots in me. It’s also an indirect invitation for him to practice and ask himself, “what did i say, what did i do to make him suffer that much?” and that is already the beginning of the practice. The second sentence invites him to look deeply to see if he’s been unjust in what he said or did.

The third sentence is, “please help me”, because alone, I can’t transform this suffering, this anger. When we become partners, when we become friends in the practice, we have to share our happiness as well as our suffering. “Now I suffer, I want to share it with you and I need your support.”

I think the three sentences for reconciliation – “I am angry at you, I suffer very much, I want you to know it.” “I am doing my best to deal with my suffering.” “Please help.” - are very useful practices to maintain good relationships. We can practice at home, at work and in church. The practice requires our truth, honesty, respect, compassion and love.

Love! That is what Paul pleads to the faith community of his day and today. “Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” Paul, who devoted himself to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, calls us to love, because that’s the way to follow Christ. Paul describes, in 2 Corinthians, how he was treated badly, and was in danger not only from other Jews and Gentiles but also from his fellow Christians. Among other things, he said that he was under daily pressure because of his anxiety for all the churches. Even though he was wounded so much, he still spoke of love. Paul was a wounded healer for the church. Like Paul, we are called to be wounded healers. Your wounds and suffering are the channels for you to understand the pain of others, the pain of the church, and the pain of the world. Your reaching out is the channel for others to understand your pain – you are angry, you are hurt, but love compels you to hold on, to do your best as you wait for healing.

I grew up without a father; I lost a beloved older brother. Sad words, bitter facts. I have not achieved complete reconciliation with either situation. I am angry, I suffer. I am doing my best to deal with it. Every day I say, ‘My dear God, my darling God, *please help.*’ I belong to the community of wounded spirits, of bruised souls – but I also belong to the community of hope, to the community that claims God’s love and compassion, and I know that, no matter what wounds we have endured, healing is not only possible but inevitable.