

## *The Healing Power of Love*

Healing Sunday  
The Reverend Nancy R. Easton

Sunday, October 18, 2009  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Isaiah 35:5-8; Psalm 124; Luke 7:18-23

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Everyone handles pain in a different manner. By pain I mean not only physical pain, but I include here mental anguish, grief, hurt, emotional scars, and spiritual suffering—the many types of brokenness we endure on a daily basis.

Some folks are stoic as all get out. Shoulders up, posture ramrod straight, they push their way through the day; push their way through their pain. Sometimes the business-like barrier they put up in their stoicism keeps the rest of us out, but we usually understand. That's one way to cope with pain.

Some folks admit they cannot be at all stoic about their situation. One look from us, one simple “How are you?” and they gush forth with a litany of their hurts. Sometimes we didn't intend the conversation to last that long, but we usually understand. They need to be free to talk about their pain.

Some folks find themselves, in the midst of their pain, concentrating on the needful things. Sometimes the things they used to think were so important look petty and trivial to them now, and it would be good for us to understand their perspective. Perhaps if we were experiencing their pain, our perspective would change, too.

But in spite of differences in how people deal with pain, they all long for healing, for the broken pieces of their lives to be made whole, for things to be set right, for an end to pain.

Barbara Brown Taylor, author and preacher, writes of a man she knew named Earl. Earl was facing his second cancer surgery, and he wasn't certain how to prepare himself for it. Apparently he was not one to go to church. Instead, like many folks, he preferred to be in the great outdoors. He liked to go into the woods by himself. That was his religion, in a sense. That was the way he dealt with his pain. That was also the way he sought any healing.

Except that, weakened by his cancer and his cancer treatments, he was no longer able to venture far into the woods alone. He had to content himself by sitting in a patch of sunshine at his office. He busied himself with papers, sorting through and organizing things so that, should his situation worsen, his family would be able to find all the necessary information at their fingertips.

But that is not where his adult children wanted to place their fingertips. Two of his kids, now grown, came to him at his office, asking if they could lay hands on him. Not wanting to be rude by saying no, Earl let them. Obviously, they were struggling to deal with his pain, and their own. He probably thought that was how they wanted to handle it all.

I don't know how you handle pain, but I think our scripture today tells us how God handles our pain. He acknowledges its existence, pays attention to its destructive potential, and then

promises us he will do everything divinely possible that we may not be overcome by that pain. He does so out of love for us. Look—the Psalmist makes clear God is on our side. Psalm 124 is not a long psalm, but long enough to make its point: If God had not been on our side, we **would** have been overwhelmed, swallowed up, engulfed by our suffering. But our help is from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth, who will not let us be trapped by our pain. See, it is God's intention—since the beginning—that we should be whole and well.

God spoke through his prophets, like Isaiah this morning, and they described the wilderness, the deserts through which God's people walk. And then those prophets described God's plans—plans for his people to thrive, for springs of water to gush up through parched ground, for plants and trees to grow lush in desert lives, for the lame man to leap as if he were a deer, and those who could not speak to sing for joy. Through prophets like Isaiah, God promised again and again that our deserts will be transformed, our lives renewed by God's mighty and gracious hand.

Ultimately, God spoke to his people by his Son. Luke's Gospel describes what surely was a wonder to behold: Jesus' very presence was changing lives. Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy in all its beauty and goodness: The blind received sight, the lame walked, the lepers were made clean, the deaf heard glorious sound, the dead were raised to life, and the word of good news reached out to the poor. Those who, in the midst of their pain and suffering and brokenness, thought they would be overcome by it all, thought there was no earthly reason to hope—now found themselves living again. God was with them. God was on their side.

Remember Earl, that cancer patient? When last we looked, his grown children had asked if they could lay hands on him, and Earl let them. Here is how Taylor describes it in her book *An Altar in the World*: "...(Earl) let them, holding very still as one of them laid both hands on his head, and the other pressed down on both of his shoulders hard enough for him to know how heavy love could be. The three of them stayed that way for what was either a long time or no time at all." Taylor writes that nothing else was said, either during or after that moment. But she adds that years later Earl brought up the moment to his kids. He said, "Remember that day you touched me in the sunlight? I still remember that day."

The Psalmist, Isaiah, and Luke are our witnesses, reminding us that our help is from the Lord, and down to this day, so many centuries later, you and I still speak their good news to each other as we read and listen to scripture. Besides their voices, we hear stories about people like Earl and his children in our own generation. And then there is this place called Trinity, where you and I encourage one another, weep and rejoice with one another, offer a helping hand to one another, serve communion to one another, pray for one another, anoint and lay hands on one another. Through those means, we discover just how heavy love can be.

Bathed in the sunlight of Jesus' presence here, may you and I not be overcome by our pain, but rather, may we experience hope and love and healing. May we remember this day. **AMEN.**