

Something About Healing

- I need to address 2 items before I begin my actual message. First, that scripture fit very nicely into an earlier version of this message. You will find no direct reference to it in the version you'll hear this morning. If I have violated some secret message- bringer code, I apologize.
- Second: If you are ever asked to bring a message or you feel led to bring a message to this meeting, please do not let fear or inexperience stand in your way. Whenever I agree to do this I think there is a real possibility of me flopping. Be assured, there is no finer or more supportive group of people to flop in front of than this one.
- *So, turn you phones and pagers off, sit back and enjoy this world premiere of "Something about Healing".*
- For those of you who do not know, Irvington Friends Monthly Meeting recently experienced the resignations of both our pastors. In addition to that, after years of contentious interaction, we discerned a need to sever our formal affiliation with Western Yearly Meeting. We are grieving those losses and in need of healing. It is with this idea in mind along with the ever present emotional and relational injuries we, as people, face, that I offer this message. I hope that Richard Bach was right when he wrote,
- "You teach best what you most need to learn." Because I need a lot of help with this.

In an earlier part of my nursing career I counseled teens-agers. They were angry or depressed or anxious. But all had impaired problem solving skills. These deficits were barriers to their healing. I used to do an exercise with them to illustrate one of these barriers. **THIS IS A GROUP PARTICIPATION MESSAGE.** Let's see how you do with this exercise. I'm going to tell you a story with 9 characters and then ask you a question about the story.

Once upon a time (January 26th 1978) a high school sophomore (1) awoke one cold and blustery day to hear the local TV weatherman (Bob Gregory (2), who also hosted the ground-breaking TV classics The Brain Game and Bowling for Dollars) reported that 15 inches of snow fell over night and the drifting snow had pretty much shut down the city, including all schools. Fast forward 3 hours to find our hero awakening again, much more rested and lighter of heart, and talking to his friend on the telephone. Let's call this friend, oh I don't know, Damon Richards (3). "Let's go to the movies," he suggests. "No one will be there so the whole parking lot will be empty." Our hero

responded, "But what about the snow? Won't that be dangerous?", Damon replied, "How can it be dangerous and fluffy?" This seemed like a valid point and although our innocent hero didn't quite understand the link between the movie invitation and the entertainment value of an empty parking lot, he was a fan of the fine arts and courteously enquired of his mother (4), " May I go to the movies with Damon?" "No you can't go. No one can go. The streets are impassable. There was a blizzard, in case you hadn't heard. It's on all three channels."

After politely asking 12 more times in the next 15 minutes, the boy's mother said with enthusiasm, (and here I paraphrase)*"you and your multiple siblings and this (gosh darn) snow are driving me crazy. (Apparently our hero was from a large and possibly rambunctious family). Get out of here. Go to your movie, but don't blame me when you get stuck."*

From behind his newspaper our hero's father (5) then said, "*Take my car, Thom (I mean, SON). It should handle better in the snow and I want you to check out the brakes. Since I had them worked on they feel a little funny.*"

Little did the father know that earlier in the week the mechanic (6) at the local garage did not have the exact replacement brake pads for 1970 metallic green Oldsmobile Vista Cruiser. When the mechanic went to the shop manager (7) to order the pads the manager said, "*I can't have that heap sitting in the lot for a week. Just use the pads for a Cutlass. They're almost an exact match and they'll work fine. Trust me. I know this stuff.*"

The mechanic did not want to crawl back to Mr. Davila begging for his old job at Orange Julius, so he did as the manager instructed. And that is how our hero found himself careening toward Lafayette Square with his friend riding shot-gun and encouraging him to get squirrely with the car and you friend, yes YOU (8), in the back seat. As he approached an unfamiliar four-way stop he hit the brakes which locked up and sent the car skidding into the intersection where he was broadsided by a sweet customized Chevy Van (9) that also had skidded into the intersection.

The station wagon flipped upside-down into a ditch trapping all passengers in a snowbound steel cage. THE END

HERE'S THEQUESTION!!! Who is to blame? Our hero, his mother, his father, the mechanic, the shop manager, Damon Richards, Bob Gregory, you, or the driver of the sweet customized Chevy Van. Take a moment and divide the

blame any way you want. Maybe one person is 100% to blame and maybe all 9 characters are assigned 11.1% of the blame. Think about while as we enjoy this musical interlude. (Here's where I play the glockenspiel.)

Time's up, pencils down. In the interest of time I'm going to take a quick poll. As I read the list of characters just raise your hand if you think that character shares in the blame. Our hero the Sophomore. His Mother. His Father. The Mechanic. The Mechanic's Boss. Bob Gregory. Damon Richards. You. The other driver.

I appreciate your willingness to play along. But the bad news is it's kind of a trick question. You are trapped in an overturned car in snow-filled ditch. No answer to the question "Who's to blame?" gets you out of that car and to safety any quicker. The ease and relief of blaming others are shallow and fleeting comforts. Blaming does not help because blaming does not heal. It just keeps us stuck.

There may come a time to examine a situation, to determine what went wrong and what decisions were responsible for the outcome and how to learn from the incident, but blaming does not lead to healing.

It is probably overly simplistic and naïve to expect myself or others to completely stop blaming. But I want to encourage us to recognize when we are blaming. Recognize that, although it's easy and comfortable to blame, it's not helpful. Recognize that visiting that mental place of blame may be a common and habitual part of who we are, but commit to not moving there and settling in. I may still blame, but it's just a place I'm briefly passing through to a healthier attitude.

Now, I don't believe there is one way to resolve all situations, but I do believe that blaming offer little as a tool for healing.

There are some reliable tools that can, when used effectively in the right situations, promote individual, relational and corporate healing.

One of those is commitment to healing.... The odds of recovery improve significantly when you repeated focus on healing despite the barriers and the disappointments that occur in the process.

Other tools are Compassionate listening, Silence, Prayer, Discernment, and Openness to unanticipated paths toward healing.

And one I'd like to explore a little deeper is Recognition that healing is not a known destination, but a process.

Since healing is a process it can be difficult to recognize and measure:

As with physical conditions, although we may still hurt, our gradual healing may be under way.

We may look and act and feel different than we did before an injury, yet we are gradually improving.

Our healing may not look like we imagined it would, yet the healing is real.

So we must take care to not rigidly define what form healing will take.

Part of the healing process may be recognizing the complexity of the situation that wounded you. If you believe the situation can be easily summed up as, "I'm a victim and they are wrong, and mean and thoughtless..." you may be missing some nuance that is critical to your healing process.

To illustrate the unpredictable path of healing, I offer this.

The story is told that during the last days of the Raj in India, just preceding Indian independence from British colonial rule, a Hindu man killed a Muslim boy in a riot. Tormented by his deed, the man repentantly approached the Mahatma and asked if there was anything he could do to make amends and thus avoid punishment in the afterlife. Gandhi told him that he knew a way out this hell for him. The Hindu was told to adopt a homeless Muslim boy and raise him as his own son. But, one more thing, said Gandhi: You must raise him as a Muslim. The process of healing may not follow the path we imagine.

As we enter into our time of Open Worship I offer these words of Buddhist Monk and author, Jack Kornfield, “Everything that has a beginning has an ending. Make peace with that and all will be well.”