

“New Creation Faith”
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“Who hurt you, once, so far beyond repair?”

This phrase gets repeated often in the mystery novels of Louise Penny, which I’m now hard-core addicted to, having taken up reading all 16 of Penny’s currently published books, since the pandemic.

“Who hurt you, once, so far beyond repair?”

Penny puts these words into the mouth of one of the main characters in her Inspector Gamache series – a swearing, Scotch-swilling poet named Ruth Zardo. The line, taken with permission from a poem by Marylyn Plessner, speaks to the core project of Penny’s series, a central concern that has drawn millions of readers, me among them, to her unconventional whodunnits.

Are we, after enduring certain hurts, beyond repair? Or can we, like some of Penny’s characters – like she herself has done – not only survive our various wounds, but find a way to thrive after sustaining them?

As we continue our current worship series, Tending New Creation, I invite you to reflect with me on this truth: when we tend to our relationship with God, we connect with the power of new life and healing.

Sometimes there are wounds that have remained with us over the years and we continue to “bleed” even though we think ignoring them will make them go away. Each of characters in the Inspector Gamache series is carrying around old wounds. Inspector Gamache, for instance, has childhood wounds, trauma really, stemming from a fatal car crash that took both of her parents. Penny herself has wounds from her early adult life when she was alone, depressed, and drinking heavily to cope with her feelings.

To be human means we will encounter pain and loss and experience hurt. We get wounded, and we wound others. Sometimes it isn’t even a matter of what was done to us but rather what was done to us did to us. In other words, how the hurt, the grief, the loss, the disappointment manifests still in our life. This is the way that trauma operates in us. And contrary to popular thought, trauma is not limited only to big natural disasters, war, or experiences of personal violence.

Dr. Bruce Perry says that “trauma is any pattern of activating your stress response system that leads to an alteration in how that system is functioning, and that leads to an over-activity and an over-reactivity.”¹

None of us get through life without some sort of significant stressor, some significant event. But the question becomes, how are we carrying these stressors, these wounds? How are they showing up and functioning in our life? In the full words of the poem that Penny places on the lips of the fictional poet, Ruth Zardo, are these:

“who hurt you, once, so far beyond repair?

that you would meet each overture

with curling lip?

While we, who knew you well,

your friends, (the focus of your scorn)

could see your courage in the face of fear,

your wit, and thoughtfulness,

and will remember you

with something close to love.”²

Ruth’s poem puts a finger on what Dr. Brene Brown observes about what was done to us did to us: it renders many people unwilling or incapable, in some situations, of being vulnerable in terms of love, belonging, joy, intimacy, and trust.³

The good news for all of us, in all of our woundedness, is that when we tend to our relationship with God, we connect with the power of new life and healing. I say this cautiously and without any desire to glibly imply that a relationship with God immediately cures all the impact of the wounds we carry with us. Our adult education course on the Holy Spirit is discovering this is absolutely not the case as we have seen in scripture how the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives does not mean we will live without pain or self-doubt. Nor does it mean that the Spirit will take away all the anguish we might feel.

In today’s scripture text, in this story of this unnamed woman, who has a profound encounter Jesus, we see a portrait of someone deeply wounded. Her’s is a physical wound that has had massive ramifications in life: socially outcast, permanently ritually impure,

¹ Brown, B. (Host). (2021, May 5). Brené with Oprah Winfrey and Dr. Bruce D. Perry on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing. [Audio podcast episode]. In Unlocking Us with Brené Brown. Parcast Network. <https://brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-with-oprah-winfrey-and-dr-bruce-d-perry-on-trauma-resilience-and-healing/>

² Louise Penny, *Bury Your Dead*.

³ Brown, B. (Host). (2021, May 5). Brené with Oprah Winfrey and Dr. Bruce D. Perry on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing. [Audio podcast episode]. In Unlocking Us with Brené Brown. Parcast Network. <https://brenebrown.com/podcast/brene-with-oprah-winfrey-and-dr-bruce-d-perry-on-trauma-resilience-and-healing/>

economically destitute, spiritually cut off, and all alone. No doubt many around this woman decided that she was damaged goods, hurt beyond repair. Perhaps she was tempted to think that about herself. The text tells us she had “endured” or “suffered” much. Her wounds marginalized her as much as a person could be marginalized and indeed this marginalization created more wounds.

All of this is quite devastating, but the remarkable power in today’s story is the way this outcast woman is for us a model of what I am calling new creation faith, that is: faith cast not as articulated beliefs about Jesus but instead as a kind of barrier-crossing courage, daring, and persistence. In the hope of touching Jesus, in the hope of experiencing healing, and being set free from the imprisonment of her wounds, and restored to community and true belonging, this unnamed woman risks the chance that the crowd might turn on her and drive her away. She risks the chance that Jesus might rebuke and embarrass her. Theologian Theodore Jennings says that “She bets everything on a desperate gamble. That is faith. That is the only faith she has. It is sheer audacity.”

Everything is initiated by the woman. She goes after Jesus. She touches him. She knows in herself and feels in her body that she has been healed. This is a remarkable portrayal of a woman in that time and culture. For all that she has suffered and been through with her unique wounds, she is the initiator of her healing. Yes, it is the power that comes from Jesus that ultimately heals her. But it is her action of reaching out to God in boldness and tenacity that brings about the healing.

Healing comes in many different forms, physical, emotional, social, and otherwise. The Rev. Michael Lindvall tells the story of a friend, a man of deep faith, who was diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease when he was still in his fifties. He and his wife prayer that he would be healed. Twenty year later, he was in the last debilitating stages of the disease. Nevertheless, he once told Michael that his prayers had been answered. He said in all sincerity, “I have been healed, not of Parkinson’s disease, but I have been healed of my fear of Parkinson’s disease.”

Friends, our invitation today is to trust that our most daring, faithful efforts will be met with God’s merciful healing touch.

If I could have you take away only one thing from this story as we ponder together new creation faith it would be this: this unnamed woman’s boldness and tenacity are the pivotal power possessed by each and every human being. “Your faith has made you well . . .” Jesus tells her as he also gives her the most intimate healing name she could have received: Daughter! So the question for us is: Are we willing to move confidently toward Jesus, knowing his very presence in our lives can end the pain that we’ve carried around for a long time?

I went to end my sermon today with an invitation to you to consider what I have found to be a helpful practice in healing old wounds: it is a loving-kindness meditation that pairs well with new creation faith that is courageous, daring and persistent. Studies have found that

this practice has many positive psychological and physiological benefits. Just a few of those benefits are relaxation; a strengthening of the areas in the brain that are responsible for empathy, emotional regulation, and resilience; an increase in positive emotions and compassion; and a decrease in bias and self-criticism.

Here are the words of the meditation:

Here's how you would practice this meditation. Begin by sitting comfortable with your eyes closed. Breathe in and out slowly through your nose, and notice your breath fill your body. Imagine someone you love sitting in front of you. In your mind, tell that person the phrases:

May you be healthy.

May you be happy.

May you be free from suffering.

May you be filled with peace.

pausing between each phrase.

As you continue to breathe, feel your kind words and energy filling your heart space.

Next, imagine someone you might have challenges with, a family member, neighbor, a work colleague, some who has harmed you. If you find this too difficult, choose a more neutral person. Repeat the phrases to that person and send them your loving energy.

Now, bring to mind the other humans on this planet who might need love, compassion, kindness, and help. Repeat your phrases and imagined sending out your loving energy with each breath.

Finally, think of yourself. Fill your own heart space with love for yourself as you repeat:

May I be healthy.

May I be happy.

May I be free from suffering.

May I be filled with peace.

Take a moment and notice how this practice makes you feel and how it affects you and your relationships over time.

Remember that Jesus' message of encouragement here, the good news of the Gospel in today's story is this: *Even "out of the depths," my children, take heart, reach out, push through, and dare to touch God's garment — for God is already reaching out to you, and will yet take your hand, both today and in the end, to say, Talitha cum! Little one, get up!*
Amen.