

“If people bring so much courage to this world
the world has to kill them to break them,
so of course it kills them.
The world breaks every one
and afterward many are strong at the broken places.
— Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms

In our gospel reading this morning,
Jesus makes reference to a curious episode
that happens to the people of Israel on their wilderness journey;
in this encounter, the children of Israel become strong
By worshipping the very thing that threatens their existence.

In a similar way,
Say John and Jesus,
Followers of Jesus’ way
Are given new life
Through the instrument of death,
The cross,
And Jesus’ sacrifice on it.

Both texts seem strange,
Both texts also hold forth the promise of healing.

The point of the stories,
after all,
is that God is intent on providing healing for God's people.

God's desire for healing persists
not only when we are sick or broken
because of circumstances beyond our control,
but also
and I would say especially
in those times when our own choices
have brought about what ails us.

We see God's bent toward healing in the other readings as well:

*They cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress,
we read in the psalm;
he sent out his word and healed them*

. And to his friends in the church at Ephesus,
Paul the Apostle writes,
*God, who is rich in mercy,
out of the great love with which he loved us
even when we were dead through our trespasses,
made us alive together with Christ*

I am especially struck by Paul's words here—
that when our brokenness is so severe
as to cause a kind of death,
God's pervasive mercy and love,
made evident in Christ,
can bring us back to life.

When new life comes,
when healing arrives,
it doesn't always look like we hope it would.
In the times when healing doesn't equate with curing,
or doesn't fix the underlying cause of our pain,
this can be bitter indeed.

In the midst of this,
All these passages bear witness to a God
who ceaselessly,
stubbornly
works to make a path to wholeness for us.

If there's anything I have learned on my journey through life,
it's that the path to healing often unfolds
by weird, inexplicable turns,
as the snakebitten people of Israel discovered.

This makes some kind of convoluted sense.

Because the brokenness that besets us
 can take such strange forms—
 be it grief, illness, accident,
 or any of the other ways that life can unexpectedly
 and senselessly clobber us—
 it should perhaps come as no surprise
 that the means of our healing can take strange forms as well
 and make us strong
 precisely and absolutely
 at the broken places

Even so,
 I still can find myself surprised
 by the strange remedies that present themselves—
 the peculiar graces that visit,
 the unforeseen encounters that bring comfort or insight,
 the particular practices of solace
 that don't always make logical sense
 and might not fit for someone else
 but offer the mending my heart most needs.

This past week we laid to rest a friend of mine of many years-
 Jay Pearson-
 His partner of 47 years-
 His husband
 Gave an eloquent eulogy in which herecounted
 Their travels together
 And the work they did in founding the mobile loaves and fishes program.

But the deepest grace moments came asbJay's health was failing-
 His heart condition catching up with him-
 To the point where
 They could no longer travel together
 And eventually they could no longer devote
 dozens of hours each week to volunteering
 Helping feed and cloth and house people.

But the grace was this-

That even in that very painful circumstances
Jay and Ron with him found
Grace to help in time of need.

In fact those circumstances were the doorway through which
A gracious God walked to meet Jay
And take him by the arm
To the Father's house.

Todayt,
I am learning to keep my eyes open
for those strange and surprising remedies,
to loosen my hold on my expectations
of what mending and solace should look like,
in hopes of recognizing the remedies when they show up.

Strange remedies that make us strong at the broken places.

. At this place in our Lenten path—
which we cross the halfway point of this week—
what does this stir for you?

How do you keep your eyes and heart open
for the healing and life that Christ brings,
often in such unexpected ways?

Is there a place of brokenness
you are living with
that might hold a particular invitation for you in this season—
a step toward wholeness
that might not make sense to others
but helps open you to the healing God desires?

Amen.