

Sunday June 5, 2016
2 Cor. 4:1-15; Matt 5:13

Somewhere in the past few years, and I can't remember where, I heard a story about folks at an educational event who as an introductory activity were invited to find a partner and share their scar stories. The facilitator said it was quite amusing to watch, as folks pulled up sleeves or pantlegs, or even shirts as appropriate to show their scars and tell their stories.

I figured it was fairly safe to show my most recent scar on the power point today – although I did think about it for awhile. But I know that people are curious, and to my mind, it is so much better than what I thought it was going to look like I didn't think it would scare folks too much. And most of you have all been part of my journey these past 7 months ... although last weekend at Conference someone called it a "siege", which I felt was a more appropriate description.

Scar stories. I also have a scar on my head from my childhood when I fell down a window well into a basement and needed some stitches. And, I have a scar on my knee, and a chipped tooth, from a time when I was riding my bike alone where I shouldn't have been, and I fell. That curbed my adventurous spirit for at least

several decades. And, I also have a scar on my abdomen from my hysterectomy two and a half years ago. I won't show you that scar.

Our scars give insight into who we are, and who we have been. They form the stories of our lives. And we don't just carry physical scars, we carry emotional scars. My sister and her husband lost their first child 25 years ago this month. He was only three days old when he died because of an undetected brain injury at birth. Naturally, they were devastated. There were no words of comfort that anyone could offer, no words of explanation, no prescriptions or medications that could ease their pain.

I will never forget a minister friend that came to visit them during that week. He had never met my sister before, but agreed to come for a conversation. He sat down and the first thing he said was "You will never get over this." I could feel the tension release in the room immediately. And then he said "... but it will take it's place in the tapestry of your life." It was such a moment of truth, one that I have carried with me through many encounters. The realization that one doesn't have to "get over" something like that ... that there is no forgetting, no moment when there will not

be pain. But somehow, there will be a learning to live with the experience that is now part of who you are.

Author Eckert Tolle has written extensively about something called the pain-body. In an interview, he explains:

“The pain-body is my term for the accumulation of old emotional pain that almost all people carry in their energy field. I see it as a semi-autonomous psychic entity. It consists of negative emotions that were not faced, accepted, and then let go in the moment they arose. These negative emotions leave a residue of emotional pain, which is stored in the cells of the body. There is also a collective human pain-body containing the pain suffered by countless human beings throughout history.”

I believe that we can see this collective pain-body in our world today – here in Canada, in our aboriginal brothers and sisters and the pain inflicted by settler colonialism over many generations, in Jewish people and the experience of the Holocaust, in countries like Rwanda, Guatemala, or Syria.

Tolle has many teachings about how to identify our own individual pain-body, and how to not let the negative thinking associated with the pain continuously

feed the pain-body, keeping us from transforming the experience. He says, “When the pain-body no longer runs the internal dialogue of our compulsive thinking, we become aware of it directly. We feel the emotion in our body, and so we bring awareness to it, the light of consciousness. ... So disidentification from the emotion and just being in the now moment is the way to stop the cycle of constantly recreating painful experiences. ... Once you recognize it, it cannot take over your mind, feed on your negative thoughts, and control your internal dialogue as well as what you say and do. ... If you don't feed it anymore, it loses its energy charge and the negative emotion undergoes transmutation.”¹

So, by recognizing our own pain-bodies, our physical and emotional scars, we are recognizing and honouring our flaws and failures, our mistakes, our humanity, our vulnerability as humans.

Here is Dr. Brene Brown, author and public speaker, speaking about her research on vulnerability.

Video ...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZkDaKkFi6Y>

¹ <https://www.eckharttolle.com/article/Awakening-Your-Spiritual-Lifes-Purpose>

Dr. Brown says the definition of vulnerability includes uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure, and is about "... the willingness to show up and be seen even though there are no guarantees."

We can see this vulnerability in our reading today in the letter from Paul to the church in Corinth. We are in the middle of a six week series on Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. It's hard to just pick up the pieces of what is going on when we just hear little snippets each week. In fact, the book that we call Second Corinthians is probably a compilation of several letters that Paul sent to the early church in Corinth.

The background to this letter is that there is a conflict in the church in Corinth, and Paul asked Timothy, his colleague, to take a first letter to the community and to try and sort out the issues. Although Timothy tried his best, he was unsuccessful, and conflict persisted. Paul changed his travel plans and visited Corinth. He was gentle with them, perhaps even conciliatory, but due to the strength of the conflict, Paul was also unsuccessful. In fact, there was one personality that obviously hurt Paul with insults and untruths. All this, we learn from reading the letter carefully, noticing the references to past events.

In last week's reading, from chapter 2, we heard Paul say "I wrote you out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain, but to let you know the abundant love I have for you." Paul acknowledges his own flaws and failings. His own human-ness. And he pleads for forgiveness on both parts.

In today's reading, he says, "we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies."

Paul uses the image of clay jars as a metaphor for vulnerability and human frailty, but says that even with this vulnerability, the light of God shines through and overcomes adversity in ways that we may never understand. Clay jars in ancient times were made cheaply and were often thin and susceptible to cracking or chipping. And yet it is the very cracks, the weakness and vulnerability of the clay jar, that allow the light, the

light which comes from God, Paul says, to shine through. As Leonard Cohen says in one often quoted poems "There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." Except in Paul's understanding, the light is also within, and so it gets out through the cracks as well.

There is a wonderful old story, told in many ways, called the broken pot, or the leaky bucket.

<http://chotai.org/My%20Stories.html#Bucket>

or The Cracked Pot

<http://amazingwomenrock.com/the-story-of-the-cracked-pot-for-anyone-whos-not-quite-perfect>

This story reminds me that when I'm feeling most unuseful, most unfocussed, it's possible that I might even still be watering those seeds that God has planted. The water might still be spilling out, falling on those seeds on the side of the path. Most likely I'm just moving too fast, or haven't looked back in awhile to see the joyous row of wildflowers behind me.

It may be easy enough to think of ourselves as leaky buckets ... as imperfect clay jars that somehow still carry the love of God deep inside, and that love

poking through the cracks, disappointments, failures, missteps and scars of our lives.

How might we think of ourselves collectively as a treasure in a clay jar ... as a faith community here at St. John's that has had its share of disappointments and perceived failures, of frailties and cracks? Where have you seen the love of God shining through the cracks, through the thinness of our walls? Where have others seen our light shining through? Where have we watered the path unknowingly, allowing the wildflowers to grow in abandon? When have you seen this community show vulnerability, not vulnerability that means "weak in the knees", but vulnerability as expressed in the sign (fists open heart)? What are our scar stories from our many decades of being a faith community in this area of the city? That's where God will meet us may we walk together in that open-heartedness and vulnerability. Thanks be to God.