

I've Been Meaning to Ask... *Where Does it Hurt?*
Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
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Mark 5:21-43

Do you remember a time when you were young, when you fell off your bike or tumbled off some playground equipment and got hurt?

My guess is you ran to someone, maybe a parent, grandparent, sitter or older sibling with tears in your eyes to tell them what happened. And they probably asked you, "*where does it hurt*"?

So without reservation, you would show them your elbow or knee or whatever it was that was in pain. If you were lucky, someone would pull out a pack of frozen vegetables from the freezer, or maybe a boobo bunny and kiss the pain away.

As we get older, we become more hesitant to share our hurts and pains. They become more difficult to articulate, so we avoid talking about them. We put on a happy face or at least one that says, "*No worries! I got it, I can handle it*". Even if we're just fooling ourselves.

Social media doesn't help. We post pictures of beautiful graduations, birthday celebrations, weddings... but not of getting out of rehab. We share photos of a great vacation we just had in the Caribbean, but not the fight we had in the airport, or the bills that we are going to have difficulty paying. We share photos of our wedding anniversaries, but not of those days when one partner or the other talks themselves into staying in the marriage and working it out.

I've been meaning to ask, where does it hurt?

As I've been wrestling this week with this question, I gave a lot of thought to why we would even pose it. It's awkward to be that vulnerable... but here goes.

I remember being rushed to the hospital before the birth of my first child, 27 years ago. During the pregnancy, I had been mostly on bed rest towards, due to high blood pressure.

She was about 10 days overdue, and earlier that I had visited my OBGYN to decide if we were going to induce labor. Later that evening, my temperature began to soar, my head pounded and I began to sweat profusely. We were told to get to the hospital as soon as possible.

Once there, I was given IV fluids, antibiotics and other medications to bring down not only my blood pressure but also an infection that was spreading throughout my body. We learned that our baby's temperature had also spiked, and the fetal heart monitor showed she was in severe distress.

Minutes later, we were whisked down to an operating room where I delivered a 9lb 1oz baby girl by emergency C-section.

It was a scary time for my young family, and even telling you the story makes me a little queasy. It was nearly a week before both of us were stable and healthy enough to return home.

There was one moment I will remember for the rest of my life. The following morning my mother Kathy, and Clark's mother Rita, were finally allowed into my room. They sat together, in folding chairs at the side of my hospital bed, and just settled in. *"Tell us what happened"* they said.

When I began to tell the story, my emotions were a tumble, but I remember trying to form sentences that would be as concise and informative as possible. I remember holding back the tears. Clearly, I was putting on a brave face. And as I was trying to tell them what happened, how close to death we both came, they touched my arm and said,

"Jenn. Take your time. It's okay to cry. Start at the beginning and tell us the whole story."

Take your time. It's okay to cry. Tell us the whole story.

In that moment, our mothers taught me as much about being a parent, a pastor, a spouse, a friend as any book I would ever read.

Sit down. Turn away from distractions. Listen to the whole story... *where does it hurt?*

Any one of us can do it, but it's so much harder than it sounds, isn't it?

Jesus responded to pain in just that way in the story we just heard from the Gospel of Mark. The woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years approached him with desperation. It was a chaotic, crowded scene when she came and touched his cloak. The Bible says he was immediately aware that power had gone forth from Him.

Many people touched Jesus that day. But he noticed this one touch of this particular woman.

I wonder if Jesus was an empath. Empaths are highly sensitive individuals, people who have a keen ability to sense what the people around them are

thinking and feeling. He had no choice but to respond to the pain and hurt he could feel around him.

I know many people who are empathetic, but only a few true empaths.

One person has described to me what it's like to attend worship. Even without talking with anyone, just by sitting in the midst of people in the pews, she is able to feel all the emotions: the joy, the sorrow, the stress, the grief. She's able to intuitively feel it for everyone in the room. It's a heavy burden, and I know only a couple of people who are able to do that.

I think that Jesus had that same ability, but that most of the rest of us have to work at it. So we can learn to sit down, to pay attention, to listen to the whole story. We can learn empathy.

But first, we may have to learn it for ourselves. We often talk about how we share the same joys, but I think that which causes us the most sorrow, the most grief, the most hurt is also a universal experience.

So come back with me to the story this woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years. Jesus said to the woman, "*Your faith has made you well*". We often misinterpret this moment as saying that if we are just faithful enough we can magically cure some medical illness.

But this moment was something deeper than that. Imagine her courage. Imagine the vulnerability of being willing to reach out and ask for the help that she needs.

Every single one of us has something that has hurt us. Brene Brown writes that "*Without self-awareness and the ability to manage our emotions, we often unknowingly lead from hurt, not heart. Not only is this a huge energy suck for us and the people around us, it creates distrust, disengagement, and an eggshell culture.*"¹

None of us want that, but so few of us really want to look deeply at what has hurt us.

Author Jason Reynolds writes² about his relationship with his mother, her diagnosis of cancer when he was 18, and then a difficult very serious surgery she needed to have when he was 22. He describes learning about the 20 hour surgery, understanding how very serious it was, taking a bus from New York to DC to be with her.

¹ <https://brennebrown.com/blog/2018/12/04/leading-from-hurt-versus-leading-from-heart/#close-popup>

² [You Are Your Best Thing: Vulnerability, Shame Resilience, and the Black Experience](#) Burke, Tarana

And just before she was prepped for surgery he stood by her bed and said, *"Mom, I want to be here, but today is the day I signed the book deal. This is it. This is what I've been working for."* She nodded and told him he should do what he needed to do. He kissed her on the forehead and was gone.

And this is what he later wrote about that moment,

"At 22 years old, I left my mother in a potentially fatal surgery, so I could do what could have been done a day a week, or even a month later, but I thought about how I'd never seen black writers growing up so there couldn't have been many, and if I didn't do it then they retract the opportunity and I'd never get to see who I might become.

Instead, I got to see who I already was. I'm 36 now, my mother and I have never talked about the intricacies of that surgery and whenever asked about it she brushes it off, but I know what happened. And I know, things got shaky."

For fourteen years Jason carried guilt and shame about his choice that day. As he sat down to write about that experience, he called his 65-year-old mom and told her about it for the first time. He described his shame and guilt being like a dumbbell in his belly, an infection, something nasty spreading throughout his body.

"That was a long time ago," she said, *"Baby, you got to forgive yourself."* She went on and on, talking about all she had taught him throughout the years and all the ways he had made her proud. And then she said, *"Above all, I taught you, like my daddy taught me, family first."*

"Right, and that's the reason why I'm carrying such a heavy load." he responded.

She replied... *"But son, you've put your family first every day since. Why be ashamed of what you've atoned for? Let me make it plain. Some things are meant to stay between us. But this ain't one of them."*

Healing happens when we have the courage to name our hurts.

God calls us to see, to talk about, to hear the hurt in ourselves in each other, and in the world. That is where healing begins... may it begin with us, here and now. Amen.