

## Paradox

Acts 3:12-19

1 John 3:1-7

Luke 24:36-48

Most of us understand the concept of paradox...we have the ability to hold two concepts or ideas together that are seemingly contradictory. Life is full of paradoxes; sometimes it's about balance...balancing taking care of yourself and taking care of your family. Balancing love of others with love of self...they both can't be in first place in our lives.

Loving your family to the exclusion of and perhaps harm of yourself does little long term good and can do great harm. Yet loving yourself to the point of ignoring or displacing your family is every bit as bad if not worse. Finding a balance is critical...and it is also a paradox.

In the classic Nicene Creed we proclaim the paradox that Jesus was and is both fully human and fully divine. How can that be true? It's a paradox – we don't understand how, but we know both statements are true.

Our faith is filled with examples of paradox: We know that no one who abides in Jesus sins and that those who sin do not know Jesus...yet all of us sin, including the disciple who wrote those words.

On the road to Emmaus, the disciples are frightened by Jesus' appearance, overjoyed to see Him, filled with wonder and disbelief. All at the same time.

Our faith rests on these kinds of paradox. We know God to be holy, righteous and pure and cannot tolerate those who are sinful. But we also know that even though we are anything BUT holy, righteous or pure – just like Jesus' disciples – we are nevertheless called children of God and used by God to share the Good News with all people. It's a paradox.

Today's readings give us a place to start to understand the "why" behind these paradox...these scriptures flow together to provide us with one purpose behind the paradox...healing.

A powerful word: healing. Something that has little meaning, until we are the ones yearning for healing.

It's important to realize that what happened to Jesus was not a random act of ugliness, not simply another in a long series of cruelties and indignities that powerful and corrupt people have foisted upon the weak, the innocent and the good.

Jesus' life, suffering, death and resurrection were a part of God's long-term effort to deal with the very human problems of sin, evil, hatred, discord and death.

The only way forward from a human history of self-inflicted misery was the way of Christ, the way of the cross.

Rather than seek revenge, God in Christ embraced justice, turned away from our death and through His own death gave us life. Remember the words of Luke you just heard, "Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in His name to all nations".

This is the world's only hope, our only way out of a cycle of offense and revenge, of wrong piled upon wrong in a deadly game of king of the hill. The only way to bring an end is the gospel call for repentance and forgiveness...and not only in a private and personal way, but also in a communal and corporate way as well.

This is a message spoken to the disciples and one that resonates all too well with us today, in a world where we seem to be racing to the lowest common denominator, where compromise for the good of all is a lost art, where the game of king of the hill has become all too much a match of life or death.

Today's readings lead us forward into our response and the gift we receive in these paradoxes: Healing.

In today's story from Acts, Peter and John are continuing the healing ministry of Jesus when they heal the lame man at the temple gate. Today's reading is the sermon that Peter gave after the healing. It's important to hear that at least one message of Peter's sermon is that in spite of the crucifixion the name of Jesus brings healing.

And did you notice? In the story the lame man does not display faith that the disciples will heal him; he's only there for a handout. God's healing is NOT dependant on the purity of our faith.

This is important...remember it:

Healing and Grace do NOT depend on our mustering enough faith to convince God to act. God takes the initiative. Always!

Then there is the physical healing pictured in today's reading from Luke. There He is, standing among them, speaking, eating, pointing to His flesh and bones. Jesus is healed, intact.

And finally, there is the spiritual healing of the epistle of John. John promises the full presence of Christ and our transformation to be like Him. Part of this transformation involves purification. If Luke promises physical healing, John promises moral and spiritual healing.

That is the message and ministry of the church: That the church continues to offer healing in its ministry. To each and everyone of God's creatures. There is not one person, however created, that is beyond God's healing. When the church, when the faithful dare to proclaim someone out of realm of God's healing, they have wandered far from the truth.

This is a paradox, especially in today's world.

We live in a world where radical Muslims kidnap girls, behead innocents and blow themselves up in a distorted understanding, or blatant misunderstanding of their faith.

We live in a world where radical Christians arm themselves with every form of weapon they can buy to protect themselves from their own governments, are perfectly willing to condemn anyone who runs afoul of their interpretation and selective reading of the Christian message, have killed more innocent victims in the west than any terrorist group, espouse an eye for an eye justice and believe that, somehow, they are special to God.

We live in a world where the value of human life is less than that of the stock market, or the profit of a drug company or where health and healing are often of less importance than net profit.

We live in a world where people are manifestly NOT holy, righteous or pure. Is there anyone here who would challenge that statement?

Nonetheless, we live in a world that was and continues to be created by a loving and merciful God. Even when we succumb to the seduction of personal gain over justice, when we are ready to consign the rest of the world's population from "people" to "other", when we lie to ourselves that our actions are "just" and our choices are correct, God is here.

We know how easy it is to trick ourselves...we have enough practice at it! Yet in spite of all that we are all that we are not, we ARE loved and we ARE forgiven. Absolutely. Completely. And therein is the paradox.

The love of God is ours. The forgiveness of God is ours. The healing of God is ours. All we need do is allow that healing to happen.

There is nothing in your past or in your present that can possibly remove you from the love of God. No act of commission or omission. No slip up or intentional act, to which you respond with heartfelt repentance.

We allow God's healing in our lives when we are finally willing to admit our mistakes, so that we can open our lives to the healing mercy of God's love. Only then can we welcome God's Grace into our lives. If we admit no mistakes, there is no room for healing. Paradox.

However, God WANTS us to be full, whole members of creation; a creation that He made and proclaimed as good...yet there is no healing without repentance.

Our lives are a paradox of healing and God's love. We don't understand it all, not all has been revealed to us, but this we do know: as God's children, we are blessed, we are loved, we are forgiven. Our lives can be transformed by the abundant mercy given to us in Christ Jesus, if we dare but ask.