

Isaiah 65:1-9
Psalm 22:19-28
Galatians 3:23-29
Luke 8:26-39

Sermon June 23rd, 2019

Jesus' Healing Challenges Us

In April of 2002 I finally had enough. I had been smoking pretty heavy for five years, and was tired of always feeling out of shape. Tired of smelling not so great, and needing to drench myself in cologne every hour. Tired of looking at those grotesque pictures on the package reminding me of all the long-term health risks I may contract. Tired of risking other people's health. Tired of spending so much money. In 2002 cigarettes had gone up double due to new taxes.

So, instead, I decided to invest my money in gum. Starting my journey to health, happiness, and wholeness. Knowing that quitting smoking would be the best thing for me. At least in the long run.

Now, I knew it wasn't going to be easy. But, I still think I underestimated how rough the road ahead was going to be. Kind of like driving on a secondary highway in Saskatchewan. At first it looks like a road that is just a little more uneven than what we normally drive on. Maybe a few more cracks and crannies. Then some little ways down the road you see a pot hole the size of the Grand Canyon. Or erosion leaving huge bumps in the middle of the road that look like mountains. Maybe, a slight exaggeration.

I thought the withdrawal symptoms would be the toughest hurdle to jump over. However, it was the social changes that were the hardest to deal with. All the friends I hung out with smoked, and after a little while, I had to come to the realization that I couldn't keep hanging around my friends all the time. If I did I would probably start up again. I also realized that I had very little in common with my friends who smoked. It was like the only thing that kept us together was smoking.

It didn't help that some of my friends became very defensive thinking I was judging them even before I opened my mouth. I can't blame them though. I have known lots of people who become very self-righteous after overcoming an addiction. For myself, I feel any addiction is very hard to

overcome and we need to approach someone with an addiction with some compassion and understanding.

So, I had to reset my life. I had to build new friendships, which as an adult is a lot harder for some reason. I think it may be that many people already have established friends from their school days, and are not looking to invest more time and energy into new relationships. So, I spent a lot of lonely days wondering if I had made a big mistake.

After about two years I started to build new friendships, and now when looking back I know that it was one of the most positive turning points in my life. In the moment though it was really hard to make that change. Even knowing that I would feel healthier.

Sometimes doing the right thing or striving for greater health comes with a cost. Comes with some bumps/mountains in the road.

Sometimes we get used to living with the baggage in our lives. We get comfortable. And when we try and cleanse ourselves from this baggage we become uncomfortable. How often do we live with our addictions, our bad habits, because it becomes our normal?

In university I had a friend who was living in an abusive relationship. My friend knew he was better off without her in his life. My friend looked so much healthier when he didn't have contact with her. But, there were days where he regretted his decision and wanted to go back. He was lonely, and not getting any younger. He felt uncomfortable in his new environment. At times, it was hard for me to understand. Until I remembered my home environment growing up. Unfortunately, I had a very challenging childhood, and when I left home to go to university I went through a period of detox. At times I started to feel emotionally healthier. At other times, I felt out of place in my new environment. It felt weird living in a house where people didn't fight all the time. It took my friend and myself a couple of years before we started to get comfortable with our new normal.

How often do we live in an abusive or toxic relationship, because it becomes our normal? We have become used to it, and when we are away from it we feel out of sorts. At least for the first little while.

Well, in our gospel this morning, we hear about Jesus' encounter with a person who has been dealing with spiritual/mental health problems for

years. The community must have felt the impact of this person's spiritual/mental health problems. Otherwise, they wouldn't have tried to restrain him.

Jesus now encounters this person free from his shackles, and chooses to heal him. Jesus exorcises the demons out of this person and sends them into a herd of pigs. The pigs run off the cliff and drown. Leaving this person free from his spiritual/mental problems.

The owners of the pigs are furious, because Jesus has killed their main source of income. They run into town probably to file a complaint about this Jesus character. They come back scared of the power Jesus has shown to possess. They ask Jesus to leave.

Now, Jesus has just healed someone whose health issues has impacted the community and this individual in an unhealthy way for years. This person and the community can now reconcile, moving forward, living their lives with health and wholeness.

And yet, the people's response to Jesus' life-giving love is to send Jesus away? They became used to this person and their spiritual/mental health problems. And the cost of Jesus' healing was just too much for them.

Except for the person who was healed. He wanted to follow Jesus. He wanted to live this new life that Jesus has given him.

However, Jesus wants him to reintegrate himself in his own community. Part of healing physically or mentally is also healing socially. Often when we deal with physical or mental health problems the impact goes beyond ourselves. It effects our relationships with those in our community. Jesus exorcises the demons allowing him to experience healing with his community even though it will be hard since the community is used to seeing this person in a certain way.

Also, Jesus wants this community to experience God's healing, and knows that the people have asked him to leave. In response, Jesus is hoping that this person who has been receptive of Jesus' healing can now reflect God's healing love to his community.

So, when we respond adversely to our healing, Jesus stays patient, and finds another way to help us see the good that comes out of our experience of God's healing.

Yes, life will change. Yes, sometimes the adjustments will be hard. Yes, sometimes, we may even ask the healer to leave. But, with Jesus, Jesus promises to walk with us in our healing. Jesus will be there. Even if Jesus has to try different ways to get us to experience this healing.

Because, when we experience this healing. When we are able to embrace this healing. When we come to that point where we finally detox. Jesus invites us to share this good news of God's healing love to others. Jesus transforms our wounds into compassion, wisdom, and understanding for others so that others will experience God's healing too. Like our psalmist witnesses in their experience of healing, we see that with God's healing comes new life, comes a healthier life. Comes a life steeped in love for our neighbor.

Let us pray, healing God, thank you for healing us from the toxicity in our lives. When we struggle to adapt to our new life give us strength, patience, and understanding. When we finally detox redirect us to reflect your healing love to others. In Jesus name we pray, **Amen.**