

Coach House Church BEACONS

LEAVE IT ALL BEHIND

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I've noticed as I've been talking to people during Lockdown – people are reminiscing a lot. Maybe it's just having time to think. Thinking back to the old days, remembering wet camping holidays when their kids were little, or looking back to their own childhood. Putting old photos on Facebook. I even caught myself reminiscing about the power cuts in the 70's – what a great time we had! For those that aren't nearly as old as me, there was an economic crisis which resulted in electricity supplies being cut, I think to just 3 days a week. What was a terrible blow to the economy was immense fun to me as a kid - to have all the family huddled around a single battery operated transistor radio, listening by candlelight as I ruined my teeth with sticky blackjacks and penny chews. Heaven! (I wonder if some of us will look back to Lockdown in the same way?)

Anyway, reminiscing about happy memories is lovely – but what happens when we end up living in the past – not just chuckling over happy memories, but living day by day in the pain of days long since gone by. So many of us do this – even though we look fine on the surface, when we get alone with ourselves, we just keep getting drawn back. Reliving that painful comment from a friend, a spouse, a boss, a parent. Reliving one specific incident, or a whole traumatic period of our lives. People glibly say, “just forget about it – move on, it's not worth it”. And we agree.

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But it's like a spider's web that draws you back – every time your mind is at rest, you find yourself going over and over the same old things. It's become a habit – an addiction – daily peeling the scab from a barely healed wound. Very painful.

What's the answer?

Well, before we come to an answer, let's look at the question. Why are some things so painful, when other things - major and minor - are like water off a ducks back? Quickly forgotten – we can maybe recall it happening, but there's no lasting pain in it.

Looking at my own experience, some things I find quite easy to forgive and let go. They annoy me or maybe upset me for a short while, but once my attention is captured by something else, it drifts away and I don't give it another thought.

But other things really stick. Why? I wonder if it's that, if some action or comment attacks my sense of identity – who I really AM – somehow that really cuts deep. The offence is magnified. It strikes the core of my being, where I am most vulnerable. And most of us – if we're honest - aren't all that secure in who we really are. We might look confident – we might even come across totally brash and arrogant – but deep down we're not as confident and secure as we look.

Things that crush our identity seem to be among the hardest to forget.

And of course – some offences are huge, unimaginably so. Some have been attacked to the very depths of who they are – by family breakdown, by violence, by abuse. I daren't even stray into such areas of deep wounding. But I think, to some extent, the same is true? That the depth of the pain is, at least in part, because it so attacks the identity, who we were made to be, and our freedom to be that unique person – that's where the wound is. That's why it cuts so deep.

So how do we put that right? How can we restore an identity that has been so cruelly wounded?

If my identity is all mashed up by life, by others, and let's face it a lot of the time by my own mistakes and decisions, how can it ever be restored?

There's an amazing passage in the bible, it was written by one of the prophets, Isaiah, around 700 BC. God reveals to him, ahead of time, the nature and identity of the coming Messiah.

He says that when the Saviour comes, he will

“bind up the broken hearted, proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners. He will comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion – a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair”. Isaiah 61:1

Wow. Even though I've read those words many times over the years – it still makes me want to cry. The healing and restoration of every broken heart! The binding of every wound! O the mercy and compassion of God – who sees our great need!

When Jesus did finally arrive – 700 years later – this was the first passage that he read out in public. And He declared, “this scripture is now fulfilled in your hearing”. He told us that he was bringing restoration. That he would heal the wounds. He said he will bind up our broken hearts. He will comfort our mourning. He will give us brightness and joy in place of our darkness and despair.

God is the only one who can put you back together, where your identity has been wounded, abused, and stolen.

Be honest. You won't ever find the solution to your pain by going over the past – you've tried that, maybe for years. You won't find your true identity in anger, bitterness. This just eats away at your very marrow, steals your life and leaves you hopeless, depressed and dried up.

So why not reach out for the restoration that Jesus offers?

Where do we begin? Forgiveness. Sorry if that sounds a bit pious – bear with me. The Christian perspective is that we enter into real life as we let go – as we let go of trying to sort it all out for ourselves. As we ask God to forgive us – and as we learn to forgive the people who have hurt us.

As you begin to let go, you may realise that the person who hurt you didn't mean any harm. Its just that they are a wounded human being, the same as you. they weren't

perfect, perhaps they were just doing the best they could at the time. As you get a new perspective, it may be easy to forgive. But what if there was real harm – if you forgive, doesn't that mean they get off scot free? No. It doesn't mean it doesn't matter. It doesn't mean you brush it under the carpet and pretend it wasn't so bad. It doesn't mean that person won't be called to account for what they have done. It just means you decide to trust God, and let Him deal with it. He knows them. He knows how to deal with THEIR wounding, their issues of identity. And he knows real evil when he sees it – and has the power to deal with it accordingly. Let him.

As you look at the past, your less than happy past, feel free to rage and cry, express your pent up anger, stamp your feet and punch your pillow. Maybe speak to a trusted friend or counsellor or minister. But do this – not to re live it, over and over, as if this has become your identity, your reason for being; as if this defines who you are. Do it so as to leave it behind. There's a place in the bible where it says "weeping may remain for a night – but joy comes in the morning". The past is gone. Let the Healer come in and do what only He can do – restore you to your true identity.

There's a picture in my mind that sums all this up. When Jesus rose from the dead – in a burst of the most amazing power, he stood up and walked out into the morning light. And he left his grave clothes neatly folded in the tomb. He simply walked away and left the things that belonged to the past – to his suffering and death – he left them behind; he left them in the place of the dead.

So join me. There are things in my past that I just have to choose leave behind. I cant change them. I've examined them carefully, from every angle. I've learned what I can. But now, I choose to fold them up and leave them in the tomb. So I can walk out with Jesus into a life more abundant than anything I've known before.

Father God bring us into this place of freedom, and fullness of life. In Jesus name.

Amen



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