

"Broken Spirits, Broken Bodies"
Broken — Good News for Tough Times: Part 1 of 6

a sermon based on

Romans 8:1-11

and delivered on-

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6th Sunday after Pentecost(Year A)

for

Cherry Valley United Methodist Church

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Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

That's the version most of us are familiar with. Older versions are a bit different in the last two lines. The earliest known version that we know of was published in 1797.

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
Four-score Men and Four-score more,
Could not make Humpty Dumpty where he was before.

Was it a riddle? A political satire? Just a "fun" rhyme? We don't really know.

One thing – though that is obvious is that – it speaks to a certain futility in Humpty Dumpty's restoration. He's broken – for him it is hopeless. Just like this broken vase looks like a lost cause.

Today, we'll be beginning a sermon series following St. Paul's letter to the Romans in which we explore ways to discover – and receive God's grace and blessing even in the midst of trouble.

As Paul says in Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." No matter how tough our situation – no matter how broken we may feel – God can repair it.

So how do we approach this (I'm going to call it "unnatural" – because it represents our fallen nature) unnatural tendency to tend to futility rather than hope?

And so today, we begin with a look at the spirit – body connection.

In the Preface to Primitive Physick – John Wesley begins:

"When man came first out of the hands of the great Creator, clothed in body as well as in soul, with immortality and incorruption, there was no place for physic, or the art of healing. As he knew no sin, so he knew no pain, no sickness, weakness, or bodily disorder. The habitation wherein the angelic mind, the *Divinae particula Auræ* (the particle of breath divine) abode, though originally formed out of the dust of the earth, was liable to no decay. It had no seeds of corruption or dissolution within itself. And there was nothing without to injure it: Heaven and earth and all the hosts of them were mild, benign, and friendly to human nature. The entire creation was at peace with man, so long as man was at peace with his Creator. So that well might "the morning stars sing together, and all the sons of God shout for joy."

"But since man rebelled against the Sovereign of heaven and earth, how entirely is the scene changed! The incorruptible frame hath put on corruption, the immortal has put on mortality. The seeds of weakness and pain, of sickness and death, are now lodged in our inmost substance;"

Our bodies – our souls – are connected to our spirit. Our spiritual well-being – our spiritual health – affects how we experience the world.

In the passage from Romans, today, when Paul speaks about the law of the Spirit and the law of the flesh – he's not talking merely about the avoidance of "carnal" – physical – pleasure. If that were the case, he would have used the word that meant "meat" – rather what he's talking

about is a worldview entirely consisting of materiality – the material world. And he says, it is incomplete.

So often – the reason our troubles – our brokenness – seem overwhelming and hope seems futile – is because we're faced with misdiagnosis – focusing in on that one thing that we know is the source of our trouble – instead of doing a broader search.

Let me tell you about Sadie. Sadie is not her real name. Although she's no longer with us, out of respect for her privacy, I've changed her name and maybe tweaked the details a little bit to obscure her identity.

This was about fourteen (maybe fifteen) years ago. Sadie was in her mid-eighties when it happened. She and her husband were driving to Rochester, Minnesota to Mayo Clinic (I don't know who had the appointment; but one did, and they went together.) when it happened. As they made a left hand turn, they hadn't seen the truck approaching. Although they drove what I would have called a boat of a car, it was no match for the semi as it smashed directly into the passenger side of the car – Sadie's side.

Sadie survived. {aside: When I said she's no longer with us, it's because time caught up with her. Remember this was years ago and she was already well into her eighties.} Her husband survived with surprisingly mild injuries. Sadie wasn't as fortunate. In addition to a neck injury, she fractured at least one limb and her skull. She ended up in the hospital for weeks with one of those halo supports keeping her head in place. When I'd visit with her, we'd pray and talk about how she was feeling. Her head hurt, but eventually her limb healed and she'd progressed to the point that she could return home without that halo apparatus.

As she healed, her head quit hurting, but she started to have this other sensation. I can't describe it, because she couldn't really describe it – although she tried. She told this to her doctors, who ran tests and reviewed her injuries. "You should be fine," they told her. "It's all in your head." It went so far that she underwent psychiatric evaluation.

I asked her, "You know, you're know spring chicken, have they checked to see if there's something else going on?" This went on for (probably) about a year.

Finally, one of her doctor's ran some other tests. Sadie had Parkinson's disease. The sensations that she had experienced really were all in her head, but not her imagination. But to come to that conclusion and to offer the treatment that would address this disease that had been progressing through that whole time required looking beyond the obvious or apparent cause of her discomfort. If she hadn't been in an accident with head injuries, would that diagnosis have come sooner?

Fortunately, for Sadie the treatments worked and she even resumed some of her volunteer activity for the church.

Tunnel vision comes naturally – in fact our brains do that automatically in times of danger to help us focus on the threat at hand and to respond accordingly. But what if the danger isn't what we think it is?

Several years ago, I took a class at Nashotah House on healing with Fr. Alan Hansen (a charismatic Episcopal priest and director of Acts 29 Ministries) One of the things he taught about healing ministry is that the first step is always – not sometimes or occasionally, but always – an interview.

In the story of Bartimaeus in Mark 10, when the blind man calls out "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me,"^(v. 47) Jesus doesn't just walk over to him and give him vision. He does make Bartimaeus see, but only after asking "What do you want me to do for you?" and listening to the man's reply ^(v. 51). The same thing happens in Luke 18. So many other times, Jesus begins with a question, and maybe a follow-up question or two. He doesn't just presume what the need is, he asks.

Part of that is helping the person or the mother or father to identify what it is that they want, because it's not always obvious.

So let's go back to my study under Fr. Hansen. Healing begins with an interview. Part of that interview is asking "What do you want?" but it goes deeper than that. It can confuse people, "I told you what I want. Let's get too it." Healing is more than treating or even curing a physical infirmity. Healing – real healing – applies to the whole person, body, mind and spirit. Even physicians know that our mental state affects our physical well-being. Our spiritual state does as well.

What good does it do to treat the cuts on a teenager engaged in cutting, without treating the angst that leads her to cut herself? Right? Not only is she likely to cut again, but she may not even allow the treated wounds to heal. The behavior gets in the way.

It happens with our spirits. Our sin might lead us to do things that harm our bodies. Our inability or reluctance to forgive strains our minds and bodies.

This is not to say – that all physical illness or suffering is result of sin; (It can be) but that our spiritual illness can get in the way of receiving God's blessings. Medication interactions are one example. I've said it before: I'm a fat guy with a legitimate thyroid condition. The medication that I need, Synthroid, can't be taken with minerals or milk. Even though "Milk does the body good," it prevents the body from absorbing that medication.

Our brokenness – our sin does that, too. God really does want us to be healed. That word "*salvation*" in Greek and English comes from the same root as "*salve*." Jesus went to the cross to bring the full power of healing to our lives. But he also, took time to care for people's bodies, to speak up for their dignity like that woman pouring perfume on his feet while Jesus ate in the home of a Pharisee named Simon. When others scoffed, Jesus spoke about how the host had ignored his duties but that this woman couldn't contain her love for him, concluding, "Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.' Then he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.'"^(Lk 7:47-48)

I'll admit – sometimes when I'm singing "It is well with my soul," it's with as much hope or yearning – than it is as a statement of fact.

We can turn to physicians for help with our bodies, we can turn to financial planners for help with our finances, we can turn to whatever the expert is for whatever the problem is – but I am convinced that – if we take Scripture seriously – if we really want to find hope – that means looking for those places where our soul – our spirits ache and suffer affliction.

Today – not to dismiss whatever challenges each of us face in the world – but there is a real sense that we need to do some self-interviewing – ask, "Where is sin separating me from God? Where do I need the insight that only God can provide?" And then, confess those needs for forgiveness and direction – confident that in doing so – God will free us from those burdens so

that we can claim the opportunities for relief in the world – through the one for who all things are possible.

So – let us start. [Glue first piece back on]

AMEN.