

July 2, 2017

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15

On the Mend: Healing What Ails Us “Healing Intentions”

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Today, we begin an eight part series that will run to the end of August, where we will look at the wounds that hold us back from the fullness of life Jesus intends for each and every one of us, that which keeps us from fully being alive. Throughout the series we will look at healing intentions, healing inhibitions, healing fear, healing pride, healing divisions, healing trust, healing holdouts, and healing power.

It was with great pride and potential that the largest and most lavish passenger steamship in the world for its time was created. And thus, on April 10, 1912, she began her maiden voyage, setting sail for New York with 2,233 people on board, including many wealthy and prominent figures.

On the upper decks, it was all about keeping the party in luxury. But, on the fourth day of that maiden voyage, tragedy occurred. The ship hit an iceberg that tore open the hull and began to take in water.

And thus, there were two worlds tragically divided; life on the upper decks looked so impressive, but on the lower decks, beneath the waterline, there was damage and danger that was being ignored till it was too late.

That ship can be a reflection of our lives. For, we were created with great pride and potential. But, when we're only focused on the upper decks, that which is only seen on the surface, and avoid the problems below and beneath, we too can face dire consequences.

We are the captain of our own lives, and with that comes choices; and those choices hold the potential and possibility of being both destructive and maybe even deadly.

It is important for us to grasp the concept of the iceberg. Even though only 10% could be seen, there was 90% that was below the surface, beneath the water, and that ignoring the 90% provided nothing less than being a fatal decision.

Today, we are starting our series on healing by tending to life beneath the deck, below the surface, our inner lives. For who we are not just the 10% that is clearly visible. Rather, who we are consists of the 90% of us that is just below the surface.

It is always important when reading scripture to look at who is involved in the conversation or happening. In this case, it is Jesus and the religious leaders of his time. They are criticizing his disciples because they have failed to wash their hands and clean their eating utensils, drinking cups, and cookware.

In other words, Jesus was chastising them for concentrating on the upper deck only. He told them they should focus on that which was below the surface; all that was inside of them. The mess and problem – that which destroys, is not exterior, but rather comes from within.

Jesus spoke many a time about our need to pay attention to the condition of our heart. Which was understood in his time to mean the inner life. For when Jesus refers to the significance of our hearts he is speaking about that which is a bit more dynamic than simply our English use of the word heart and emotions. The Hebrew word for “heart” refers to the whole of

one inner disposition; a disposition formed by feelings, affections, and will.

In other words, they are not a problem in and of themselves, but become a problem when our upper deck, our outer life, and that which is below the surface, our inner life, does not match. Emotions, affections, and will can cause us to divide ourselves, one being our idealized self and the other our real self.

Jesus called the religious leaders of his time “hypocrites”. Which is not exactly a word one would say when trying to be polite, because in our day and time it is quite a derogatory word. Yet, the word Jesus used which is translated hypocrite comes from the word, which refers to an actor. Those in his time knew how to act outwardly to the public when it came to looking like one was centered on God. But, nonetheless, they had inward dispositions, which did not flow from God. Thus, they then did not reflect God because rightness flows from the inside out.

Jesus was reminding them and us, that there is a potential for a form of spirituality that tries to separate the outward from the inward! In other words, our spiritual behavior can become detached from the real life within us. Without intention, it can happen.

So, let’s intentionally look at how we might see clearly what is right below the surface, and thus bring it to the light of day, so we may not end up with a tragedy.

One of our intentions needs to be – **no longer ignoring the emotions of anger, sadness, and fear**. The Christian life, a life in the footsteps of Jesus, is one in which we are called to: love, joy and courage. Hiding these things from God (anger, sadness

and fear) and from one another does nothing, but shoot us in the foot from getting the help we need, so we too can live a life of love, joy, and courage.

The second of our intentions should be to **embrace the healthy pleasures of life that God gives us**. Yet, if we are not attentive we can deny these emotionally helpful gifts of friendship, music, beauty, laughter, and nature. To not do so, is to be oxygen deprived, and whenever we have a shortage of oxygen, we have poor brainpower, and thus make poor decisions, which do not lead to our health, well being and wholeness.

Thirdly, our intentions should be to **look at our past's impact on the present, especially regarding our family of origin**. It would be hazardous for us to assume that in embracing a life with God at the center, that we are free from the past. Certainly there is freedom, but while we are free from the ultimate control and consequence of the past, and we do receive new life in Christ, there is still the matter of working out our old patterns. And for most of us, there are at least a handful of patterns from our families and formative years that need to be seen for what they are so we can really face them and be transformed, and thus a receiver of restorative health and fullness of life.

There are things that have happened in all our lives that we want to avoid facing and feeling. Yet the truth is, when we avoid them, they control us all the more. "For the cave we fear to enter holds the treasure we seek." (Joseph Campbell)

So, given all this, why do we stay stuck, continually replaying the old hurts and wounds, and yet never seem to put them behind us. We bang into the iceberg, and then before we know

it we are taking on water and we do nothing but keep going down, down, down.

Let's face it; some of it has to do with what others are thinking of us, as we parade around the luxury accommodations on the upper deck. Some of that has to do with God, who is a respecter of choice, and thus does not force or pressure us. So then, we can end up giving into others who pressure us to be other than who we are. Yet, in the end that presents us with a dicotomy; which is unbearable for us to live with, because none of us really enjoys being two-faced or severely divided – our public self vs. our real inner self. And let's be honest, keeping up that kind of front is exhausting.

None of us, intends to be a hypocrite, an actor portraying someone else's life other than being who you really are – yet, it does not change the reality that at some level every one of us is. So, it can happen, we come to worship without dealing with the anger we have with God, others or ourselves. We come singing of the love of God, but are making decisions based on fear, and then we can be less than honest ,because we're afraid of conflict or rejection.

Another barrier to health, well-being and wholeness is being too busy doing life above the surface to deal with life beneath it. The pressure to live superficially and conform is so great on us. So, instead of really looking at ourselves, taking the time to recognize, acknowledge, and respond to our inner world, we say things like, "That's how I roll and people are gonna have to deal with it." Why not, deal with what's inside of us, rather than just expecting everyone else to deal with it.

It takes space and time to keep our inner life in honest relationship with God, others, and ourselves. It requires silence

and solitude. For contemplation and reflection are not merely a time for ideas and thoughts, but also it is a time to cultivate the heart: our affections, emotions, and will, our love for God, others, and ourselves, and to clarify our intentions and plan our actions.

In conclusion, let me recount for you how the ship came to be sunk. That fateful Sunday, at 1:45 PM, a message from the steamer Amerika warned that large icebergs lay in Titanic's path, but because wireless radio operators Jack Phillips and Harold Bride were paid primarily to relay messages to and from the passengers, they were not focused on relaying "non-essential" ice messages to the bridge. Later that evening, another report of numerous large icebergs, this time from Mesaba, also failed to reach the bridge. The Californian, which was nearby, stopped for the night because of ice. Just before the Californian's wireless operator had gone off-duty at 11:00 PM, he attempted to warn the Titanic that there was ice ahead, but an annoyed Jack Phillips cut him off. Occupied with sending backlogged passenger messages, Phillips fired back an angry response, "Shut up, shut up, I am busy; I am working."

Let's not make the same mistake. Let's tend to that which not only can be seen above the surface, but also to that which lies beneath the surface – for that is what defiles and destroys us, if not attended to!

(Some of the thoughts expressed in this sermon can from a sermon preached by Brad Bailey entitled, "Tending To Life Beneath the Surface")