

Sharing Scars

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A few years ago, I glanced at the scar on my left arm and thought back to my friend, the late Lutheran pastor/poet/artist/tour leader/author/retreat leader/junk sculptor Herb Brokering. Decades ago, I attended one of Brokering's seminars. At one point, he invited participants to pair off and show each other a scar on their body (if possible and appropriate, of course), then to tell the story of how they came by it. It was fascinating!

I decided to try it during my sermon time a few weeks later. I had people group into twos or threes and explain the circumstances that earned them a scar. (This was very different from what we usually do during worship—one of my pastor friends calls Protestant services “Talking Head Worship.”) After a few moments of hesitation and finding partners and “Who’s going first?” the conversation started to flow. I mean, folks *really* got into it. The noise level in the sanctuary was remarkable, with frequent peals of laughter and occasional gasps.

The two people in my group had fascinating tales, one of a horrible car accident, the other of an emergency, life-saving surgery. Mine was utterly mundane in comparison. While a teenager working in my brother's fruit and vegetable store, I accidentally stabbed myself with a paring knife in the crook of my left arm while checking the sweet corn for worms. The knife gouged out a triangular hole about the size of a nickel. You could actually see inside my arm about an inch deep—tendons and ligaments laid bare for inspection, as in an anatomy book. Amazingly, it didn't hurt a bit. I turned to the guy on my right, my high-school buddy Pete, who was also checking corn, and brought my arm around to show him the hole. He glanced down and immediately swooned. Knees buckling, he sat down quickly to avoid falling. (His dad, the late Harley Racer, known to many of you, was our family physician; evidently Pete was not going to follow in his father's footsteps.)

After a few seconds, blood filled the hole and poured out of my arm....

In the worship service I gave people only about five minutes to share their stories, and most groups were reluctant to stop.

Of course, I did get an anonymous note following the service: “Bill, don’t *ever* do that again!” Huh! I have no idea what was behind that sentiment. Perhaps that my exercise wasn’t a normal sermon told in a typical lecture style?

More likely, I think, is that the exercise “hit a nerve” of some sort, figuratively and perhaps almost literally. It may have brought back painful memories the person didn’t want to think about, much less share with a stranger. It’s never my intention to cause people pain. I wish I could have asked that person for forgiveness, but that’s the problem with anonymous notes. (Well, one of the problems.)

Yet most found the exercise to be interesting at the least, and perhaps even somewhat healing. Such fascinating facts we can learn about people through their scars. Who knew that Jerry ran a Tilt-a-whirl at the State Fair or that Anne worked in a slaughterhouse?

And think what a tale the resurrected Christ had to share . . .

Isn’t it fascinating that his glorified body still displayed evidence of the wounds in side and hands that he experienced on the Cross?

But Brokering’s point, and mine, was that the most painful scars in our lives are not the visible ones.

What I said to the congregation was this, “I don’t think there was one adult in this sanctuary without a scar, a physical scar. But most of our scars, the truly excruciating ones, are not visible; they are the emotional scars on our hearts. What will we do with *them*?”

(Now, before I go on, let me take a little side street, a vitally important side street. I believe that the case of sexual abuse is a unique kind of emotional

scar. And we need some professional help to guide us through recovery, and we should not hurry that process.)

Back to the main narrative.

I shared with the congregation this story about one of the early stars of the Boston Bruins hockey team, Eddie Shore. This was long before players wore facemasks or even helmets. As a defenseman, he was a tough guy and he was fearless. Thus, he caught a lot of pucks in the face. And sticks. And fists. Over the years he received hundreds of stitches. By the time he retired, his face was a patchwork of scars.

But twenty years later, at a reunion of the club, his teammates were astounded to see that Eddie's face was now completely smooth, not a scar to be seen. When asked about it, he said, "Well, you see, I had this skin cream. Every night I rubbed my scars with this skin cream, worked it in for about five minutes. On each gash. Night after night. Over the years the scars gradually got lighter and lighter. Eventually, they disappeared entirely." (Story originally heard in a sermon by Pastor Doyle Hansen.)

Many people don't *want* their "scars" to disappear, their emotional injuries. They pick at them; they rehearse their grievances to keep the wounds fresh.

But the wisest among us know to rub on the skin cream of forgiveness.

That we might be healed.

That we might be whole.

And I know that some of you, perhaps many of you, are thinking, "I can't. I just can't." And you are right. You can't. On your own. That's where we need to enlist the assistance of the Holy Spirit, to help us do that which we are unable to do on our own. Maybe we need some professional counseling. And maybe we need to ask our friends and pastors to join us in prayer for healing.

Now we come to our prayer time. You are invited to come forward or to the hallway and meet with one of our prayer partners, for any sort of need--prayers for forgiveness, for healing for yourself or others, healing of relationships, perhaps prayers of praise and thanksgiving, anything. And, if you wish, to be marked with the sign of the cross with olive oil from trees growing on the actual Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

God wishes for us wholeness and healing.