

Palm Harbor United Methodist Church
Sermon August 30, 2020
Rev. Sharon Patch
KNOWN BY THE SCARS
GENESIS 45:1-5

Mirror, mirror on the wall...no, no, no, don't answer that question. Do you know what I see when I look in the mirror? Well, I see white hair, wrinkles and a nose with a scar on it. That scar happened one evening when Jim and I were moving one of those big old portable televisions. We'd had new carpet put in our bedroom and the installers had left the tv sitting on the bathroom floor. It was big and awkward and heavy. As we carefully carried it into the bedroom, I tripped and fell. My biggest concern was not to drop the tv but that meant I took it down with me and my face went into it.

I immediately grabbed my face and fell onto the bed in agony, unaware that I was bleeding all over the place. Finally, Jim was able to get a wet towel and get me calmed down enough to determine that I really needed stitches and my nose might be broken. Well, it wasn't broken, but it did need stitches. Now, every time I look in the mirror I see that scar and remember that event.

How many of you have scars? Few of us escape life without earning a few. I'll bet you kids already have a scar or two...from falling down, wrecking on your bike or skateboard or running in the house and having an encounter with a door or a table. I'll bet when you look at those scars you have a vivid memory of how it happened. These scars are visible. But, let me ask you, do you have scars that are not so visible. Have things happened that hurt you deeply inside. Have others said things or done things that penetrated your heart and spirit leaving invisible scars.

In our scripture lesson for this morning, we have the story of Joseph and his brothers. Let's look at what happened to wound Joseph and his brothers leading up to today's lesson. As a boy, Joseph was a dreamer and the favorite of his father. His father even made him a robe....sometimes this robe has been called a robe of many colors and it might have been but the important thing about it was that it had sleeves. Sleeves were special and it was a sign that his dad thought he was special...more special than his brothers. The idea that their dad loved Joseph more than them must have wounded his brothers. Why, Joseph didn't even have to do the work that his brothers did. That doesn't seem fair, does it.

Then Joseph had a dream that his brothers would be bowing down to him and being a little arrogant and naïve ...he told his brothers about this dream. Well you can just imagine how that made them feel.

One day his dad sent Joseph out to the fields to where his brothers were working to check on them, and they decided to get revenge on him. They had endured enough of this brat. First, they put him in a well, and then some Egyptians came along and the brothers pulled him out of the well and sold Joseph to them as a slave.

Now, when they got home they had to explain to Dad, why little brother was not with them. But, they had thought this through. They had taken his precious coat and dipped it in goat's blood. They told dad that Joseph had been eaten by a wild animal...that it was Joseph's blood on the coat.

Poor Joseph. Poor dad. His beloved son was gone. He was distraught.

In the meantime, Joseph was sold to Potiphar, who saw that Joseph was indeed special so he put him in charge of the household. Potiphar's wife took a liking to Joseph but when he rejected her advances, she accused him of raping her. Joseph was thrown into prison.

If you are keeping score...that's two major scars: being sold as a slave and being accused of a crime he didn't commit.

When we are wounded, our body reacts and forms a scab to protect the wound while it heals. One of the things we do when we have a scab is pick at it...and it can reopen and the more we pick at it, the more likely it is to get infected and if it's infected it can't heal and when it does heal it leaves a worse scar.

Joseph didn't pick at his wounds, instead he made the best of the situation and impressed the prison warden, who put him in charge of the other prisoners. He was interpreting the dreams of his fellow prisoners and Pharaoh heard about him and he started interpreting Pharaoh's dreams. Then, Joseph had a dream that there would be a famine in the land in five years. Pharaoh obviously believed him and made him like the Vice President in charge of the social and economic affairs of the empire. Joseph began storing grain for the famine that would occur.

Now, back to Dad and the boys. When the famine arrived in Canaan, where they lived, they needed food. They had heard that there was grain stored up in Egypt, so they decide to take a shopping trip there not knowing who they would be dealing with.

What do you think Joseph should do when the boys arrive? Should he make them his slaves? Should he refuse to sell them a grain of grain?

After all, Joseph's life has been a roller coaster ride to this point. There were some really good times but there had also been some really deeply wounding times. He could easily be bitter, especially toward the brothers who were so cruel to him. But, Joseph doesn't see himself as a victim. He does not view his physical and emotional scars as reasons for despair or revenge. He sees them as signs of God's grace.

So, when he faced his brothers he sent everyone else out of the room and began to weep. He tells them he is their brother, Joseph. His first question is not, "How could you have done this to me." His first question was: Is Dad alive?

Of course, the brothers expected him to demand revenge. They were terrified. But, Joseph isn't interested in inflicting wounds on them. He sees this whole thing as part of God's plan to provide for the family.

It is not easy for us to see where God is at work in our lives during times of tragedy, suffering and pain. Not every tragedy we experience will have a silver lining.

Yet, God is with us in times of pain and suffering. God used Joseph to save his family, through whom all the earth would be blessed. This is the same God that transformed the evil and unjust death of Jesus into the salvation of the world. Jesus had scars, nail prints in his hands and feet, wounds on his head from the crown of thorns, lash marks on his back. He was wounded emotionally by rejection and betrayal. Yet, Jesus did not think of himself as a victim. He saw God's plan to save mankind through his suffering, death and resurrection. The Apostle Paul even while languishing in prison with many scars of his own, said, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose".

Do all things work out the way we want them to? No. But, no matter how painful the situation we are in, God is there with us. God will not leave us alone to deal with it. God will heal our broken hearts and help us to get on with life. The scars will remain, the memories will persist but they need not cripple or destroy us.

Did you know that a broken bone when it heals, is stronger than it was before it was broken? You've heard it said that whatever doesn't kill you, makes you stronger. If we don't allow our wounds to become infected and poison our hearts and minds, we become wiser, stronger, even more understanding of the pain and suffering of others.

We can heal, we can become stronger and we can move on. If we keep picking at our wounds, seeking revenge, rehashing our hurts, those wounds can kill us. At least, they will kill the hope and joy we can have in life.

Joseph didn't harbor resentment. He didn't seek revenge. He didn't strike out at others because of the pain he suffered. He allowed God to heal him and to use him to fulfill God's purpose for his life.

Do you need to quit picking at your wounds and allow them to heal? Do you need to forgive so that the poison of anger and hurt can be removed from your life? Don't let past wounds continue to haunt you. Offer them as a sacrifice to God, so that you can heal and move forward. You may have scars but they will fade with time and you will be able to claim the life God has for you.