

July 10, 2022

The Gospel of Luke
XXVIII. The Broken Places
Luke 8:40-56

Dr. William P. Seel
Easley Presbyterian Church
Easley, South Carolina

Teresa was raised in a household with two alcoholic parents who were often lost in an alcoholic fog.¹ Teresa was pretty much forced to raise herself. Despite living in a nice home in a nice middle-class suburb, she can remember as early as three years old searching the house for food, while her parents lay passed out on the floor. If you were to see the very few pictures of her from her childhood, you would assume the child in the photo was an orphan or a refugee. She grew up an afterthought, a side note, a child ignored by two parents absorbed in addiction. She grew up withdrawn, with no social skills, and no friends.

In fifth grade, however, Teresa discovered something about herself: that she was smart. Her teacher noticed it too, and provided her with a steady stream of books to read. Her mind now awakened, she spent hours at the public library to escape her homelife. She poured herself into her schoolwork. Despite her parents' lack of involvement, she achieved straight A's in middle school. In high school, she was in all advanced classes and placed near the top of her class. She looked forward to her high school graduation ceremony as what would surely be the high point of her life thus far. She was one of only a handful of students who would be wearing a gold cord signifying her achievement. She was looking forward to the long-neglected recognition that ceremony would surely bring to her.

The day came. The speeches were given and then the principle stood up to present the diplomas. Before making the presentation, however, he addressed the gathered students and especially their families, saying, *"In order to expedite the ceremony, I would like to ask that the audience postpone all applause until all the graduates have received their diplomas."* Of course, everyone ignored that instruction. Each time a name was announced, clusters of relatives, friends, and classmates would stand and cheer – and it kept happening even after the principle reminded them several times not to do so. Soon Teresa realized that every graduate was receiving applause – and a sick feeling began to well up inside of her: *"What if when my name is read, the room remains silent?"* Friendless, she knew she had no hope of applause from her fellow students. She scanned the auditorium anxiously, looking for her parents. Her mother was not there. She finally located her father – he was standing against the back wall with one of his drinking buddies. She stared at him, hoping to catch his eye – willing him to notice her, to notice her predicament, praying that he and his buddy would make at least some kind of noise when her name was read.

Finally, her name was called. Her father remained stoic, either indifferent or unaware that his daughter was receiving a

diploma. Teresa waited a beat hoping for some kind of noise, some kind of recognition. There was none. She stood, made her way through the row of seated graduates and walked across the stage in silence. After receiving her diploma, she walked back to her seat, and felt herself burning with shame at the echoes of her dress shoes clacking across the walls of the auditorium. When the ceremony ended, she quietly placed her diploma, her robe and her honor cord in a trash can near the exit and walked home in tears. She had been the only graduate greeted by silence.²

After that, Teresa cut herself off from her parents and worked her way through a very good college over three thousand miles away from her hometown. Still withdrawn, still emotionally damaged and socially isolated, she spent all her time either working or studying. She finished at the top of her class, but skipped her college graduation ceremony, still wounded by her experience in high school. She then went on to law school. Again filling her life with work and study; again without friends; again finishing at the top of her class and passing the bar exam with ease. At the encouragement of one of her professors, she decided to attend her law school graduation ceremony. As she arrived at the auditorium, however, she flashed back to the shame she had felt at her high school graduation. She saw a group of teenagers just outside the auditorium, showed them her name in the graduation program, and paid them to cheer for her when her name was announced. She wasn't going to let it happen again. The teenagers seemed mystified by her request, but happily took the money and promised to applaud.

Teresa processed in with the other graduates. The dean asked everyone to hold their applause until all the graduates had received their diplomas. And, as before, that instruction was completely ignored – every graduate receiving cheers from family and friends. When Teresa's name was called, she stood, hoping at least the teenagers she had paid would come through for her. But something happened, maybe they were distracted – and they missed their cue. Teresa, for the second time in her life, walked across a public stage in silence – on what should have been one of the happiest days of her life.

That night all the shame, all the hurt, all the loneliness of her life just came crashing down upon her. She had worked so hard to prove her worth, to keep herself walled off from all the pain inside. But that law school graduation ceremony had broken it all out into the open again. And that night, Teresa began to drink. Over the next six years, her addiction led her to live on the streets of San Francisco, doing whatever she had to do for drink, for food, for shelter. Finally, one morning, after nearly dying of exposure the night before, she stumbled into a twelve-step meeting. Eventually she stopped drinking, got a job as a legal secretary for a small nonprofit, rented a studio apartment. And after a few years, she met Johann – a cheerful, stable man who lived in her apartment complex. After a brief courtship, they were married. Teresa had come a long way.

Two years later, on her thirty-fifth birthday, she returned home from work to find a surprise birthday party waiting for her. The lights flashed on and suddenly there were streamers, balloons, congratulatory signs. And, even more, neighbors and workmates and members of Teresa's twelve-step group were all there, dressed up and cheering for her. She had never had a birthday party before in her whole life – and she was shocked speechless with joy. To make up for the fact that

she had never had a birthday party growing up, her husband – who had set up the whole thing – had made the theme of her party a children’s birthday party. There were children’s party hats, childhood party games like pin the tail on the donkey, even a bright colorful children’s birthday cake. The gifts were also children’s birthday-type gifts – coloring sets and a dress-up doll and all sorts of other wonderful things Teresa should have had and experienced as a child. The laughter, the love, the playfulness, the games – all awakened in her a deep sense of healing.

After all the gifts had been opened, Johann gathered everyone around the television. After a few introductory comments, he put in a DVD and started up the video – it was a celebration of Teresa’s life in pictures and music, interviews with many of her new friends, quotes about all the beautiful traits that Teresa possessed. Then, at the end, there appeared the faded footage from Teresa’s law school graduation ceremony. Shocked, and suddenly very, very frightened, Teresa watched as the dean called her name. She watched that driven, lonely, hurting young woman walk across the stage – bracing herself for the traumatizing silence that had accompanied that moment. But the silence never came. Instead, she began to hear a rolling crescendo of applause, cheers, punctuated by her husband’s recorded voice hooting and hollering, “*Way to go, Teresa!*” and “*You did it, Teresa!*” Johann, a sound engineer, had gotten the video from the law school and had spent weeks recording his voice in different pitches, from different orientations, calling out and cheering for his wife – a hundred different voices. And then he had put it all together with the original video so that, this time, as Teresa walked across that stage she would be greeted with wild approval.

Teresa watched in bewilderment. Then, suddenly, something just erupted within her. She began screaming, “*Turning it off! That’s not how it happened!*” She ran to the bedroom, slammed the door – and everyone could hear the weeping and wailing even through that closed door. Johann rushed to the bedroom after her, trying to apologize. She screamed at him to leave her alone: “*You knew how painful that was to me! How dare you put that up on a screen! How dare you try to cover it up!*” Awkward and distraught, Johann asked the guests to leave and then began picking up the apartment. He went and slept in another room.

It was about three in the morning when Terea finally calmed down. She had been weeping from wounds that went all the way back to childhood. She wept the unwept tears of all the abuse and neglect, shame and humiliation she had suffered as a child and as a youth. All of it came back. And all of it finally came out. Empty now, she got up and went out into the living room. She opened the refrigerator and took out a piece of her birthday cake – chocolate with vanilla icing, her favorite. She found the toy doll, the coloring books, and the party hats – gathered them up and set them on the coffee table, like a display, and examined them while she ate her piece of cake. Then she got up, went to the television, put in her birthday DVD and hit play.

Johann heard Teresa out in the living room. Racked with guilt, he had spent the night listening to Teresa’s anguish, berating himself for the pain he had resurrected. He heard the television turn on and then slowly, apprehensively, he walked out from the study. Teresa looked at him and smiled remorsefully, with dabs of frosting at the corners of her mouth. Johann smiled back. Then, without speaking, he stood behind her and gently placed his hands on her shoulders. Teresa picked up the remote and scanned the DVD he

had made, forwarding the images until she found the clip from the law school graduation. Teresa pushed the play button, turned up the sound and watched the video for a second time.

Teresa watched as her name was called. She watched as her younger self stood up. She watched as the young graduate cast her eyes down. She watched as the young woman walked with shoulders stiff and protective. Teresa watched and listened.

She listened as her husband, in over a hundred voices, cheered for her. She listened as his hands clapped from over a hundred locations. She listened as he called out in strange, sometimes comical but always exuberant, voices, “Teresa! Teresa! Hooray for Teresa! Good for you, Teresa! You’ve done it, Teresa!”

And this time . . . this time she heard.

She heard.

“I’m so sorry,” Johann said. “I should never have done this. I’ll erase it.”

Teresa placed her hands on Johann’s hands, looked up at him and said, “Actually, I like it. I like it. Let’s leave it as it is.”

* * * * *

Why do I tell you that story? Well, because that story highlights exactly what our two healing stories this morning are trying to tell us about God’s love and the broken places in our own lives.

A woman with a twelve-year flow of blood – imagine the physical suffering that entailed. But even greater must have been the toll her sickness had taken upon her spirit. Not just the daily damage to her hopes and dreams as her condition persisted, despite the doctors and the endless, fruitless treatments. But the fact that her particular ailment rendered her ritually unclean to all those around her, according to Leviticus.⁴ Meaning she was cut off from others; meaning that she was, no doubt, shunned even by members of her own family. She was unclean – meaning that she was excluded even from the worship of God – which had to feel to her like God Himself was rejecting her, calling her unclean, calling her worthless in His sight.

And then, that day, when Jesus came to town. She, no doubt, has heard about His healing work – and so she rallies herself one more time into hope. “If only,” she thinks – “just maybe touch even just the fringe of His garment as He passes.” And the opportunity presents itself, just as she had hoped. She reaches out, touches His garment – and instantly she knows that she has been healed, at long last healed. But then He stops – and whatever joy she was just beginning to feel shifts swiftly to alarm and to fear and to all those twelve years of feeling shame and exclusion and worthlessness. He stops, looking around and asking, “*Who touched me?*” His eyes then fall upon her, and she comes toward Him trembling, trembling falling down before Him at His feet. She explains what she has done and why she has done it – and prepares herself for the worst. At the very least, she knows that she was unclean when she touched Him, which means that she has now rendered Him unclean. In that moment, it must have all come upon her again, those twelve

years of suffering, of rejection, of feeling excluded even by God. What will this man – this man of God – what will He now say to her for what she has done, for what she has been?

And Jesus, looking upon her, says to her words she could never have imagined. *“Daughter,”* He addresses her. Not “Unclean” or “Unwanted” – He calls her, *“Daughter.”* The Son of God, God Himself, is looking into her eyes, seeing all that brokenness and woundedness within, and calling her, *“Daughter” “Your faith has made you well; go in peace.”* And the healing that had to have happened in that moment must have been a thousandfold greater than the physical healing which had preceded it. For Jesus had spoken directly into her spiritual wound, spoken directly into the broken places within her heart. In calling her out from the crowd, He had no doubt reopened those old wounds, that broken place, laid it bare – but only so that His grace could finally get in. Only so that His love could finally touch her as she had dared to touch Him. Only so that His healing mercy could enter all the way into her heart – and make her not only well, but make her whole once again. The broken places made whole by the love of her Savior.

And the same thing, in a sense, happens with Jairus. What greater wound can there be than to lose a child? How anxious Jairus must have been as Jesus delayed with the woman. How helplessly broken must have been his heart when word came that it was already too late. But Jesus turns to him in that very moment – and speaks into that broken place: *“Do not fear; only believe, and she will be well.”* And then Jesus enters the house – and raises her up from the dead. He takes her by the hand and gently calls to her, *“My child, arise.”* And, in that moment, her physical healing is accomplished. But imagine for a moment, the emotional, spiritual healing that was taking place in Jairus’ soul. That broken place opened up in him by his daughter’s sickness and death, now filled by Jesus’ grace, now overcome by His love, now made whole by His healing power – lifting her, and lifting him also, into new life. The broken places made whole by the love of his Savior.

These two healing stories tell us so much about the character of the God who has made us and redeems us. About His love for us, His grace given to us, His desire to make us healed and whole. And these stories speak of how it is, so often, that we will find Him – that He will come to us – in just precisely those broken places in our own lives. Those places we are most ashamed of, most afraid of, most tormented by, most reluctant to open up even before Him.

But in His love for us, in His deep desire to pour out His grace upon us, in His loving desire to make us whole and wholly His, those broken places within us are irresistible to our God.⁵ And if we are willing to trust Him enough to open up those broken places to Him, we will very likely hear Him speaking tenderly to us, saying, *“Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.”* Saying to us, *“My precious child, arise.”* We will very likely hear the One who loves us calling out our name and cheering for us, as did Teresa through the hundred-fold voice of her husband. And we will find that our broken places can indeed be healed, can indeed be made whole.

¹ This story is borrowed from Mark Yaconelli, *The Gift of Hard Things* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2016), pp. 57-67.

² Yaconelli, p.60.

³ Yaconelli, pp. 65-66.

⁴ See Leviticus 15:19-31.

⁵ Yaconelli, p. 67.