

January 31, 2010

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Spiritual Pain—Spiritual Healing  
Part 3: “The Spirit of Ubuntu”  
Luke 10.25-37

Anne Lamott said, “Life is one big emergency room. You’re either the one being cared for or the one doing the caring. And in the blink of an eye those roles can switch.”

In other words, we’re in this thing called life together.

Greg Mortenson, author of *Three Cups of Tea* and *Stones into Schools* will be speaking across the street at Bend High on Feb.11. His story in many ways is a modern day version of the Parable of the Good Samaritan we just heard read.

Greg Mortenson used to be an ER nurse and mountain climber living in Montana. He now devotes his life to promoting peace by building schools in poverty stricken villages in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

In 1993, Greg was part of a climbing team seeking to climb K2, the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest mountain in the world in the Himalayas in Pakistan. On the way down the mountain, Greg became disoriented in a blizzard and became separated from his climbing group. He was lost, vulnerable, exposed to the elements.

Think about that experience for a moment . . . a white out where you lose vision of a way ahead . . . you become disconnected . . . feel alone . . . cut-off from those around you. Feeling isolated . . . vulnerable. It’s a scary feeling.

Today is week 3 of my message series *Spiritual pain/Spiritual Healing*. There are four universal spiritual pains common to the

human journey : 1) A crisis of meaning and identity 2) An inability to forgive 3) A sense of hopelessness and, 4) A sense of being separate, isolated, alone in your suffering.

Even though our culture prefers to avoid, deny, numb or run away from our pain, the path to transformation is to face our pain, to lean into it and make our way through our pain and suffering. That's why it's so important to be part of a community where you don't have to make that journey alone.

The pain I want to lean into today is the pain of feeling separate, isolated, alone, abandoned. This is the kind of pain Jesus expressed from the cross when he cried out, "My God, Have you forsaken me?" have you forgotten me? Do you care? Does any one care? Psychologists suggest the most basic, primal fear and pain we have is the fear of being abandoned...being all alone in our pain and suffering.

Look at today's Bible reading as a metaphor for a second. It is being knocked down and beaten up by life and left all alone lying by the side of the road...exposed and vulnerable...and people walk by as if they don't even see you, as if you don't matter. Have you had the experience of being in a crowd yet feeling all alone?

In the story of Greg Mortenson, he got caught in a blizzard that came out of nowhere and it derailed him from his path leaving him lost and disoriented...separated from the others. The experience of loss can often feel like that.

So Greg wandered for days without knowing where he was in freezing temperatures...without food, water or shelter. He wandered into an impoverished Pakistani village high in the Himalayas.

So when this tall, freezing, starving, sick, foreigner...an American...some one they were supposed to fear...their enemy stumbled into their village, instead of being afraid and trying to protect themselves, they opened their hearts...welcomed him...fed him...tended to his frostbite...nursed and healed him back to health over a two month period.

Greg Mortenson was so grateful to them for saving his life...for treating him as one of their own...he promised he would return some day and build a school and provide a teacher for the children of this community.

The people of this village, as well as the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan, were no longer foreigners or enemies but they were now mysteriously a part of him. It was no longer us-them, separate, it was "we." His life was intertwined with their lives. His well-being was connected to their well-being.

The Bantu people of Africa call this the Spirit of Ubuntu. Naomi Tutu, daughter of Desmond Tutu, will be speaking on the Spirit of Ubuntu in this sanctuary on Feb.13. Talk to me if you'd like more details.

Ubuntu means "I am because you are...I am because we are". It means you cannot exist as a human being in isolation. We are connected and what we do, or choose not to do, not only affects the people around you but affects the whole world.

The Spirit of Ubuntu says if one person is attacked, oppressed, unloved, in pain, I am diminished. If another person is celebrated, loved, healed, restored, my life is blessed. I am concerned about your well-being because my well-being is tied up with your well-

being. I can not know salvation which literally means “wholeness” apart from your salvation. In the Spirit of Ubuntu, there is no such thing as individual salvation. Can you imagine how the Spirit of Ubuntu would change the way you live in community? No one really wins until we all win!

The Apostle Paul expressed it this way in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Corinthians, “We are mysteriously part of one another...when one suffers, we all suffer. When one rejoices, we all rejoice.” We “suffer with” one another – that’s literally to feel or “suffer with” someone.

I had an experience earlier in my life of the Spirit of Ubuntu, when I was going through a period of depression. I felt pretty isolated, cut-off, alone in my pain. A friend showed up unannounced with a pizza in his hand. I am not exaggerating when I say that we spent the next two hours together and he didn’t say a single word but his presence spoke volumes.

He looked at me. He saw me. I knew he simply didn’t feel sorry for me. He felt my pain and he hurt because I hurt. He was willing to be with me in my pain without judgment...without trying to fix me or give me advice, sitting there in the awkward silence because there were no words to say. “Just being there” helped me lessen my pain because I knew I wasn’t alone.

I love the story Gary Wills tells of his young son who woke up one night crying. He had a bad dream, a nightmare.

When Wills asked his son what was troubling him, the little boy said that a nun in his school had told the children that they would end up in hell if they sinned. “Am I going to hell?” the little boy asked his father...his voice shaking.

Wills writes, “There is not an ounce of heroism in my nature, but I instantly announced what any parent would: All I can say, son, is that if you’re going there, I’m going with you.” That’s the Spirit of Ubuntu – if you’re going there I’m going with you.

I believe, ultimately, that’s the mystery of God’s love revealed to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. God is saying to us there is no place – no hell, no suffering, no pain, no threat, not even death itself – for which God doesn’t say, “If you’re there, I’m there with you...if you’re suffering, I am suffering with you...if you’re in the very depths and darkness of hell, I am with you and will never forsake you. You are not alone.”

That’s the kind of community we’re asked to be for one another and for the world...if you’re going through hell, I’m right there with you. You are not alone.”

Speaking of a kind of hell, take a look at this picture of this child. This child’s family was killed. He is alone, like the man in our Bible reading, left naked, vulnerable, exposed...vulnerable now to child slavery or sex trafficking...vulnerable to disease.

What are the eyes with which we see this child? Is this child separate from us? Someone we feel sorry for? Or is our well-being somehow tied up with this child’s well-being? Is this child part of a group we call “them” or is this child “us, “we?” How we answer makes all the difference in the world.

In our Bible reading today, it says all three saw the man who had been beaten. The Priest and the Levite saw some one separate from them. Perhaps they felt sympathy but they thought about how stopping to help would impact them. Touching some one

who was dying would make them ritually unclean for their important work in the temple.

The Samaritan saw the man and it says that he had compassion. The word here is the same Greek word used when Jesus looked over and saw the suffering of the people of Jerusalem and wept because he had compassion for them. The Greek word translated as compassion means being physically moved in the pit of your stomach...not just thinking, 'Oh, that's too bad" but feeling the pain... "suffering with."

In telling this story, Jesus turns everything on its head, because the Samaritan, the hated "other" the "them in the us/them story of life, is the one who sees the man lying on the side of the road and literally feels his pain...sees some one who is not separate but part of him.

The eyes of the Samaritan are the eyes that look at this child and hurt inside because this isn't just any child...this is "our" child. Our well-being is tied up with this child's well-being.

Mortenson called his first book Three Cups of Tea because the leader of the village which saved his life told him when a stranger comes to you, you must invite him in and offer him a cup of tea. The second time he comes, offer a second cup of tea because he is an honored guest.

The third time, offer a third cup as he is now part of your family...your life is intertwined with his life...you will now be willing to literally give your life for him.

We don't get to choose who our neighbor is – our neighbor is someone we are given – and if we see with the eyes of the

Samaritan you might just be surprised who you are given! Yes, life is one big emergency room – but we're in there together and the healing we each need lies in our hearts . . . would you like a cup of tea?