

Follow the Healer – to help carry each other's burdens

Rev'd Peter Balabanski

Pentecost +5A – Mt 11.14-30 – Healing Sunday

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. ^{Mt 11.28-30}

We carry terrible burdens in our lives. It never fails to shock me – the size of the burdens people stagger along under. It doesn't matter how rich, how successful, how clever, how attractive, how good or how blessed a person is, there will often be a burden. It might be a terrible memory, a disabling sickness or injury, a poisoned relationship, a terrifying decision, a festering resentment, an unresolved sadness or guilt, a deep fear, a tormenting grief or regret – you name it. Each one is a burden, and each burden, carried alone and unrelieved, can cripple us in time.

Jesus says bring those burdens to him and he will give us the rest we long for. We lay them at the foot of his Cross and in return, he offers us his yoke. A yoke is a long piece of wood we sling over our shoulders with a heavy load swung from each end. Maybe this offer of a yoke doesn't sound all that attractive at first glance.

One of my images of the yoke Jesus offers us is his arm around our shoulder. *His* skin bears the chafing with ours: *his* shoulder bear the weight with ours. He faces in the same direction we do; we don't have to face our challenges alone.

I find this image encouraging because quite often, someone in

pain gradually ends up alone. Their pain makes other people feel uncomfortable – maybe even guilty about not being able to help. And so, far from helping, sometimes people will even lash out with something illogical and cruel, writing sufferers off with cop-outs like *They must have brought it on themselves*. That's what the Hindu / Buddhist doctrine of *Karma* works like. The suffering person must have done something to bring on their misfortune. Rape victims often suffer this too: *'asking for it!'* And poor people in the developing world apparently *'shouldn't have had so many children'*.

Followers of Christ are needed to help the world see things differently. Christ sees burdens and suffering through the eyes of compassion – through the eyes of a fellow sufferer: and so do the followers of Jesus. If Jesus, who was so good, could suffer the way *he* did, who's to assume that bad things that happens to people could only be their own fault, or that their suffering is God's judgement? The Cross shows me the opposite: that suffering is actually a place where God draws nearest to us. God chooses to be here in solidarity with us in our pain.

Jesus didn't make his followers invulnerable. He was vulnerable himself. He became entirely one of us. He came to help us discover *his* freedom in *our* weakness; to give us peace with who we are. Jesus accepts *our* reality: our being human; mortal; and he loves us for it. Being mortal is a condition which means that suffering is inevitable for us. But into our mortality, Jesus brings healing – not an end to suffering; not a change in our being; not a cure – but healing. He puts an arm around our shoulder, and faces our pain with us. Healing. I once saw on a poster in a hospital; *'Suffering is inevitable; misery is optional'*.

And that's where we can fit into the picture. Some women who'd lost partners to workplace accidents started visiting workplaces where people had died. They went to help the survivors move towards healing and wholeness. They did it by staying

with them in their time of suffering. That's not easy, but they knew it's what was needed to bring healing. These women ministered out of their own experience of suffering. They had true compassion, for they knew what that suffering felt like.

So if anyone with a sad past thinks they're too damaged to give pastoral care, think again. In the way of Jesus, our pain is a qualification as one of His healers. Today can we see in our own arms the arms of Christ – just as we find his arms in the arms of the dear ones who help us. We're called to follow the Healer; to help carry each other's burdens; to be ready to shoulder them at times when they're too heavy and they need to be handed over. That's what it is to be the body of Christ.

Amen