

Proper 10A : Broken Spirits, Broken Bodies

My siblings in Christ,

From the Father who brought us into being, the Son who redeems us, and the Spirit who sustains us, grace and peace be unto you.

Our conversation today comes very heart of the Apostle Paul's epistle to the Romans - Chapter 8, verses 1 to 11. We find ourselves in familiar territory as we delve into this scripture, for the tribulations Paul describes echo the trials of our own journey. He explores the perplexing propensity of the human spirit to drift towards the undesirable, even when the righteous path is clearly marked. This quandary leads us to a simple yet profound question: Who will rescue us from this mess?

In the silence of reflection, the answer rings clear: Jesus Christ, our Savior. Christ, in His boundless love, steps into the framework of our human existence. He takes upon Himself our frailties, our shortcomings, and transmutes the sentence of condemnation we were destined for into divine deliverance. In Christ, the purpose of the law is not just imparted but embodied, actualized in us, breaking the chains that the law, in its inadequacy, failed to obliterate.

Let's shed some light on this with a tale, a parable of sorts. Picture a young boy named David, who entered this world carrying the weight of a severe health condition. From his earliest years, he grappled with physical constraints. Despite his fervent desire to engage in football matches with his pals, his body would often fail him, leaving him breathless and fatigued.

One sunny day, while David's friends were engaged in a football match at the local park, David sat on the sidelines. His father, noting his son's longing, sat beside him.

The father withdrew a \$20 bill from his pocket and asked David, "What is its worth, my son?"

"Twenty dollars," David responded.

His father then crumpled the bill, and inquired, "And now?"

David chuckled, "Still twenty dollars, Dad."

Then his father cast the crumpled bill on the earth, trampled upon it, and even smeared some dirt. Retrieving the now filthy and crumpled bill, he again questioned, "And now, its worth?"

"Still twenty dollars!" David exclaimed, amused by his father's theatrics.

"Precisely!" His father affirmed. "David, like this \$20 bill, you've been shaped by trials, stamped upon by the adversities of your health, and sometimes, you've been dragged through the mud. Yet these tribulations do not diminish your worth or the vitality of your spirit. Your value, like this bill, remains, and it emanates not from your physical prowess but from the Spirit of God that dwells within you. Your spiritual strength, sharpened by struggles, makes you able to make a difference in others' lives."

"Remember," his father added, "it is not the hardships that you confront, but your response to them that shapes your identity. You might not be able to play football like your friends, but you've cultivated empathy, patience, and resilience - virtues that elude many twice your age."

David's face lit up, his understanding of the world forever changed. He remained unchanged yet entirely transformed. Despite his ongoing challenges, he resolved to live "according to the Spirit," seeking ways to make a positive contribution to the world that his physical limitations could not impede.

Just as the crumpled \$20 note retained its worth, our value stays intact, immune to life's challenges. Even amidst struggles, we have the capacity to serve as agents of change and rays of positivity if we anchor our minds on spiritual virtues. And in embracing this course, we can triumph over our brokenness and contribute to the healing of our world.

But, dear ones, do not be lulled into viewing this as a straightforward equation. Even as we dwell in Christ, there is a tension - a struggle between the Spirit and the flesh; between the divine pathway and the worldly route.

And it's not just about individual hardships. When Paul talks of "flesh" and "Spirit," he isn't alluding solely to our physical bodies and our souls. He paints a broader, more nuanced reality. Our bodies and souls are intricately interwoven, reflecting each other's suffering. Broken

spirits can precipitate broken bodies - afflictions such as ulcers, cancer, and sleep disorders often mirror our spiritual condition. And this extends not only to our individual bodies but also to the collective body of our global family and even our Church. Our souls, tainted by greed, malice, unfettered hatred, and fear spurred by our differences, are propelling us toward self-destruction. This is sadly shown in the unfair challenges faced by our black and brown siblings, our LGBT family, and our homeless neighbors.

When I worked as a hospice chaplain, I saw the deep connection of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. We knew that physical comfort helps emotional peace and spiritual calm. We saw that emotional health, dealing with feelings of worry or sadness, directly affects our physical health and spiritual balance. Spirituality, our search for deep meaning and connection, helps comfort us, shapes how we cope, and strengthens our hope, thereby affecting our physical and mental health. In their caring work, hospice caregivers show us that for true healing and peace, we must care for our whole selves: body, mind, and spirit.

The tension between the flesh and the spirit is the struggle between aligning with the world's way and God's way. Focusing our minds on fleshly concerns propels us down a path drenched in hatred, discrimination, and death. But this death isn't merely physical; it extends to the soul, resulting in the death of hope, the death of justice.

In contrast, life in the Spirit presents us with a different narrative, a different trajectory. It is a life that liberates us from the grip of hatred and equips us with a wealth of love. It encourages us to focus on things of the Spirit - compassion, kindness, fairness, and unity. It's a balm, a healing salve for our fragmented spirits. It empowers us to be part of God's restorative ministry in our world.

David's story shows this connection. His physical condition brought challenges to his spirit, but like the crumpled bill, his worth and ability to make a difference stayed the same.

So, I put forth to you today, what does this look like in our daily lives? How do we actualize this life in the Spirit?

Firstly, my beloved brothers and sisters, we must steep ourselves in the teachings of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He showed us the way to unbounded love, relentless compassion, unyielding justice, and unity that transcends our differences.

Next, we must open our eyes and hearts to the brokenness of our world and step up to be part of the healing. It's not about monumental gestures, my friends, it's about little acts of kindness and love that can fill the deepest crevices of despair with hope. It's about showing empathy and compassion, just as Jesus did.

And, finally, we're called to pray ceaselessly. Not in a way that keeps us on our knees all day long, but in a way that keeps our hearts constantly connected to God, in each moment of our day, in each moment of our life.

Beloved, this Spirit-filled life is not walk in the park. It challenges us to break free from our comfort zones, to confront our own prejudices, to stand up against injustice, to extend love where it's not reciprocated. But this is the way of the Spirit, a way that brings liberation, that unchains us from the bondage of hatred, discrimination, and death, and propels us towards love, unity, and life.

As we reflect on Paul's words in Romans, I urge you, beloved, to set your minds on the things of the Spirit. To find your worth not in your struggles or failures, but in your capacity to bring about change, to spread love, to sow seeds of healing in a world that is yearning for it.

Let us pray,

Eternal God, you call us to live according to your Spirit. Strengthen us with your love, saturate us with your grace, and guide us on this liberating path. In spite of our trials, our tribulations, remind us of our worth, of our potential to be change agents, beacons of positivity, and healers.

May we echo your love, your peace, and your justice in our world. May we continue to invite you into our lives, allowing your presence to transform us, to heal us, to liberate us.

Amen