

A LENTEN X-RAY

In my last article, I made note of being at home with a broken ankle. Now, as the weeks have progressed, I am healing and slowly getting back to work. A couple of weeks ago, I got the opportunity to take a good look at exactly what I had done. I went in for a post-operation visit with my doctor to remove the surgery staples and x-ray the ankle to gauge the rate of healing. I was a bit shocked when we viewed the x-ray of my ankle. On the outside, the tissue looked battered and bruised but it was nothing compared to the deep wounds and permanent markers of the tragedy that had occurred under the bruised surface. I saw the fracture line in the joint on the fibula (inside bone of the leg) along with two screws holding it in place. On the tibia (outside bone) I could clearly see the break, and the metal plate holding the bone together with six screws. I was not prepared for that picture of my insides!

Since that day, I have been thinking about that revealing x-ray and marveling at the hidden damage. The scars on the outside are becoming less and less; yet I am acutely aware that the next time my leg is x-rayed, the picture will look pretty much the same: one metal plate and eight screws holding my ankle together.

In Church, we are just beginning the season of Lent. This is a time in the congregational year where we are to take a good look at ourselves and confess that we have sinned. It is a forty-day period in which we examine our inability to follow God: in reality, it is a time to take an x-ray of our lives. What do we really look like on the inside? It can be terrifying to look at the picture, we may not even believe what we see - and we certainly cannot be prepared for it. Sin leaves its marks on us. It damages us, scars up our insides, rends our heart and mars the soul. It can be astonishing to come face to face with the reality of our sin and what it is doing to our lives, but eventually we must: Lent provides us with a time to do that.

I don't know how you are feeling as you read this article. I can't know what is happening in your life or where you are in a relationship with God. I cannot put myself in your shoes or walk about in your life and take a look at the damage caused by sin. But what I can do is share with you. I can admit to you that I find myself sunk deep in the mire of sin. As real as the screws in my ankle are the marks that sin leaves on my soul. I am not perfect. I fight with my husband. I have lied; I have struggled and threatened to give up on my faith. I have disappointed my parents and my brothers, been jealous of my friends rather than glad for them. These things and many more have left their mark on me over my short 28 years on this earth. I don't tell you these things to brag or boast but to confess: a public confession to you that I am a sinner and that I need to be saved. As I look at the x-ray of my life, I see that I am twisted and raw and broken, unable to heal myself or to hold it all together.

What a dismal thing life would be if that were the end of the story! Take a moment and think about how you feel. Where are you in your life? Are you comfortable? Are you stagnant? Are you lost? What wounds are seared into your heart that you try desperately to hide?

The real question now is where do we go from here? When the x-ray reveals the break or the scars, what then? Where do we travel during these forty days and where will we end up when the journey is over?

For my physical healing, it was the doctor who looked at my x-ray in the hospital. It was he who decided what my next course of action would be, so that I could properly heal. It is also a healer to whom we go when we are made aware of our own brokenness. The journey of Lent leads us to the Son of God, the man who takes away our scars and wears them on His own hands and feet and side. The doctor who operated on my ankle will never remove the screws, he cannot take away the damage that was done and he cannot make the x-ray look any different than it already does. But Jesus Christ can and does heal us fully and completely from the sickness and scars of sin. He covers us with Himself, He bleeds and becomes damaged and dies so that we don't have to. Why? Because that is what it means for Him to love you: that is what it means for Him to be the Great Physician.

It might be hard to believe that anyone would love us that much. We think that nothing can take away what we have done or heal the scars that we carry around with us. We feel undeserving and unworthy, and in those two things, we would be right. What Jesus does on the cross is an act of pure grace. I do nothing to earn the salvation freely given to me but I also won't experience the healing until I find myself confessing at the foot of the cross and seeking a relationship in Jesus Christ. Read what Paul tells us in Romans 6:19b-23, "You can readily recall, can't you, how at one time the more you did just what you felt like doing—not caring about others, not caring about God—the worse your life became and the less freedom you had? And how much different is it now as you live in God's freedom, your lives healed and expansive in holiness? As long as you did what you felt like doing, ignoring God, you didn't have to bother with right thinking or right living, or right anything for that matter. But do you call that a free life? What did you get out of it? Nothing you're proud of now. Where did it get you? A dead end. But now that you've found you don't have to listen to sin tell you what to do, and have discovered the delight of listening to God telling you, what a surprise! A whole, healed, put-together life right now, with more and more of life on the way! Work hard for sin your whole life and your pension is death. But God's gift is real life, eternal life, delivered by Jesus, our Master." (Bible Version: The Message)

This Lent 2010, do not be afraid: take a long look at the x-ray of your life, acknowledge the scars, confess the marks, lay bare and broken and know the freedom and healing that come to us from the open arms of the Great Physician.

In His Grip,

Pastor Karen Seifert