

**Receiving the Balm of Gilead
Jeremiah 8:13-9:1
September 18, 2022
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This weekend I have been working on my homemade chicken broth for soups and sauces. We save up the chicken bones and veggie scraps and as we come to the end of summer I decided its time to process it all. I have about six quarts worth of broth ready to freeze later today. I do this in part because we cannot use commercial broths because of the onion issue and in part because I love making my own. It tastes so much better and is not loaded with lots of salt.

Soup is such a great comfort food. I especially love chicken noodle soup. Amy says I have magical soup because I always make a big pot when cold season hits and she believes it helps her get over it faster. Many believe that chicken noodle soup has some great healing properties. There are many home remedies or natural healing practices that we all do. So what are a few tried and true things you do?

Wait for answers.

For centuries we have passed down traditions and home remedies for healing that others rely on. Physicians, medicine people and shaman were often the resident experts on how to relieve pain, heal a wound, clear a rash, sooth an upset stomach and even help control blood pressure or diabetes. They may not have totally understood the exact condition being treated but they knew what plants, flowers, roots or leaves to use to aid in the healing and relieve suffering.

They may have made a tincture with alcohol, or a tea, maybe roasted and ground it into a powder or mixed with other things to create a balm a salve. With the rising cost of medical care today, I hear more people returning to these home remedies to save on medical costs and put off costly treatments. For example, before I had knee surgery

I took a turmeric concentrate and applied a topical oil to give relief until I could have surgery.

The concept of holistic healers is that you need to care for the whole person and address spiritual or emotional elements of one's condition being manifested in physical ailments. There is a close relationship between physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Emotional problems like anxiety, depression, or grief often contribute to physical ailments. Spiritual problems like unforgiveness or unconfessed wrongs likewise can affect both the mental and physical health of people. For example a regular practice of meditation or meditative movement like yoga is shown to reduce stress and lower blood pressure and improve mental health

We hear in today's reading from Jeremiah as the prophet cries out trying to once again remind the people that there is a balm in Gilead. Gilead was a region in central Israel known for its many healing plants and minerals in Israel. Jeremiah is reminding the people that just as they know that the greatest medicinal remedies are found in Gilead, the people should remember that the spiritual healing they need is found in Israel's God, not in some foreign false religion. The people have relied on a false sense of security by turning to human intervention, failing to trust God or hear the dire warnings of the prophet.

Now in Chapter 8 the help from Egypt has failed. Even the people are realizing that invasion is about to happen. But is it too late? The spiritual rebellion of the people has now resulted in physical pain and suffering. It feels too late for any healing balm to do any good. It is tempting for Jeremiah to say "I told you so" and maybe walk away. But instead, he proclaims that God is also weeping, God is also suffering in their suffering. They are not alone in their struggle.

Verse 18 says "For the brokenness of the daughter of my people I am broken, I mourn, and horror has seized me." God is not abandoning the people of Israel but is sharing in their suffering in the hopes that this depth of compassion and love will reach them somehow. We hear in this passage God calling the people of Israel "the daughter of

my people”. God is identifying with the grief of a parent when they see their child suffering. As parents or loved ones, we sometimes face situations that are outside of our control. Like a good parent, God tells the people they are not abandoned, but like a parent, God shares in their suffering.

One of the most harmful false teachings we hear in Christian circles is that if we sin or fail spiritually that God will reject us, abandon us. This false teaching believes that people can be scared into faithfulness. Or that unless we fear punishment we cannot be good people. I reject that because real change, transformative change is not simple switch that we can easily turn on or off. It can often take time and a concerted effort of growth to be transformed and to change one’s behavior long term.

In today’s reading we see the people of Israel taking the first step. They realize that Jeremiah’s words were true and it may be too late to not be taken into exile, but they have still have a long way to go to being consistently faithful to God. And yet God is sharing in their suffering. God believes in them and is not abandoning them in their time of need. Jeremiah even goes into exile with the people and continues to remind the people of God’s love and devotion toward them.

The first step to any healing begins with admitting that there is a problem in the first place. Similar to Benjamin Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning or the steps in AA, there are different phases of transformation we go through to actually grow out of unhealthy behaviors. I learned about these five phases from a book called, “The Emotionally Healthy Leader” by Peter Scazzero

1. Awareness – we need to become aware and admit that we need to correct course or change. We also need to be aware that we cannot do this alone. We need God and we need a community of support and accountability.
2. Ponder – we need to ponder or come to believe that there is a better, healthier way of being. Because until we believe there is another way we will stay where we are.

3. Value – we need to see that this new way is needed and valuable to the community also. We are mentally committing to this new way of being. At this stage you may find yourself proclaiming to others what you have come to believe is true.
4. Prioritizing – We not only intellectually understand that this is the new way of being in the world, but we are working to implement it into our lives even if at first it is inconsistent. We are moving from hearers of the word to being doers. We work to restructure our lives to give this new way priority.
5. Own it – Here we have successfully implemented into our daily lives as a way of being in the world. It has become a way of being not just a belief or an action. It is becoming part of who we are.

These steps are useful in measuring our own progression of transformative change in our lives in so many ways.

To give you just one example of applying this let me outline the different stages of becoming an Ecology justice minded

1. We become aware that the planet is warming – we believe the reports
2. We ponder or study the issue and become more informed about what people should do to help
3. Value – This becomes important enough that we begin to tell others.
4. Prioritize – This becomes important enough that we begin to do things to help save the planet. We may participate in actions to help others also change.
5. Own – we dedicate our lives to teach and help fight global warming. It is integrated into our lives.

So we know there is a balm in Gilead. We believe that even when we are down and discouraged by the terrible things happening in the world, we know we can turn to God and find healing and relief. God is with us through all of our struggles to be whole and healed in this struggle we call life.

