

## INTRODUCTION

***“I no longer speak of you as slaves, for a slave does not know what his master is about. Instead, I call you friends, since I have made known to you all that I heard from my Father.”***

**(Jn 15:15)**

The human heart does not rest until it rests in the heart of the Creator. There is a restlessness in every human heart, a longing for wholeness, completeness, and fulfillment. This inner call stretches us into unknown territories, both tempting us to self-centeredness, and challenging us to self-surrender which opens the way to final union with our Maker. Our daily choices shape our path, while the love of the One who fashioned us keeps inviting us to new wholeness and holiness. From the moment of conception until the moment of final rest, the human heart is on a journey, a journey to bond with the Lover who loved us into being.

The search for wholeness or holiness is the journey of every person interested in true peace, true healing, true inner joy, and true meaning of life. No matter where we are on our journey, each day invites us to begin again in our pursuit of wholeness, our pursuit of completion, our pursuit of healing and perfecting all that God has intricately placed in our being. With the empowerment of God's love, we are able to take one step at a time, humbly, patiently,

persistently seeking that final union with the Divine where our mission will be complete. Then we will be in Love.

Our pursuit of wholeness can get distracted by our experience of woundedness or the occasions of tragedy. The world is not perfect and life brings us challenges which move us to choices. Whatever the situation we must choose between remaining in the pain or seeking the energy of healing and the hope of wholeness. This book is about the pursuit of wholeness and the spirituality that sustains health. It is a journey into the heart energy that makes all of life different and the hope of healing possible. It presents a challenge to quiet ourselves and focus our attention on the power that flows from the heart of God. It offers an invitation to *receive* the love which can set us free in order that we might *give* love to set others free. It is an invitation to rest in the heart of the One Jesus called "*Abba.*"

This invitation is for those who thirst for the deeper realities of life and are ready to sacrifice for the ultimate quest. It is for those who have been wounded by the incompleteness of human love and are aching to be loved into wholeness. It is for those who are shaken by fear, oppressed by shame, imprisoned in grief, or gripped by anger, and long to be healed. It is for those who feel called to lead others to wholeness and holiness but are searching for direction and encouragement on their journey.

Though the ways of prayer and the ways of seeking holiness are many, this book focuses on the common path shared by all who seek wholeness, the path which takes us back to that place from which we came, the path which leads us home to our Creator. No matter what our life experience has been, the way to true wholeness includes retracing our steps to discover the Love that brought us into existence. It is a journey of quieting and listening for the heartbeat of God and entering into that place of perfect, creative, healing love.

I walk this journey with you as one who has guided numerous people to that safe place where God loved them into

existence and continues to energize their life choices. I walk with you because I have felt the pains of tragedy and want you to know that you are not alone. I stand with you because I have seen the destructive power of sin and unhealthy choices, yet I know a Love that heals, a relationship which offers wholeness and the promise of true peace. I invite you to journey with me that together we might learn the listening spirituality of Jesus and experience the power of his love relationship with the One he called "*Abba*." I invite you to discover the awesome energy of that love relationship as you make your own journey to wholeness, your journey "home." I invite you to risk entering into that perfect love, with its healing and transforming effects. I invite you to come into the place of quiet, to listen in the stillness of love, to rest in the heart of your Creator.

## CHAPTER 1

# Hearing The Call

***“I give you my word, if you care ready to believe that you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer, it shall be done for you.”***

**(Mk 11:24)**

Life's events are not always easy to experience or to comprehend. Some happen as a result of our choices and some occur despite our efforts to stop them. Certain of these events force us to face life's mysteries and to ponder our ultimate destiny. We are challenged to discern what we really believe, what we truly value, and how we plan to satisfy our deepest longings. We are pushed to choose or develop our spirituality, our vision from which we will make future choices. It is one such event that awakened my desire to develop a spirituality of healing which was consistent with the message of Jesus and the ultimate meaning of life.

I was away at school in my first year of college when my father called one day with a painful concern in his voice. He said that my youngest brother, Andy, had taken a very serious fall in the barn and was in the hospital. He went on to tell me that Andy was unconscious and his left side was paralyzed.

Never before had an event so challenged my faith in a loving God or pushed me to search for answers to the questions of life and death, suffering and healing. I had heard of tragedies and I had read

the stories of healing in the gospels, but now I felt challenged to decide what I believed about God effecting this situation. Was there really power in prayer? Would God heal Andy, and if so, what was my part in bringing about a healing?

Visits and calls to home and the hospital brought no news of healing or recovery. Numerous prayers and expressions of concern from the whole community brought no visible signs of change in my little brother.

Somehow from my reading of the gospel to that point in my life, I sensed a need to make a decision to believe that God was going to act and bring healing to Andy. The words of the gospel kept moving through my mind, "Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you shall receive, and it shall be done to you" (Mk 11:24). During those trying days I made a new commitment of faith, a belief that God's healing power is available to us in the world today. As a visible sign of that faith commitment, I bought my still unconscious brother a little brown teddy bear. Through that decision I felt a deep inner peace.

Thanksgiving Day came two weeks after Andy's fall. With Andy still unconscious it was hard to celebrate the joy of that holiday, but in the tradition of our family we all went to celebrate Eucharist on that special morning. We offered to God our prayers of thanks and our petition for healing. It's hard to tell what happens on the midst of suffering and challenge, communion and commitment, but somewhere between the tears and the gratitude that day the power of God was manifest. The courage to hope when there were no signs of hope, and the faith to give thanks when sadness overpowered all other feelings, set the stage for the power of God's love to be made visible that Thanksgiving Day.

As we surrounded my brother with our love at the hospital that afternoon, he regained consciousness, spoke his first words in two weeks, and recognized us as his family. With tears of joy streaming down our faces we hugged him and in the silence of our

hearts we gave thanks to the One who was bringing him back to health.

Six days later Andy came home from the hospital and in a month he was running and jumping just like before. Our family doctor called it one of the greatest miracles he had ever seen. Andy not only recovered physically, but in later reflection on this event he recalls having a powerful awareness of the presence of Jesus, a presence that continues to guide his life.

Many miracles happened during those two weeks. God's words gave peace where peace had been shattered. God's love gave new life where life had been damaged. People stood together in the power of divine love at a time when no words could bring comfort, and I discovered that God truly acts for our well being in the world today. In numerous relationships during those weeks, divine love was given the freedom to flow and it was human choices that opened the doors. My vision of life was expanded as I came to understand that believing means opening ourselves to the power of God's personal love for us and the many relationships which convey that love. I came to realize that to the extent that we enter into a faith relationship with God, God's love can change our lives and draw us to wholeness and real peace.

Not every crisis ends in such a beautiful way, but every crisis offers opportunities for miracles. Not every crisis allows for easy solutions, but every crisis, every experience of pain challenges us to make choices about our vision of life, our relationship with God and the image of God with which we live. It is our responses to such choices that can lead to greater wholeness and a richer, more life giving spirituality. We look closely now at the life of Jesus to discover what it was that gave him life and sustained him in his mission to bring healing and redemption to the world.

## CHAPTER 2

# Discovering The Gift

***“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he had finished, one of his disciples asked him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’ He said to them, ‘When you pray say, Abba, Father, hallowed be your name....’”***

**(Lk 11:1-2)**

The events surrounding my brother’s recovery opened my awareness of God’s power to heal, but it left me questioning the essence and the manner of the healing process. My desire for a broad education led me to Innsbruck, Austria and it was there that I encountered God’s power in another striking way and began a serious search for the essence of healing power and its connection to the human quest for wholeness.

One day during my stay in Innsbruck, I and three of my fellow students decided to go and sing spiritual music in the local hospital as a way of ministering to the hearts of those who were recovering there. We were welcomed with joy by the staff and the patients and continued to go back each week. On one occasion as we sang, a nurse came out of a nearby room and said that the young man inside wanted to talk with us. In the room was a man from Boston who had been in a serious skiing accident and had spent the last nine weeks flat on his back in a body cast. He asked

us if we would pray with him for healing and freedom from pain since the next day he was scheduled to have his cast removed. The doctor had warned him that there could be much pain when the cast was taken off and there might be a need for extensive therapy. We were a bit awed by this request since this was a new experience for us, but we did say a prayer with him and then returned home.

The next morning we received a phone call from this man who was almost too excited to talk. "What did you guys do to me last night," he asked in a way that expressed surprise and wonder. "I have been up and down the elevator four times now and they still can't believe the x-rays," he said. Then he continued with a voice of unbelief, "When the doctor cut off my cast I turned my head from side to side and felt no pain. He told me that I should have pain but there was none at all. They kept taking me back down to the x-ray room because they could not find any signs of the severed nerves and muscles in my neck." And then he asked again the resounding question, "What did you guys do anyhow?"

He knew we had prayed but he was looking for a deeper understanding of the mystery of his healing. I knew we had prayed for him, but his question pushed me to ponder what exactly we had done to effect the freedom from pain and the physical healing that he was describing to us. I kept wondering, "What had we done to change his condition?" That day all I could tell him was, "I don't know what we did," but then almost as a statement of my new mission I said, "*I am going to find out.*"

It was this healing and his question that challenged my mind and propelled me to search the scriptures for answers. I had to satisfy my quest to understand, to comprehend what truly was the essence of the Christian healing ministry. What was the source of power in Jesus that effected cures in people he met and what did we do that made such power available in the present?

I began my search through the gospels for answers. I thought I could find some word or gesture that was consistent in all the healing stories, but I found even more inconsistency than I first

anticipated. Sometimes Jesus touched people in the healing process, and sometimes he did not. Sometimes he used mud or saliva as part of the cure and sometimes he healed people while they were at a distance. I had heard that the faith of the sick person was necessary for Jesus to bring about healing, yet most of the healing stories did not even mention faith, and in some cases the people who were cured did not even know Jesus. So what was it that was consistent in all the healing stories?

After many months of study and reading, reflection and prayer, I noticed something that caught my attention and led me to new insights. In Mark's gospel I read that after numerous healings Jesus "went off to a lonely place in the desert and was absorbed in prayer" (Mk 1:35). In Luke's gospel it said, "Jesus often retired to deserted places and prayed" (Lk 5:16). I began to see that these moments of going off to pray were intricately connected to Jesus' healing ministry. I realized that Jesus' healing ministry actually flowed from, and was empowered by his time of being "absorbed in prayer." It became evident that his energy to minister healing was coming from the time he spent with the One he called "*Abba*." I came to recognize that it was the perfect, unconditional love flowing from his relationship with "*Abba*" that made each of his encounters an invitation to wholeness. Jesus brought to every sick person, every sinner, every person bound in pain, the unconditional love of "*Abba*." In the presence of that perfect love, people were cured, forgiveness was given, and evil was dispelled.

My search which began with looking for a healing word or gesture led me to discover the essential healing relationship. What I found is that the essence of Jesus' healing and freeing energy was not to be located in his action, but rather in his intense, love relationship with the Father. What he did was not as important as how he related. His desire and ability to bring about healing flowed from his ability to *receive* love from "*Abba*." In the power of that love he was moved with an intense desire to have others experience the freedom and wholeness of real love. The gospels make it clear

that Jesus' healing ministry flowed from his going off alone and soaking in the perfect love of the Father. His mission to bring salvation and wholeness to all was the result of *resting in the heart of "Abba."*

The gospels describe Jesus as being "moved with compassion" when he saw someone sick. Jesus allowed himself to feel their pain and through his compassion he invited them to receive the unconditional love flowing from his heart. In the original Greek the words describe him as being "wrenched in the guts" when he encountered someone who was ill or in need of inner freedom. His love for them was so strong that it pained him to see them hurting. He knew what they could become if they would only feel *Abba's* personal love for them. He realized their thirst for ultimate fulfillment and he knew the only relationship that would finally quench their deepest thirst. He was moved to be the vessel of perfect love, to offer healing and the hope of ultimate wholeness. To all who came he offered this gift of love and the invitation to real life.

In his gospel John writes, "In the beginning was the Word; the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God. ...through him all things came into being, and apart from him nothing came to be." (Jn 1:1,3) Here John attempts to express the mystery of the perfect love relationship between "*Abba*" and Jesus, united in the Holy Spirit. This perfect, unconditional love which formed the community of the Trinity was compelled to create, to express itself by fashioning all of creation and ultimately fashioning humans in God-like image. That love energy which John describes as the power which brought into being all creation, is the same energy that the gospels describe Jesus using to bring healing and ultimate wholeness to the people he encountered. The perfect love that flowed from the communion between Jesus and "*Abba*", which created the world, was used by Jesus to recreate life and restore it to health.

Perhaps the greatest gift, the richest treasure that Jesus offered to his disciples and to the world was his description of the

relationship which generated such healing power. I believe that gift was given the day the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray. We read:

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he had finished, one of his disciples asked him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: *Abba*, Father, hallowed be your name,..."

(Lk 11:1-2)

The disciples were very likely shocked by this revolutionary new way of addressing God and the image of God which it conveyed. They had been schooled in Judaism and from their background they would have most likely come to picture God as one who watched over the world from a distance. They would have imagined God watching every move they made and punishing every step that was out of line. They would have grown up hearing of a God who was impersonal and exacting, distant and wrathful. They had been raised in a tradition where only once a year, on one special day, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies and dare to say the name of God. When they heard Jesus call God, "*Abba*", it would have been almost incomprehensible for them to think of God in that way and yet they were listening to the Son of God describe God. This radically new picture of God would stretch them into a whole new vision of life and introduce them to an intimate, life-giving relationship that brought healing and forgiveness. While Jesus' words on this day were probably shocking to the disciples, it is understandable why this prayer became the central prayer of his followers.

The word "*Abba*" is the Hebrew words for "Daddy" or "my father," and it conveys a feeling of closeness and intimacy. In our present culture people sometimes get distracted by this image of God, thinking it describes God as masculine. In the Old Testament

we read how an aspect of God was described by the feminine word, Wisdom, which is similar to what the Christian church later described as the Holy Spirit. No description of God in human terms is complete. We know that God is beyond sexual identity. What Jesus revealed and emphasized was the intimacy he shared with “*Abba*,” and the life-giving intimacy in which his followers could also share. He gave his followers a place to rest in healing Love. Knowing that we can share in an intimate relationship with God is a very precious treasure, a life-transforming gift, since through this relationship we can satisfy our deepest thirst for meaning and find healing for the wounds we carry within.

The prayer which Jesus taught that day we have come to know as the “Lord’s Prayer,” but the precious treasure which Jesus offered that day was inviting his disciples, and us, into the intimacy shared within the Trinity, the communion of perfect love which created the world. Through this prayer he introduced the disciples and the world to a new way of relating to God and a new description of how God desires to relate to us. He gave us a treasure, a communion, that would continue to offer healing and wholeness to all who dared to accept the invitation to enter the heart of God.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul affirms the treasure of being able to call God, “*Abba*,” and to feel the intimacy of that image (Gal 4:4-7). This new way of relating to God as “*Abba*,” Jesus, and the indwelling Spirit of Love, became the distinctive mark of Christians. Jesus introduced his disciples and all who would come after him to a God of intimacy who desires to be close to people. He revealed to his disciples, and to us, the intimate love relationship that sustained his ministry of healing, teaching, and forgiving, that life-giving relationship which would ultimately sustain him in his final moment of sacrifice. He invited us to draw close to God, to feel the power of “*Abba*’s” personal, unconditional love for us. In that closeness I have experienced much healing and

witnessed many people set free from the inner wounds and physical illnesses which were keeping them from wholeness.

History has shown that there were always some who resisted Jesus' unique revelation of God as "*Abba*" and the intimacy God desires to have with us. Sometimes we may seek to keep God at a distance (as if this were possible) because the thought of being close to God scares us or causes us to feel shameful. In my experience when I resist Jesus' words I gradually discover something about myself that is in need of inner healing. Our journey to wholeness and true peace may involve naming our true feelings as we seek to receive the gift Jesus offered when he said that we can call God, "*Abba*", when he revealed that we can experience God in an intimate, personal way. In our resistance we may discover something about ourselves which is keeping us from experiencing God's personal love for us.

Jesus rested in the heart of "*Abba*" and allowed his heart to be bathed in limitless love in order that he might offer life and wholeness to a broken world. It is this "resting in the Heart", this "being absorbed in relationship", this "total immersion in Love" that I believe is the essence of the true Christian healing ministry. This is what Jesus carried to every healing encounter. If we carry anything less we come ill equipped. Healing can happen through encounters in ways we do not fully understand, but if we wish to continue what Jesus did then we must first *receive* what Jesus received that we might *offer* what he offered.

Jesus knew that the perfect Love which created would also heal and restore life. His mission was to receive that love with such consistency that he could give love in radical abundance and then teach his disciples to do the same. What he received in his time with "*Abba*" was "agape", the Greek word for the kind of perfect, unconditional love that begins with God and flows unconditionally out from God. It is different than "phelos" which is the love between friends, or "eros" which is the attraction between men and women. It is this agape-love which compelled Jesus to reach out to the sick,

the suffering, the sinners, and the possessed, while also empowering him to set them free. It was this love which moved him with compassion when he saw someone living a life less than he knew was possible. It is this love that we must first *receive* if we wish to be whole, if we wish to be holy, and if we wish to participate in bringing others to true wholeness.

I do not know that I will ever understand fully what caused the man in Innsbruck to experience a dramatic physical healing, but I have come to realize that what we did in his hospital room that day was not as important as what we did before we got to his room. My years of experience have made it clear that the Christian healing ministry is not a technique, but the fruits of a love relationship. Christian healing ministry, and actually the fullness of Christian life, flows from a listening, receiving spirituality. It flows from going to a “deserted place” and receiving the love which empowers and guides the journey to wholeness. Our desire to receive and offer healing leads us to the only Relationship that can satisfy our deepest human thirst for love, it leads us into the community of the Trinity, the place of perfect love flowing within the heart of God. If the follower of Jesus is going to truly know the life Jesus offers and participate in offering life to others, he or she must begin with *resting in the heart of God* to absorb this perfect, unconditional, healing love.

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## Reflection

I invite you now to take a moment to quiet yourself, relax, and rest for a time in the heart of God. Imagine being in the center of the perfect love relationship that brought you into existence. No matter what your experience of human love has been, imagine yourself back at the time before you did anything and before anything was done to you. Feel complete, unconditional love surrounding you the day God loved you into existence. See the smile on “*Abba*’s” face as you were being created in God’s perfect

image. Experience how comforting it is to be loved just for who you are, a love that no one can take from you. Savor the beauty, the quiet, the awesomeness of this precious time. Relish the peace of being so close to your Creator, the security of being “home.” If this is the first time that you have ever gone back to this moment in your life, rest in its tranquillity and peace as long as you can and know that you can come back as often as you wish. The love you feel around you as you rest in this quiet place in the Heart, is the love that heals you and draws you to wholeness. Soak it in. Breathe it in. Enjoy its beauty, its power, its peace. When you have finished resting in this love, I invite you to come back to the present moment.

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What we learn from Jesus as we walk with him through the pages of scripture is a spirituality that can quench our deepest thirst and bring us to wholeness and fulfillment. He offers us a relationship which challenges us to let go and rest in the security of “*Abba*’s” personal, unconditional love. He invites us to a place of quiet where surrender leads to security, love transforms wounds, and repentance leads to real freedom. In the next four chapters we will go to that place of quiet, that place in the Heart and allow the perfect, compassionate love of God to bring us security and inner healing.

### **Prayer For Openness**

Lord God, in my pains I have closed the door at times to the ways in which you wish to touch my life with your healing embrace. I have limited your healing and transforming power by closing my heart and mind to the words of unconditional love which you spoke through Jesus. I have denied you access to the deepest chambers of my heart because at times I was afraid of

feeling your presence, ashamed of what you might think of me, hurt by unchosen losses in life, or angry at situations which I thought you could change. I have closed my mind to your vision for my life and the profound way in which you continually demonstrate your desire to have each person rest in your love. Lord, bless me with a new openness to your personal love. Break through the barriers I have placed between us. Allow my heart to experience your personal, unconditional love for me beginning with the day you loved me into existence. Help me to trust your love. Show me the way to let your perfect love heal the parts of me which are not yet complete, not yet whole. Open me to your complete love. Help me to allow your love to dispel the fear and shame, the grief and anger which have turned me inward on myself and kept me from the true wholeness which you intended for me. Let me always feel you close at hand as I make my journey to the fullness of life found only in you. Amen.

### CHAPTER 3

# Calming Our Fears

***“Love has no room for fear; rather, perfect love casts out all fear.”***

**(1 Jn 4:18)**

From his writing it seems evident that John, the beloved disciple of Jesus, came to understand the freeing power of “*Abba’s*” perfect love. His words tell us that he felt this transforming love flow from his Master’s heart and he saw the power of that love sustain his Friend’s life. Not only did this perfect love empower Jesus’ ministry of healing and forgiving, but it also sustained him in his personal journey as he made his way to Jerusalem and the cross. His listening, healing spirituality led him to recognize what awaited him as he drew closer to his final hour and his words to his disciples along the journey invited them to learn the power of resting in the heart of “*Abba*”.

In his intense moment of pain and agony in the garden of Gethsemani, the disciples would see Jesus go off alone one more time and watch him find inner strength and peace in that place of passion and power. At a time when he was “filled with fear and distress” and “sorrow to the point of death”, they would hear him pray, “*Abba*, (O Father), you have the power to do all things. Take this cup away from me. But let it be as you would have it, not as I’

(Mk 14:36). In the quiet of that night they knew he was resting, surrendering, and absorbing the Presence which would sustain him in his final sacrifice. The same love relationship which empowered him to passionately free others from the pain caused by sickness, sin, and evil, now would empower him through his passion and death to the final victory of life.

We all have fears and moments of distress. They may not be as intense as those that Jesus faced in his final hours, but they are real. It is normal to have fears but it is not healthy to be imprisoned by them. Fear can hold us in bondage. It can paralyze us and inhibit us from becoming whole, especially if we do not even know that we are bound by fear. Jesus offers us a secure place in the heart of God where we can begin to name our deepest fears and he stands with us as we seek to walk through those fears to the freedom of real life.

The more I work in the healing ministry, the more I see the devastating power of fear. I work with people who are afraid of their feelings and spend great amounts of energy each day holding them in check. I talk with people who live in constant fear of what others might say about them if they make needed changes in their life. I see people who hide behind well-constructed defenses because they are afraid of the intimacy of sharing how they really feel. I ache at the sight of adults who because of deep childhood wounds are afraid to feel and so they live in the loneliness of isolation from others, themselves, and their Creator. I have prayed with people who have an overwhelming fear of dying and I have prayed with people who have an overwhelming fear of living.

Fear is a feeling created by God and as such is good. It functions best as a short term impulse that causes adrenaline to flow through our veins so that we can act quickly and effectively. It calls us to keep away when danger is near and it can enlighten us to take precautions as we venture out on a journey. But fear is not meant to be constantly filing away at our nerve endings and draining our energy. Our bodies are not designed to live in perpetual fear. Such

fear can be very destructive to our bodies and inhibit the dreams in our hearts.

Having a safe place where we can name our deepest fears is a precious treasure that can start us on the healing journey of freeing ourselves from them. In my daily prayer time I go to this safe place and *rest in the heart of "Abba."* If I am feeling fearful, I ask myself, what am I really afraid of, or what is the worst thing that could happen? These questions spoke in the security of the One who loves me help me get in touch with the root of my fear. Once I name the deepest root of fear I can begin to decide how I might step through it to freedom.

In many cases we do not even know that we are afraid. We may make many choices in a day and not realize how many of them are made because of some fear. We might keep the radio playing constantly because we are afraid of the silence and the feelings that well up inside of us when we are quiet. We may stay compulsively busy all day and work until late at night because we are afraid of the intimacy which our life commitment entails. We may keep ourselves medicated with food, alcohol or drugs because we fear the depth of pain inside of us and fear the self revelation that it would take to gain our freedom.

These fears are very real yet they are very destructive. They will continue to chase us through life like a ghost until we turn toward them and name them. Once they are named, we can make a choice to begin walking through them. The security of knowing that we are personally loved and cherished by our Creator offers us an inner power to take this first crucial step. It allows us to know that the worst thing that could happen will still leave us resting in the embrace of our Maker. It affords us the luxury of being able to risk facing our fear for nothing in this world will be able to separate us from the perfect love of our God.

If our fear has been with us a long time it is helpful to share it with a friend, a prayer minister, or a counselor. Such honest sharing can challenge us to become clear in identifying the real fear.

Sometimes the fear we seem to identify in another person is actually our own unnamed fear. I recall an incident that happened to me as I was training for pastoral ministry. As part of our learning I was asked to visit people in the hospital and then write down one of the conversations I had with a person and how I felt about the whole event. I described how I would go past various rooms in the hospital until I found a room in which there was only one patient. I wrote that I did this so that the person would be free to talk and would not be afraid of a person in the other bed listening. When I shared this with my supervisor he stopped me right there and asked, "Who would be afraid of the other person in the room?" I tried to explain that the patient would be afraid, but he asked again, "*Who* would be afraid?" He had to ask a number of times before I realized that *I* was afraid of what the other person would think if I did not say the right thing or ask the right question. The fear was in me but it was easier to imagine it in another person. I could not get past my fear of making a mistake until I named it and owned it. Once I could name my fear I could gradually walk through it and with time and practice I knew the fear would subside. The fear has subsided and the lesson I learned that day continues to help me stay free of unnecessary fear.

At times our fear may be rooted in choices from the past. A fear of what others think can be fed by an inner voice which keeps saying, "If they only knew what I did, they wouldn't like me or accept me." If this voice represents the feeling of guilt from a past sin or sins, then the fear may not subside until we make a sincere decision to repent. Trying to convince ourselves that it was not that bad, or rationalizing that someone else made us do it, will not dissolve such fear. If the guilt and consequent fear has been there a long time, it may be necessary to express the source of guilt to a confessor who can express God's forgiveness of us and invite us to soak in God's unconditional love again. It is in this quiet place of love and acceptance that we can forgive ourselves and begin to

act with the confidence which comes from knowing that we belong to the Creator.

Our present fears may also stem from being wounded in childhood by the mistakes or imperfect love of others. No human being can love us perfectly and at times human love may have been so distorted by previous injuries that it caused us to pull within ourselves and fear any love. We can not undo what was done to us, but the perfect love of God can help us identify some goodness in the imperfect love of our earlier years. This divine love can begin to dispel our fears and heal the wounds we carry within. In the quiet of 'Abba's' unconditional love we can safely walk back to those moments when we were made to feel fearful through the actions of others. We might recall how Jesus often dispelled people's fears and healed their wounds by revealing his unconditional love for them. As we quiet ourselves and remember an incident which caused us great fear, we can imagine Jesus loving us perfectly in that incident because he was there loving us perfectly. As we experience his perfect, personal love in that moment, we are given the chance to let go of the fear of that time so that it does not continue to keep us from wholeness in the present. As we gradually give Jesus our inner fears which are held in our memory and step through those fears with the courage that comes from his perfect love, we become more peaceful and more capable of living our life to the full.

If we fear feeling our feelings or have difficulty naming them, we may need a counselor to help us slowly walk through the fears and the clumsiness of trying to express what is really inside. If we have gotten in the habit of covering our true feelings with food or other chemicals, then the steps to freedom and wholeness can be somewhat more difficult, but final peace is worth the journey. In such a journey, resting in God's heart of unconditional love can make the difference between the peace of continual recovery and the prison of dependency. If this assurance of perfect love is coupled with a recovering community where feelings can be

expressed and support in honest sharing can be felt, the fears can be overcome. One step at a time the journey nears the goal of true freedom and our Maker's love empowers the way.

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### **Reflection**

I invite you now to quiet yourself, take a few moments to breath easy and imagine yourself laying in the soft quiet place at the center of God's heart. Feel the gentle support of unconditional love beneath you and blankets of perfect love wrapped over you. Breathe in the love that fills that space. Recall God's perfect, personal love for you before you did anything or anything was done to you. In the security of that love try to feel and own your deepest fear. Ask yourself what you are really most afraid of and reflect on how that fear keeps you from being all that "Abba" created you to be. Try to imagine the worst thing that could happen if you begin to step through that fear, and then realize that the warmth of God's personal love would still be surrounding you. Reflect on who God has put in your life at this time that might help you discover real courage and inner peace. Decide what steps, which we have just outlined, you might be willing to begin taking in order that you could come closer to living life to the full as your Creator intended. Feel the power of the true love around you and the support of that love as you make decisions to move ahead on your journey. Feel the perfect love of God which casts out all fear. Be aware that you can come as often as you like to this place of quiet love as you seek the healing and the wholeness which the Lord wants for you. Give thanks for the gift of this place and for the One who makes real life possible. When you are finished, slowly come back and recognize that you are loved.

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## **SCRIPTURE WORDS**

### **TO CALM OUR FEARS**

The following passages from scripture may help you find freedom from the fears which you carry within. Find a quiet place, free of distractions where you can *rest in the heart of Abba*. Take time to quiet yourself and feel the presence of God's personal, unconditional love all around you and within you. Then slowly read through one of the passages. Let the words touch your heart and invite you to greater wholeness.

Psalm 103: 1-13

Psalm 116: 1-9

Hosea 11: 1-4

Jeremiah 1: 4-10

Mark 5: 25-34

Mark 14: 34-46

1 John 4: 7-18

## CHAPTER 4

# T ransforming Our Shame

***“People were bringing their little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples were scolding them for this. Jesus became indignant when he noticed it and said: ‘Let the children come to me and do not hinder them....’ Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them.”***

**(Mk 10:13-16)**

When we begin to quiet ourselves and page through the gospels we open ourselves to the Power of the healing stories in which Jesus offers the fullness of life to those he met. By imagining that we are those people standing before Jesus, we can feel the power of those encounters for our lives. Since Jesus is the same today as he was then, his love today is just as accepting and healing as it was then. In this chapter we will allow the secure, accepting love of Jesus to be our safe place where we can name our feelings of shame and dispel the voices which nurture those pervasive feelings.

Jesus wants us to have the fullness of life, and a continual, oppressive feeling of shame can prevent us from such a life. Shame can affect our whole being. In some cases it is an all pervasive

feeling of inadequacy, inferiority, unworthiness, low self-esteem, and incompleteness. It is a sense of being unacceptable and unwanted that is nurtured by inner voices which keep saying, "I am a mistake. I am flawed. I am no good." Some people describe shame as a "hole in the soul" which keeps draining our sense of well being and can make us feel unacceptable even to God. We might even wonder at times, "How can God love a person like me?"

This type of shame usually has its roots in our early childhood. It often stems from an environment where a child is made to feel as if he or she is in the way, or the cause of the discord that exists in that environment. It can stem from shameful remarks by significant adults who perhaps because of their own shame will say things to their children like, "You were a mistake! You dummy! You never do anything right! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! You will never be anything." If the children in such an environment have no other source of affirmation in their life, they will begin to truly believe that something is wrong with them, something is wrong with their being. This can initiate an overwhelming sense of inferiority and inner torment which builds through their life with every degrading remark.

We all need and long to be loved and held special by someone especially in our early formative years. When such needed love and affirmation is absent, and in its place we receive words of shame and denial of our being, we can flounder through life feeling abandoned and empty, at a loss to know where to turn for any sense of goodness or happiness. We may learn very quickly to cover our feelings with unnecessary lies, distracting humor, or pressured achievements, but the pain deep within ourselves remains. We may seek to drown the ache in our hearts with drugs or alcohol, but the morning after leaves us feeling even more shameful and the next "fix" only wraps us tighter in the trap of addiction with no relief from our pervasive inner darkness.

When our esteem is low and feelings of unworthiness permeate our hearts, we may put up with abuse and denial in our

relationships. People who feel a deep, pervasive shame often accept abuse from others, thinking that they do not deserve any better, or clinging to the few good moments which offer comfort from their constant inner pain. They often live in denial of their pain and find ways to cover it up.

The words of a song called "Friend of A Wounded Heart" express the pain of living in shame and offer the hope that only the Master's voice can bring. The song says:

Smile, make'em think your happy. Lie and say that things are fine, and hide that empty longing that you feel, don't ever show it, just keep your heart concealed.

Why are the days so lonely? I wonder where, where can a heart go free, and who will dry the tears that no one sees? There must be someone to share your silent dreams.

Caught like a leaf in the wind, looking for a friend, where can you turn? Whisper the words of a prayer and you'll find him there, arms open wide, love in his eyes.

Jesus, he meets you where you are. Jesus, he heals your secret scares. All the love you're longing for is Jesus, the friend of a wounded heart.

The pain of a continual feeling of shame can be overwhelming and the prison of lies and loneliness can seem inescapable, but the scriptures show is that Jesus is a Friend of wounded hearts. He offers us a freeing love which flows from the heart of "Abba." Because trust was broken early in our life by people who said they loved us, it may be difficult to trust again. The

only hope of freedom and wholeness is to begin to trust Jesus and the healing relationship to which he invites us. We begin to feel the healing effects of that Friend's love and the freedom from the prison of shame as we honestly name our true feeling and identify the source of those feelings.

As we try to discover the source of our "shaming voice," it seems necessary to distinguish the feeling of guilt from the feeling of shame. At times we may hear someone say, "He or she always makes me feel guilty," when they really mean that the person's words or actions make them feel shameful. While guilt and shame feel similar and therefore get confused at times, their origin is very different. By looking at the real cause of what we are feeling, we can distinguish guilt from shame, which sets the stage for freedom and inner healing.

The inner voice causing us to feel guilt comes from our conscience and makes us feel uncomfortable when we do something outside the guidelines of our conscience. If our conscience has been formed by the words and values of Jesus, the feeling of authentic guilt comes from an action we do or a choice we make which is contrary to the actions and values of Jesus. Guilt will make us feel uncomfortable or "bad." The feeling of authentic guilt is valuable in keeping our lives patterned on the values and actions of Jesus. If we feel guilt about an action that we have done, we can quickly dissolve it by making a choice to repent and reorder our lives according to our conscience. The security of God's unconditional love empowers us to make such a choice for repentance, and through that decision our heart is restored to inner peace.

Unlike guilt which stems from something we do, shame stems from our vision of ourselves. The inner voice causing us to feel shame comes not from our conscience but from the memory of people whose way of relating to us led us to believe that we *are* a wrong choice. The feeling of shame does not stem from an action we have done but from the voice of significant people who in some way denied the goodness of our being. Their voice or voices can

gradually become our inner voice which continues to tear away at the very essence of who we are as creatures formed in the image of God. Because the feeling of shame often originates early in our lives, and touches the very core of our personhood, it can seem all pervasive. Whereas the feeling of guilt can bring us to repentance and a greater wholeness, the feeling of shame can erode our recognition of the precious treasure that we are, and impair us from becoming the person we were created to be.

The process of releasing ourselves from the ever constant feeling of shame is to find a safe environment where we feel loved for who we are and feel safe enough to name our shame. This might be with a true friend, with a spouse, with people who are on a similar healing journey, with a counselor, or in our quiet place of *resting in the heart of "Abba."*

Once we feel safe in a particular environment, we can begin sharing or writing how we talk to ourselves during the day, especially when we make a mistake or accidentally break something. As we reflect on our inner monologue do we find ourselves saying things like, "You dummy. You stupid person. You never do anything right." In examining this inner monologue it is very important to discover what names we call ourselves? Just as important in this journey to inner healing is to then ask ourselves, "whose voice does it sound like?" or "who called me that name?" These questions can guide us to the origin or root of our shaming voice and the feelings of shame which continue to flow from it. We may find that the voice is the voice of a shaming parent or some other significant adult in the early years of our childhood. We make this journey into our past not to condemn or to blame anyone, but to identify our shame roots, feel the feelings, and begin our journey to wholeness. Once we know and can name the origins of our shame, and the voice that still shames us, we are on our way to freedom.

Once we have identified the roots of our shame voice we can begin to choose not to believe those old shaming voices any more. Since these voices may have become a part of our own inner

voice, this choice can be difficult. While accepting and affirming people can be helpful in bringing us to name our shame voice, the power to heal our inner wounds and dispel these old voices flows from the perfect love of God revealed in the bible. By consistently listening to the Creator's voice say to us, "I have loved you with an everlasting love, constant is my affection for you" (Jer 31:3), "you are precious in my eyes and glorious, and I love you" (Isa 43:4), and "As the Father has love me, so I have loved you" (Jn 15:9), we are empowered to dispel the voices that said anything different than that. By imagining the smile on God's face the day God loved us into existence, we begin to feel the inaccuracy of the voices which denied our goodness and treated us as less than an image of God. Remembering God's unconditional love for us just because we are lovable has power to dispel the painful memories which lead us to feel less than lovable. The process of dissolving the power which these old shaming voices have over us may take time, but listening daily to the voice of God affirming our goodness and expressing love for us makes the process possible.

One story which allows us to feel Jesus' desire and ability to heal our shame is the story of his encounter with the woman at the well (Jn 4:4-42). The fact that this woman came to the well at noon when no one else would be there suggests that she felt shameful, and the first part of her dialogue with Jesus portrays a low self esteem. Jesus affirmed the goodness in this woman, and in the security of his accepting, healing love, she began dispelling the voices of shame. With a new inner knowledge that she was not a mistake, but a very precious person with an "Abba" who loved her, she went back into town and invited others to the wellspring of healing love.

Perhaps we, like this woman, find ourselves at times hiding behind our defenses hoping people do not sense how badly we feel about ourselves, yet wishing they would see the tears of loneliness that flow down the inside of our hearts. We thirst like the woman who after six relationships with men was still longing to feel the

security and affirmation of true love. In the midst of our longing, Jesus comes and listens to our deepest pains and feels our hidden tears. In that moment we know that someone cares, someone understands. We can imagine Jesus looking into our eyes and saying, “Let go of the shame, let go of the image you have of yourself. You are precious, you are loved, you are beautiful, and you have your “Daddy’s” eyes. We have the same “Abba” and no one can take that from you. Your Creator sees good in you even if you can not see it in yourself. Your Friend esteems you even if right now you do not esteem yourself.”

It is in our quiet going to the well and sitting with Jesus that we can hear the Divine voice of healing love. Through continual quieting and listening the voice of perfect love overpowers the old shaming voices of the past. We can come often and walk with Jesus through the gospel stories, feeling his acceptance and hearing his gentle voice invite us to a new vision of ourselves.

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## Reflection

Because our shaming voice often originates in our childhood, the story of Jesus and the children can be a very powerful image for healing the child within us, the child that still lives in the prison of a shaming voice. We might take time now to relax in our quiet place of prayer and reflect on that story in order that we are able to feel the gift it offers us as we make our journey to wholeness. We read:

People were bringing their little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples were scolding them for this. Jesus became indignant when he noticed it and said: ‘Let the children come to me and do not hinder them....’ Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them. (Mk 10:13-16)

After reading the story, imagine a time in your early life when you remember a parent or significant adult tearing down at your person, not for something you had knowingly done wrong, but just for being a child or making an honest mistake. Imagine how you felt as they gave you the impression that you were a mistake, you were in the way, you were no good. As you feel the heaviness and pain of that moment, imagine yourself going off from that place and coming to where Jesus was sitting with many children surrounding him. Hear Jesus calling you to come and sit on his lap. Feel the shame inside of you making you want to resist that invitation, telling yourself that you are not worthy to sit on Jesus' lap. Then look into Jesus' eyes and see the gentleness there, the deep love he has for you, the desire he has to hold you close. Let his gentle look dispel the voices that make you feel less than precious, or fearful of his words of affirmation. As you gradually walk closer to him, feel his non-judgmental spirit and the joy in his heart to see you coming to receive the healing love that he has for you. Feel the strength and security of his arms as you let him pick you up and set you on his lap. Let his firm embrace begin giving you the security to undo the negative effects of the earlier shaming voice. Begin to let yourself trust his voice as the voice of truth about you, the truth that you are precious, that you may not be perfect, but that you are created in God's image. Let him tell you about *Abba*, who delights in your goodness and loves you just because you are lovable. Hear him say to you, "You are *Abba's* very precious child, and you have *Abba's* eyes." As you listen, allow yourself to let go of the feelings of shame that you came with. Allow your mind to recognize the lies that were told to you by others about who you are as a person and consider how the persons who shamed you must have lived in the prison of shame themselves. Look again into Jesus' eyes and realize that he loves you dearly and invites you to come daily and sit with him as you gradually dispel the shame voices in your life and replace them with the affirming voice of Jesus and *Abba*.

As you come back to the present bring along in your heart the feeling of Jesus' healing love. Bring back the words that he shared with you. Perhaps you want to write them down. The next time you begin doubting your goodness or feel the old shaming voices trying to tear away at you, read the words he gave to you or go back to this quiet place with Jesus and look again onto his eyes. Feel the healing power of his Voice.

As we make our journey towards wholeness and freedom from the prison of shame, we may still have to deal with or live with people who shame us. These may be family members or even leaders in our church. At first we may need to limit our time with such shaming people, not as a judgment about them, but as an honest recognition of our own limits and our desire to stay on the journey of inner healing and freedom. When we grow strong enough to claim our true identity as sons or daughters of "Abba," and feel the beauty of who we are as children of God, then we may be able to talk with them about why they have a need to shame us. Through a daily listening to Jesus' affirming voice in our quiet time we can draw energy to dispel their shaming words, and in the gentleness which he shows to us, we may be able to invite them to real freedom and inner peace.

Staying free from the power of destructive shame can be a continual process. Seeking out affirming people with whom we can share and consistently feel our inner goodness is a great source of on-going support. A self-help group or a prayer partner can be a great aid in getting free from the power of a shame voice. There is, however, no substitute for daily sitting in the security of "Abba's" heart and receiving words of love and acceptance from our Creator. This continual absorbing of the agape love which created us provides a wellspring of life and the security of knowing we are precious.

## **SCRIPTURE WORDS**

### **FOR TRANSFORMING OUR SHAME**

The following passages from scripture may help you dispel the feelings of shame which keep you from being whole. Find a quiet place, free of distractions where you *can rest in the heart of "Abba."* Take time to quiet yourself and feel the presence of God's personal, unconditional love all around you and within you. Then slowly read through one of the passages. Let the words touch your heart and invite you to greater wholeness.

Isaiah 43:1-4

Psalm 139:1-18

Jeremiah 31:3

Ephesians 1:3-10

John 15:9-16

Matthew 11:25-28

Mark 10:13-16

## CHAPTER 5

# Resolving Our Grief

***"When Mary came to the place where Jesus was, seeing him, she fell at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here my brother, Lazarus, would never have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had accompanied her also weeping, he was troubled in spirit, moved by the deepest emotion. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Lord, come and see," they said. Jesus began to weep..."***

***(Jn 11:32-35)***

Grief is a feeling which we all have to greater or lesser degrees at various points in our life journey. It can shake our assumptions about life and cause us to doubt the fairness of life's events or even to doubt the goodness of God. The way we learn to deal with losses as a child can effect how we respond to losses throughout the rest of our life. If processing grief through the natural channels of tears and sharing is ridiculed or discouraged in early childhood, then our system can begin accumulating what we might call unresolved grief. It is this grief which with time becomes a heavy weight of inner sadness and can lead to destructive behaviors

and feel like an insurmountable depression. In the quiet of “*Abba’s*” love we will consider the losses in our life and explore a process of resolving our grief.

As we read through the gospels it becomes clear that Jesus is on the side of health and wholeness. He responded to people’s illnesses and losses with deep compassion and a desire to bring healing and new life. He raised a number of people from the dead and yet in his life journey he experienced the death of his friend, Lazarus, and his cousin, John the Baptist. He knew the pain of loss. He knew the ache of intense grief. He demonstrated his willingness to stand with people in their illnesses and losses. He gave his followers an image of a God who cherishes them and stands with them in their deepest pains. He offered those who heard him a vision of life which is eternal and he gave all who would follow him the assurance that in every loss there was the hope of resurrection.

Through reflecting on these scripture accounts, we can feel the security of God’s love and come to the awareness that Jesus stands with us in our pain. This gift offers us the space to begin the process of naming our unresolved grief, expressing our feelings of sadness, and inviting Jesus to heal and restore new life.

When we experience the death of a close relative or friend, we feel intense grief. I remember that pain when I received the news that my father had died. As our family gathered together we cried and shared the stories of all the things dad had given to us. During the visitation time, many people came to offer us their comfort and their presence. In sharing with them we processed our pain and released our grief. Through our celebration of the funeral liturgy we experienced the presence of God and God’s promise to “make all things new.” We were bathed in love by many people at that time of loss, and in that love the intense feelings of grief slowly subsided. In the warmth of people’s on-going love and the peace of God’s unfailing love, those feelings were gradually resolved.

There are some losses in our lives, however, in which we are not surrounded by love or given an occasion to process our

grief. These can hurt with a similar intensity, but the pain remains stuck in the depths of our heart. The process of resolving and healing these feelings gets stifled by other obligations or the absence of a safe environment in which to grieve. We may carry this kind of unresolved grief in our heart, sensing a certain inner sadness and yet not knowing how to release it.

I still remember the day a young couple came to my office to begin the process of having their three children baptized. The mother talked quite a bit about their being away from church for various reasons over the past years. The father sat mostly in silence, interjecting only brief comments about his dissatisfaction with church. After listening quite a while I finally turned to the father and said, "Your dad must have been very hard on you." Before he could say anything the tears started flowing from his eyes. Gradually he began sharing the pains in his heart which resulted from his abusive father. Through our subsequent dialogue he started to name his unresolved grief from the many losses in his childhood. He also expressed the anger which stemmed from that hidden pain, an anger which he took out on God, on his family and at work. During the course of our exchange I introduced him to "*Abba*" who could heal his inner wounds by loving him with a perfect love which his father could not do. He listened attentively and expressed his desire to experience this healing love. We prayed briefly that he might begin to feel the deep, personal love God had for him.

The next Sunday that couple and their children came to worship for the first time in many years and they kept coming. The father had found a safe place where he could resolve his grief and a relationship that could heal his inner wounds. The celebration of the children's baptism became a true celebration of new life for the whole family who had discovered the healing and freeing power of God's personal, unconditional love.

In working with adults who grew up in severely dysfunctional families, I often hear the inner pains of unnamed losses. I hear of children who were forced to carry out the adult

responsibilities of the home because the adults were caught up in addictive behavior. Often the oldest child was left to care for the other children. Such children are stripped of their childhood, but their loss gets no sympathy from anyone and remains ungrieved. In a similar way children who are sexually abused will experience the loss of their purity and personhood, but the fear of telling anyone leaves them to hurt all alone. In homes where one or both parents are alcoholic, the children often experience one or both of their parents as “gone”. Children of divorced parents experience the loss of their family as they knew it and perhaps the loss of a parent. Because there is no funeral or words of comfort for these grieving children, they often stuff the hurt and may even feel responsible for the situation. If children grow up in these kind of situations and are not allowed to talk and cry through the pains they feel, such pains can continue to hold them in a state of constant inner sadness even into adult life. This kind of intense pain, at times, can numb them to the love of the One who could heal and set them free.

Because losses are a part of life, unresolved grief continues to accumulate in our lives. If the pains of the past are not talked through and allowed to be cleansed from our hearts, the next experience of loss awakens all those pains plus the ones of the present. This cumulative effect can cause us to feel overwhelmed in sadness at times without knowing exactly from where such sadness is coming. A small loss or disappointment can cause us to feel intense sadness or react in violent anger without knowing the source of such responses. Such responses may be signs that our grief has been accumulating a long time.

The deep pains of accumulated unresolved grief can cause a person to seek relief in unhealthy relationships or the “high” of drugs, alcohol, and food. Many believe that the main cause of chemical addiction, codependency and eating disorders is unresolved grief. Seeking the temporary relief found in addictive behavior often leads a person to experience even more losses such as destroyed marriages, the loss of job, and the loss of physical

health. The vicious cycle of seeking unhealthy relief from unresolved grief can alter the chemistry in our body leading to a state of depression and a loss of interest in life. This makes the journey to wholeness more complex but never impossible.

The intense pain of unresolved grief may also tempt a person to stay destructively busy because they are afraid to stop and try to sort out what is going on inside of them. Continual running and busyness only covers the feelings of sadness, and with time the sadness turns to anger. The end result is often difficulties in relationships, especially intimate relationships, which leave a person with more feelings of loss.

At times when I invite people to take quiet time in the heart of God, they resist doing so because the thought of being quiet and feeling their feelings is too painful, or their anger has gotten directed at God. Living in such a web of unnamed pain is not the kind of life God intended for them. Through our dialogue I try to help them be more accurate about their resistance. If the fear of feeling their sadness seems to be the main issue, our naming of the fear and prayer for courage often helps dispel their fear. Once they have courage to name their sadness, its power over their life lessens and they begin to feel relief and the strength to make healthier choices. If their resistance to quieting themselves stems from anger at God, we discuss the underlying assumptions which may have led to that anger. Often I find that the real anger is at the inaccurate picture of God which they were given in life. They sometimes think that God caused the pain instead of recognizing its origin in the unhealthy and sinful choices of people. A prayerful walk into the gospels helps change their picture of God and awaken their deep inner thirst to know the God of compassion revealed by Jesus. Feeling Jesus' gentle love offers them the space and the security to begin honestly looking at the unnamed losses of their past and to discover the new life which is possible in the power of his love.

The first step in resolving our grief is accurately naming it. If we have accumulated grief for a long time, the process of naming it

may involve the help of healthy friend, a counselor, or a pastor. In cases where our unnamed grief has led to use of chemicals to ease our pain or has disrupted our primary relationships, we will probably need a professional to help us untangle the web in which we find ourselves. At times the stories of others in a self-help group who have recovered from the web of unnamed pain can help us discover repressed feelings and be of great benefit for our journey to real freedom.

Once we accurately name the deep feelings of unresolved grief which have accumulated in our life, it becomes important to share those feelings with someone we trust. We may feel foolish at first allowing the tears to flow over events so far in the past, but we must assure ourselves that the tears on the outside are much healthier than the many tears we have cried on the inside for years. Just as crying at the death of a loved one is natural and healthy, so crying through past ungrieved losses and sharing the pain with another person is a natural part of the healing process. This second step of sharing our pain of grief may occur with a grieving partner who will listen to us tell our stories and allow us to express our grief without trying to “fix it” or explain away the pain. This person can be a professional, or a member of a self-help group, or simply a friend who knows how to listen. It is through expressing our hurt in the safety of another’s care that we begin to sort out the sources and depth of our pain. This step helps us to begin the journey of letting it go.

The scripture story which provides us with a model for resolving grief and offers the hope of new life is the story of Jesus coming to the tomb of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44). Mary and Martha ask Jesus to come when their brother, Lazarus, is sick but Jesus arrives after their brother has died. When Jesus arrives they honestly name their pain and express their sadness at the loss of their brother. Jesus listens to their grief and lets his tears be a sign that he feels with them in their pain. Jesus allows himself to feel his own feelings of loss and uses the natural means of crying as the way

of letting go of the pain. In his tears we can find permission to cry and recognize the freeing power of tears shared in the safety of love.

What Mary and Martha do next shows us the step that allows our deepest grief to heal. They take Jesus to the tomb. It is in taking Jesus to the tomb that they experience the healing and restoring power of Jesus' love flowing from *Abba*. It is through the power of this divine, re-creative love that we can find the hope of new life even in our moments of deepest pain.

The journey of resolving our deepest grief leads us to this moment when we must decide to take Jesus to the "tombs" in our heart, the places where we have buried grief. If we are not used to feeling our grief, we may be tempted to run from it. To run from the grief because of fear, however, only makes the pain worse. Jesus stands with us in our fear in order that we might face the pain and dissolve its power over us. If our losses were in early childhood we may have covered those tombs with years of repressive energy, but the presence of Jesus and the pure, safe love of *Abba* empowers us to "roll away the stone" and experience healing. Once we feel Jesus with us in our moments of deepest pain, we are invited to release into the Father's love that which is lost in order that we might let that same love restore to us that which still has life. When I could face the grief of my father's death and release dad into the unconditional love of *Abba*, the grief gradually subsided.

I discovered that once I released into God's love that which was lost, I could feel very powerfully the many ways dad's presence was still alive and how his life continued to energize me. In letting go we discovered the new life which is available in the life-giving love of God. In a similar way, taking Jesus to the tombs in our heart allows us to experience newness and freedom. If, for example, we feel the grief of losing our childhood or a safe place to just be, we can imagine Jesus with us in that loss because he was. We can walk back in our imagination to the time the loss occurred and see Jesus grieving with us as he grieved with Martha and Mary. We can feel him feeling with us in our pain and receiving our tears.

We can gradually surrender to him those years that will never be again. As we let go of those times, we begin to discover the child which is still very much alive in us and we feel more intensely the loving presence of Jesus with us today. We may not be able to play with certain toys any more, but we can discover our spontaneity again and give ourselves the freedom to play and laugh at whatever age we are at now. We can bring out of the "tomb," through the power of love flowing from *Abba*, that aspect of the situation which still has life. I have been with adults who have made this healing journey and they speak of the freedom they have to play and their actions tell me that they are resolving their past grief and becoming more whole.

Whatever our particular losses have been, Jesus offers a spark of resurrection and the hope of new life. People in our church who have "lost" their family to addictions have discovered a whole new healthy "family" in the community after grieving their loss and opening themselves to the newness that flows from God's love. Some who have grieved the loss of their childhood dream for their life are now beginning to dream again and to become the person they always felt called to be. Through grieving their losses they discover an energy to make new choices which are healthier and more life-giving. No loss is completely lost if we take Jesus to that "tomb." It is our decision to let go of that which is lost, that allows us to experience the life which still exists. In times of deep pain this is very difficult yet it is the only path to healing and new life. Knowing that Jesus stands with us in our pain gives us the strength to take the first steps of resolving our grief and discovering the love that brings forth real life.

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## **Reflection**

We take a moment now to relax and imagine Jesus with us as he came to be with Mary and Martha. If you have someone with whom you feel safe to cry, you may wish to invite them to share this reflection with you because grieving happens when we share the feelings with another person. Read the story of Jesus coming to be with Mary and Martha in their grief.

When Mary came to the place where Jesus was, seeing him, she fell at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here my brother would never have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had accompanied her also weeping, he was troubled in spirit, moved by the deepest emotion. "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Lord, come and see," they said. Jesus began to weep, which caused the Jews to remark, "See how much he loved him!" But some said, "He opened the eyes of that blind man. Why could he not have done something to stop this man from dying?" Once again troubled in spirit, Jesus approached the tomb.

It was a cave with a stone laid across it. "Take away the stone," Jesus directed. Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him, "Lord, it has been four days now; surely there will be a stench!" Jesus replied, "Did I not assure you that if you believed you would see the glory of God displayed?" (Jn 11:32-40)

Now imagine the compassion in Jesus' heart as he stands close to you and invites you to share a time of sadness and loss. Recall that he too experienced great losses in his life and cried in moments of deep pain. In the warmth of his compassion walk back to a time in your life when you experienced a serious loss which you have never grieved because you were afraid or there was no opportunity to grieve it. It may be the loss of your childhood, or the

loss of your personhood. Perhaps from your earliest recollections you felt that your parents were “gone” even though they are still physically alive today. Maybe your greatest pain is the loss of your dreams of what you hoped to be in life and now your life seems like a failure. Your deepest grief may stem from the loss of a relationship through divorce which felt somewhat like a death without a funeral and leaves you stuck in loneliness under the weight of unresolved grief. Perhaps the marriage still exists but you feel that your marriage partner is “lost” and you grieve constantly in the silence of your heart. Maybe your health is failing and you feel the constant grief of more and more losses as a result of old age or illness. Perhaps you feel that your children are being “lost” to the new values of our changing culture. Whatever feelings of grief are weighing you down or whatever tombs lay covered in your heart, you now can feel Jesus wanting to offer healing and new hope. Imagine the tears in Jesus’ eyes as he feels your pain with you and offers you the space to let your own tears fall.

Let yourself experience Jesus with you in the place of your deepest pain and recall his power to call forth new life. See Jesus inviting you to release into the gentle love of *Abba* that which is lost. Feel the release happen as you give to the Lord that part of yourself or your life experience which is gone. As you let go, hear Jesus call forth the life from the tomb as he called forth Lazarus. Begin to feel the ways Jesus can bring forth the life which still exists in the power of his love. Begin to thank Jesus for the people who he has sent to you and will send into your life as channels of his healing and restoring love. Feel the peace of knowing that you can come daily and fill in those places of loss with the healing love flowing from *Abba*’s heart. Open yourself to the new life, the fullness of life which Jesus wants for you now and the hope which he offers in that final resting place where he shall wipe every tear from our eyes, where there shall be no more death or mourning, crying out or pain, for the former world will have passed away and he will have made all things new. (See Rev. 21:1-5) Gradually allow your mind and

heart to return to the present and feel the peace that comes from letting go into the healing power of Divine love.

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For some people an outward sign of releasing a loss into the love of God can be a way of visibly celebrating the choice they made to let go and choose new life. Such “sacramentalizing” of a loss can include writing a letter to a loved one or burying a picture of a person who went away. Other symbols of letting go might include slowly opening one’s hands in a gesture of giving a person or situation to God, or planting a tree as a sign of the person’s continuing life.

The journey outlined in this chapter can be a way of freeing ourselves from past and present feelings of grief and experiencing the power of new life found in Jesus. As we can feel more and more the presence of Jesus with us in our times of pain, the grief begins to subside and we discover a pattern, a power, and a Presence to help deal with future losses. As we discover Jesus’ presence in the stories of our unresolved grief we find healing and the power for new life. Whichever steps of the journey help us to feel the pain of grief and release it from your hearts, it is the personal, unconditional love of God that makes the journey possible and the healing eternal.

**SCRIPTURE WORDS**

**FOR RESOLVING GRIEF**

In the following passages from scripture you may find comfort and the hope of new life. Find a quiet place, free of distractions where you can *rest in the heart of God*. Take time to quiet yourself and feel the presence of God's personal, unconditional love all around you and within you. Then slowly read through one of the passages. Let the words minister to your heart and help you feel the presence of *Abba* with you in the places of your unresolved grief. Let God's love free you of the unresolved grief which you may carry within.

Revelations 21: 1-5

Isaiah 61: 1-3

John 11: 1-44

Psalm 23

Romans 6:3-11

John 14:1-6

Luke 24:13-35

## CHAPTER 6

# Mobilizing Our Anger

***“In the temple precincts Jesus came upon people engaged in selling oxen, sheep and doves, and others seated exchanging coins. He made a whip of cords and drove sheep and oxen alike out of the temple area, and knocked over the money-changes’ tables, spilling their coins. He told those who were selling doves: ‘Get them out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a marketplace!’”***

**(Jn 2:14-16)**

One of the hardest things for me to imagine as I came to know the gospels was the story of Jesus getting angry at the money changers in the temple and actually turning over their tables. The feeling of anger did not seem to fit with Jesus. I had a sense that anger was a negative or “bad” emotion. Perhaps we were all raised with some sense that we were not supposed to get angry and if we did, we were not supposed to let anyone know. It seemed better to repress it or deny it than let it come out in any way. As with other feelings, Jesus offers us a model for using the energy of anger in a creative way so that it does not bring about destruction.

Anger is a natural human response to hurt or injustice. Somewhat like fear, it gets the adrenaline flowing in our whole body so that we are ready to flee or to fight. This initial feeling of anger happens instinctively before we can do anything about it, and as such it is not “bad.” It is at some point after the initial feeling that we make a choice as to how we are going to deal with or express that feeling. These choices can lead us to greater wholeness or further destruction. It is in making our choices about anger where we can find direction from Jesus’ life and empowerment in the heart of *Abba*.

The feeling of anger is a part of human life. It can be used for a constructive or healing purpose, yet it may also be used to cause harm. The initial feeling of anger often causes us to want to retaliate. While it is normal to want to retaliate, such use of anger only causes more destruction. Jesus expressed this in his Sermon on the Mount. He told his followers:

You have heard the commandment, “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” But what I say to you is: offer no resistance to injury. When a person strikes you on the right cheek, turn and offer him the other. If anyone wants to go to law over your shirt, hand him your coat as well (Mt 5:38-42).

By his words in this context Jesus is telling his followers to expose injustice and to make the person look foolish who is perpetrating the injustice. The action which Jesus suggests gives his disciples a chance to creatively use their anger to change an unjust situation without having to retaliate. His way of dealing with injustice and the feelings of anger which can accompany it, prevents harm from being done to others, and also allows a person an avenue for using their anger to bring about change rather than repressing it.

As we seek inner healing and wholeness in regard to the feeling of anger, it is important for us to distinguish between anger,

hate, and repressed anger. Anger is a natural response to hurt or injustice and provides our system with energy to retaliate or make things better. Jesus became angry when he saw people in bondage or when he encountered injustice (Mk 1:25-27; Mk 3:1-6). He did not stuff those feelings of anger nor did he retaliate against someone, but rather he mobilized the energy of those feelings to offer freedom and healing. People who work for social justice and healing today are often using their anger at personal injustice and woundedness as a partial energy source for their ministry.

I would define hate as anger which is nursed with the intent of hurting someone. I believe the apostle Paul refers to this kind of anger when he writes, "If you are angry let it be without sin. The sun must not go down on your wrath (Eph 4:26). Another way of translating his words is, "Do not let the sunset find you still nursing your anger." This kind of nursed anger or hate includes one's decision to continue the feeling for a harmful purpose. This decision often blinds us to any constructive use of anger.

Repressed anger is the accumulation of feelings of anger which a person has consciously or unconsciously chosen not to express. Many of us may have grown up with an understanding that it was not right to express our anger and therefore we became accustomed to holding it in. Unlike nursed anger it is not intended to harm anyone, but in fact repressed anger is destructive to ourselves and very often harmful to others. It can show up in our behavior as procrastination, perpetual lateness, sarcasm, cynicism, impatience, frequent disturbing dreams, apathy, and frequent sighing but its greatest toll is often within our body.

Repressed anger often gets expressed at people near to us yet its most destructive effects are deep with us. No matter how unjust past events have been or unfair someone's actions are, our continual repressing of the anger we feel harms us the most. If our repressed anger is also nursed by our inner choice not to forgive someone, or change a situation, it can be quite destructive. It can

cause physical pain in our body, make us susceptible to disease, and deaden our heart to the life God wants for us.

I remember a young woman who asked me to help her after she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Her initial request during our first visit was, "Would you help me cope with my fear of death and my depression?" She told me that she had always been able to control things in her life and now she did not know how to handle her situation. I told her that I could help her cope, but that I would also be willing to pray with her for healing. That suggestion initiated a stream of anger which poured from her mouth for a half hour. She expressed intense anger at men who had misused her since adolescence, and anger at God for "not helping me when I needed him." She went on about her anger at the church for its views on pre-marital sex and the right to life for the unborn. When I had a chance to speak, I said, "It sounds as if the cancer has been there a long time." She assured me that on her physical check-up six months earlier she had received a clean bill of health. I repeated my previous statement and this time she paused for a while and said, "I'll have to think about that." After a brief prayer for inner peace, she left my office still showing signs of anger.

A week later she called me and said, "I think the cancer has been there a long time. Can I come and see you?" During this visit she expressed years of simmering anger stemming from her being abused and she spoke of the guilt she felt for retaliating against men. She asked me how she might be freed of her guilt and when I suggested confessing her sins, she proceeded to give me all the reasons why she did not feel the need to confess her sins. Then I offered her one good reason why she might wish to confess and she walked away in anger.

Three weeks later she returned ready to begin the journey to inner freedom and healing. The cancer in her body and the pain in her heart brought her to a decision for life. She confessed fifteen years of guilt and inner pain tied together by intense anger. Through naming her past sins and experiencing Jesus' compassion and

mercy, she was able to begin forgiving herself and those who had hurt her. I told her that Jesus was with her when sin was done to her and when she sinned, and I assured her that through his unconditional love she could experience forgiveness and inner healing. As part of that encounter with Jesus, she prayed a prayer of blessing for those who had abused her. That day she changed so drastically that her husband commented on the new peace which he saw in her. She told me after the prayers, "I felt a heavy weight lift off my chest as we prayed. I never knew that all of those things had been tearing at me for so long. I feel hopeful for the first time since my diagnosis. I guess the real cancer is being healed."

After four months of chemotherapy and soaking prayer by the community, surgery was scheduled to remove her ovaries. The surgery proved unnecessary since there was no more evidence of cancer. I distinctly remember her call when she found out this good news. She was grateful for the physical healing which had occurred through the medication and the prayers, but she was even more thankful for the inner healing which she had received. She said, "I could find out that I was to die tomorrow and it wouldn't bother me, for now I know what it means to live." Her years of simmering anger were gone. She forgave herself and others through the power of God's mercy. She changed her attitudes and became an advocate for the sacredness of human life. She was on the road to wholeness.

When anger has turned to hate, forgiveness is the only way to wholeness. It is not easy to forgive especially when the pain of the person's actions still lingers on. Whether our anger stems from continual childhood abuse, an accident which left permanent damage, or a painful divorce, the anger is real and feelings of wanting to retaliate are human, but the choice to forgive opens the door to true peace and freedom. Experiencing God's forgiveness for our sins can often help us be merciful toward others. Through forgiveness we set the stage for our anger to become a source of energy for healing and wholeness.

If we carry anger because of some injustice done to us, it may be helpful to recognize that Jesus is also angry about the injustice done. We can feel him standing with us in our anger as long ago he stood with people who were being oppressed by evil or unfairly held captive by those in power. As Jesus once cleansed his Father's house, we can feel him helping us to cleanse our "temple" of the wounds which were inflicted upon us. In the power of Jesus' love for us, we can use our anger as an energy for healing rather than destroying. In choosing to forgive those who hurt us, we give Jesus the power to cleanse our hearts of the hurt which we still feel and to heal our bodies of the destruction which the nursed anger has caused.

Perhaps it is important to realize that forgiving does not mean that we forget the hurt, condone the action, or dismiss the injury as unimportant. It is not the same as reconciling with a person since reconciliation takes the decision of two people to make amends. The one who harmed us may never apologize, but our peace and wholeness does not rely on their choices, but rather on our choices. Forgiveness is an intellectual choice which we make in order to be freed from the prison of nursed anger. Making that choice may take some time and may involve sharing with someone we trust the effects and consequences of nursed anger. In the quiet of *Abba's* unconditional love we find the energy to make that freeing decision. By resting in God's unconditional love we can sort through all the reasons why we resist forgiving and then allow that love to dissolve each one. When we are ready we can choose to forgive. We can express that decision by praying a blessing prayer for the person at whom we were directing our nursed anger. Through that decision and prayer our anger gradually subsides and we discover again the freedom of love and the possibilities for wholeness.

While many of us may not harbor nursed anger, we may carry within ourselves a high level of repressed anger. If we do not name our anger and find a healthy way to get it out of our system it

accumulates in us. Such accumulated anger simmers within us and then lashes out like an uncontrollable fire harming those who are near us. Stories of child abuse, family violence, divorces, rapes and killings are constant reminders of the destructive power of accumulated, repressed anger. It may begin with a feeling of impatience or short moments of “flying off the handle,” but left unattended, repressed anger continues to grow with destructive consequences.

Tests show that anger raises our blood pressure. For a short term, its effects can help us escape a harmful situation but it is not meant to be carried for years. Repressed anger can cause headaches as well as soreness in our neck, shoulders and back. Carried for a long time, the tension flowing from festering anger can cause pain in our joints and a number of chronic diseases. New tests continue to show the physical toll on the body of someone who carries repressed anger. God does not want us to live in the pain of such hidden anger.

In the quiet of *Abba's* unconditional love for us we find a secure place to start naming the anger which we may have repressed deep within our heart. If we have grown up stuffing our anger for whatever reasons, it may be difficult to notice that we are really angry. In our quiet moments of feeling God's love we might honestly examine our past behavior to discern any accumulated repressed anger. We may ask ourselves, “Do I ever overreact in anger to a situation? Do I often become impatient? Do I try to control relationships? Am I sarcastic or violent toward others?” These questions are not meant to condemn ourselves but to make us aware of simmering repressed anger within us. In naming our real anger we set the stage to release it and experience healing. If we can acknowledge our repressed anger to ourselves and one other person, then we can choose to mobilize it for a healthy purpose.

It took me a long time to name my anger at the church for certain rules and ways that things were done. I mistakenly believed

that since I loved the church, I could not be angry at it. With the help of a trusted friend and some quiet reflective time, I was able to admit my anger. Once verbalized I could consciously choose to use the energy of that anger to help lead people to wholeness while letting go of the structures in the church which I could not change.

In a similar way I have seen many people make a choice to use the energy of their anger to get well and help others be well. In my work with recovering alcoholics and codependents I have seen many people finally acknowledge their anger and then choose to use its power to daily walk the steps of recovery and to help others on the road to wellness. The force behind many twelve-step recovery groups is in part the energy of anger. Once submitted to the power of God, it can become a force that moves people toward wholeness.

We may notice that some people who are raised in an abusive home surrounded by anger grow up and become abusive themselves while others spend their adult life helping to free the abused. I believe the difference is that some named their anger and made a choice to use its energy to make life better for others. When we name our anger we set the stage for it to become a force for healing and wholeness. If we can feel Jesus with us in our anger at the injustice of certain situations, we can experience his power with us as we cleanse the temple of our hearts, our minds, and our bodies. His perfect love helps heal our wounds, quiet destructive voices, and dispel the power that certain memories have on our behavior. In the empowerment of his companionship we can use our anger in a way that gives life.

As we feel safe in naming past anger and find ways of using its power for good, we become more confident in verbalizing our anger in a way and at a time that does not cause harm. Rather than letting it accumulate to violent proportions, we seek to talk through our anger with ourselves, our God, and a trusted friend. We come to recognize that there is a middle way to deal with anger which does not cause harm either by expression or by repression. We see

that middle way in Jesus who kept his heart free of nursed and repressed anger so that he could use the daily feelings of anger to bring about healing and freedom for those he met. Using him as an example, we try to accurately describe our feelings of anger and consider ways of using its power to change for the better what we can change and to accept that which we cannot change. The security of *Abba's* heart offers us the space to work through this process. Feeling loved personally by our Creator, even when we are angry, makes this process much easier and more successful.

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### **Reflection**

We take a moment now to rest in that Heart where we feel absorbed in unconditional love. Read the following story of Jesus cleansing the temple and let it minister to your heart.

As the Jewish Passover was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple precincts Jesus came upon people engaged in selling oxen, sheep and doves, and others seated exchanging coins. He made a whip of cords and drove sheep and oxen alike out of the temple area, and knocked over the money-changes' tables, spilling their coins. He told those who were selling doves: "Get them out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!" His disciples recalled the words of Scripture: "Zeal for your house consumes me." (Jn 2:13-17).

Imagine Jesus' anger as he sought to bring respect again to his Father's house by cleansing it of those things which were not intended to be there. See the fire in his eyes when he noticed people defiling this holy dwelling. Recall the many times in his life

when the unfairness of disease, the bondage of evil or the injustice of human choices caused him anger and he responded with a passion to bring about healing and true freedom.

Feel Jesus with you now in the temple of your heart, your mind, and your body. Sense his anger at the injustices which have been done to you. Be aware of how he has stood with you when people unfairly intruded into your temple and caused harm or tried to destroy the precious gift that you are. Ask him to help you name the anger that you felt at those times and to begin using this energy for healing within yourself and others. If you have nursed anger toward someone who hurt you, ask Jesus now to give you the courage and the strength to forgive that person. Recall how Jesus sacrificed his life so that you might be forgiven. Let Jesus' abundant mercy flowing from his cross cleanse you and that person of the destructive behavior which has kept you from being whole.

As you feel Jesus' deep desire to free you from the harmful effects of nursed and repressed anger, ask for his strength to take the necessary choices which will help you arrive at the wholeness he wants for you. Let go of the things you cannot change and begin to change those things which will bring forth healing. Feel his energy empower you to process the anger that is yet to come into your life. Listen for his wisdom to direct you in how you might bring healing to others who live in the bondage of injustice or are the victims of unnamed anger. Take time to thank him for offering you the grace of *Abba's* unconditional love which has begun to set you free. Rest for a moment in the freeing power of that precious love. As you slowly come back, feel the peace of knowing that anger does not have to be destructive but can provide an energy for offering life and hope. Know that you can go often to the place of quiet and rest in the heart of the One who sets you free.

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## SCRIPTURE WORDS

### FOR MOBILIZING OUR ANGER

In the following words from scripture you may find a security to release imprisoned anger and the realization that Jesus stands with you in times of injustice. Find a quiet place, free of distractions where you can *rest in the heart of Abba*. Take time to quiet yourself and feel the presence of God's personal, unconditional love all around you and within you. Then slowly read through one of the passages. Let the words speak to your heart and free you of any repressed anger which you may carry within. Let his words be a source of guidance as you deal with the injustices and anger that is part of life.

John 2:13-17

Ephesians 4:26

Mark 1:23-27

Mark 3:1-6

Matthew 26:47-54

1 John 3:1-3

John 1:10-14

## CHAPTER 7

# Quieting Our Heart

***“Jesus prayed, ‘Father, all those you gave me I would have in my company where I am, to see this glory of mine which is your gift to me, because of the love you bore me before the world began.’”***

**(Jn 17:24)**

It is through resting in the heart of God that we experience a complete, unconditional love which heals inner wounds and empowers us to minister love to others. It is during this precious time of resting with our Creator that we hear the quiet whispers which affirm our goodness and direct our choices. In this place of quiet we can find energy to carry out our life calling and the daily callings God places in our heart. It is here where we listen for the heartbeat of God and dialogue with the One who fashioned us into being. It is in the quiet of love where we discover what it means to pray.

What is evident from the scriptures is that the life energy for wholeness, holiness, and true inner peace is found in the quiet of the Divine. Jesus often renewed himself in the quiet of *Abba*'s love to sustain his healing energy and to foster the peace which guided his mission. It is difficult to describe how each person might come to

enjoy the treasures of that quiet place. There are no “right” words to say or “right” things to do, but only some common elements which may help us set the stage to continually experience the Presence, and receive the transforming love flowing from God’s heart.

Coming into the heart of God involves a decision, an inner resolve, to quiet ourselves and choose to listen for the rhythm of God’s heart. It involves an intentional choice to seek true fulfillment, to want to receive the treasure of our Creator’s love. This decision would seem easy, yet in a world filled with almost constant noise where doing is rewarded and getting ahead is celebrated, this decision takes a conscious effort to seek something better, something more lasting. It involves pulling away from the noise of daily life and intentionally desiring to let pure love enter and transform our heart. It requires emptying a place in our minds and being ready to allow the voice of our Creator to change the inner voice which directs our life. It involves having an openness to enhance our present picture of God, which may be limited by childhood voices or cultural prejudices. It means looking attentively at Jesus, the Son, and gradually experiencing the power of his relationship with the One he called “*Abba.*” It is a decision to let ourselves fall into Love.

The decision to come to the quiet place of unconditional love can be initially frightening. If we have been used to making it on our own, the submission to another voice can shake loose unknown fears of inner voices which have bound us in the past. If we have been hurt in past relationships, the feelings of sadness and fear may cause us to be suspicious of letting down our guard again. It can scare us to feel that we are letting go of the controls in our life, yet one step beyond these fears there is a relationship of accepting and perfect Love which dispels all fear.

I can remember when a spiritual leader during a retreat encouraged me to take this step of choosing to listen and receive God’s love each day. I recall resisting his initial suggestion but in

that resistance I discerned my fear of letting go of being in control of what I wanted to do. I was very comfortable being in control of my life and I was afraid of what God might tell me to do if I surrendered my control. I feared how my life might have to change if I truly listened to God's voice. Once I named that fear I could step through it only to discover the treasure which waited for me on the other side.

One evening during that retreat, in the quiet of our chapel, I decided to take the time to quiet myself and listen to God. I was very used to telling God what I wanted during my prayer time, but never before had I made such a concerted effort to listen to God's voice. It took me almost an hour to quiet my inner voices and truly listen, but in the silent of that moment I discovered the power of entering into the heart of *Abba*. I felt an overwhelming sense of love all around me as I heard God say, "Paul, I love you. I appreciate all that you do, but do you know how much I love you? For years I have been watching you, waiting for you to slow down and feel my deep love for you. You are precious to *me*."

I had known of God's love but I had never before experienced such an awesome awareness of God's personal, unique, unconditional love for me. In that encounter I discovered a *relationship* that began to quench my deepest thirst and gave me a new power and clarity for my life journey. My decision to listen and to receive opened the way for me to feel and know God's personal, intimate love for me and the power which flowed from that love.

As I mentioned earlier, I was afraid initially that if I surrendered to God's voice, God would ask me to do something very difficult. I imagined that God might "send" me to some distant country to do things for which I was not prepared. Gradually I came to realize that God does not work that way. God simply loves us with a passion and invites us to experience healing and empowerment through that love. In this way we are prepared to be vessels of love for others. I continue to experience occasional tinges of fear as I sense God calling me to consider new choices in

my life, but God knows my abilities and I know that the Voice will lead to a new level of peace and wholeness. With time I have come to appreciate the words of Isaiah when he wrote, “A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench,…” (Is 42:3). I have come to be awed by the gentleness and patience of God.

That initial experience of God’s personal love happened while I was making a five-day retreat. Taking time to pull away from life in order to receive real Life is an essential part of wholeness and true healing. We may not have five days at this point in our life, but if we seek the power of resting in the Heart, we will discover places where the quiet of God’s loving voice can be heard. The initial experience of God’s personal love for us invites us to continual listening and receiving. The choice to make time for daily resting in the Heart opens the way for inner healing and transformation which can only come from God.

Our hearts ultimately desire perfect love. We may experience glimpses of such love from family or friends, but our hearts will not truly rest until they feel totally embraced in God’s personal love for us. We can experience God’s perfect, personal love for us because God loves us personally and perfectly just for who we are. God desires to let us know this perfect love, for only in this love will we experience ultimate fulfillment and peace. Through a conscious decision to be quiet and let God’s love soak through the clutter and distractions of our life, we can begin to feel personally loved and cherished by the One who formed our being. Whether this happens during a retreat, a worship service, or in the quiet of our own prayer time, it is the beginning of the only journey that will fill our deepest longings and bring us true wholeness.

This invitation to feel bathed in the love relationship between *Abba* and Jesus is the treasure Jesus gave to all of his followers. It is the same gift which the first Christians tried to offer to those who desired to know Jesus after his resurrection. People were invited to let go of past controls and behaviors and to begin listening to the

Master's voice. Their decision to surrender control made them ready to enter into the relationship of love between *Abba* and Jesus and to experience the power of that love which they called the Holy Spirit. Through immersing themselves in that perfect Love they experienced life changing power and new gifts for offering life to others. The early church used flowing water in the rite of baptism as a symbol of God's unconditional love pouring over the new Christians and bathing their hearts in love. These new Christians were invited to rest often in the heart of *Abba*, and through their "resting" they received sustaining energy for inner transformation and the power to face persecution and even death for their Lord.

With various historical developments and the focus on children being baptized, the rite of baptism often was no longer the occasion for adults to experience this personal, healing love flowing from the heart of God. We cannot change history, but we can each decide to quiet ourselves and receive the energy of our baptism. In that quiet place we can discover the power flowing from our being baptized into the love relationship between Jesus and *Abba*, and the sustaining energy of daily resting in the quiet of God's heart.

The period of time we take to initially open ourselves to God's personal love often requires the guidance of a person trained in spiritual formation and the prayer of a caring community. This "retreat time" can take many forms, but its power flows from humbly and honestly going into the heart of *Abba* and allowing the personal love of God's heart to transform every fiber of our being. Through the years I have developed a six-week series called *Spiritual Enrichment Seminars* in which I invite a group of people to come into the quiet and feel the gift of God's personal love for them. During our weekly meetings we reflect on the love relationship between Jesus and *Abba*, and the invitation Jesus offers us to share in the power of that relationship. Between gatherings I encourage the participants to spend at least fifteen minutes of quiet time every day learning the ways of God as exemplified by Jesus and feeling God's unique love for them. I invite them to allow that

love to free them of whatever is not whole in their life. In the quiet of these prayer-filled weeks their experiencing of God's personal love brings about repentance, forgiveness, inner healing, and a deep awareness of how precious they are. The participants discover new gifts within themselves flowing from the Spirit of God which they can offer back to God to build up the Christian community. The effort we make in giving God permission to transform our life always bears lasting fruit.

This decision to go off alone and be in communion with *Abba* usually begins as a discipline but it has the potential to become a wellspring of healing and transforming energy which no other activity can offer. It may take some time to develop a regular "quiet time," but God is patient. There may be periods when we do not experience any strong feelings or hear God's voice, but God anoints our faithfulness and our desire to listen. Our desire for inner peace and wholeness draws us to gradually make the choice to listen regularly and the fruits of feeling the quiet stillness of God's voice keep us returning.

When I first began to develop a listening, receiving spirituality I was inconsistent with my quiet time. I could find many excuses for not being quiet with God, but eventually the peace of quietly resting in God's heart became more significant than anything else that I could do during that time. There are still weeks when my time with God does not offer any new revelations and yet between those weeks I sense the whisper of the soft, still Voice which fills my heart with peace and my mind with insights that I know are from God. I have come to recognize that this quiet place of resting with God is not only for hearing God but often simply a place to rest in unconditional love. I have come to believe that God honors our desire to listen and rejoices to soak us in the warmth of perfect love.

As we seek to develop our listening spirituality, we may at times need the guidance of a spiritual director. This person walks with us in our spiritual journey to assist us in distinguishing the voice of God from our own inner voice, especially in times when we must

make major life decisions. Having a soul friend or spiritual partner who also listens to the heart of *Abba*, can offer the precious gift of mutual support as we develop our listening spirituality. These people, however, are no substitute for us making our journey to the quiet and listening often to the words which the Lord has for us. It is God's voice and God's personal love that guides and empowers our journey to wholeness and real Life.

There are various places we might seek out to take daily time for resting in the heart of *Abba*, but it is crucial that we find *our* place. For me it is a "prayer corner" in our house where I sit at the beginning of each day. It is there that I daily soak in the love of God, and using texts from my bible, enter into conversations with the One who created and redeemed me. I find that quietly reading and feeling the life of Jesus as recorded in the gospels offers the most pure means of learning the ways of God and discerning God's will for my life. As I page through the gospels I remind myself of the way Jesus lived and in the silence of that place I allow his example to guide my choices. It is not that I hear voices but rather that I feel a Presence and I surrender control so that my will becomes the will of the Creator and my heart becomes a heart filled with compassionate *agape*-love.

Jesus said toward the end of his life, "Anyone committed to the truth hears my voice" (Jn 18:37). It is our radical openness to face the truth about ourselves which makes our resting in the heart of *Abba* rich with healing and empowerment. Our commitment to seek truth no matter how painful or challenging, opens the way for the security of God's love to melt any forms of denial or deceit and empowers us to take steps toward genuine wholeness. We may for a time still wear our masks and cling to our defenses when we go out into the world, but in these moments of coming into the quiet of *Abba's* love, it is our commitment to truth that gives God permission to heal our wounds and set us totally free.

There are many and varied methods which can be used to enter into the place of quiet. Repeating the name "Jesus" or "*Abba*"

may be for us a means of centering on the presence of God and opening ourselves to the treasure that God's heart holds for that day. Lighting a candle, playing soft instrumental music, reading a passage from scripture, or looking at a spiritual image are some of the tools we may find helpful as we seek to quiet ourselves in order that we might listen and receive. Writing down our feelings or the messages we hear from the Creator's presence may help us receive the energy of this precious time and use it as a strengthening, guiding force in our daily lives. It may take some time for us to develop the pattern of daily listening or to discover the setting and the methods which are most effective for us to feel the power of the Heart, but the treasure is worth the effort.

The decision to rest in the heart of *Abba* and allow God to effect our lives means that we must choose to unclutter our minds and hearts to make space for this treasure. The apostle John wrote in a letter to his community, "If anyone loves the world, the Father's love has no place in him" (1 Jn 2:15). By making room for God's love to enter in, we give that love a chance to transform us. This making room within ourselves involves taking authority over what we allow into our minds and hearts. As we continue to rest in the heart of *Abba* on a daily basis, we will gradually notice things that no longer have a place in us. What we read, what we watch, and what we listen to, may begin to change as we take time to listen to the Master's voice. As we absorb the words of the gospels in the quiet of love, the Lord gently leads us to an inner cleansing of our daily choices and gradually we feel the energy of the new freedom found in the Master's love.

As we take time to pull away from the noise of the world and silence ourselves, we may notice our mind trying to take us off in all different areas. This can seem like a distraction, but it may also show us what areas in our life need God's freeing and healing love. When I pray, my mind can begin racing, wondering how I am going to get all my jobs done that day. Instead of feeling shameful for being distracted while at prayer, I use my "distraction" as a

means of discovering how God is trying to love me into wholeness. When my mind races regarding my schedule, I know that fear is at the source of such racing and that I am not completely open to the presence of God in some facet of my life. I talk with Jesus about my fear and the unrest it is causing in my heart. I often find that my fear of not getting finished with all my work comes from areas in my life that I have not completely given over to God's will. Through the dialogue I begin to relax and allow myself to feel loved. In the quiet of *Abba's* love, I discover the peace of knowing that God always gives me enough time in every day to do the things God wants me to do. By feeling loved during this quiet time I go through the day more relaxed and more attentive to the many moments in which God blesses my day with love.

We each have places to which our mind wanders when we seek to be still but such wanderings may be important for our dialogue with God. Our inner voice, for example, may start rehearsing a conversation which we foresee happening that day. We might ask ourselves *why* our mind is preoccupied with that future situation. Perhaps we carry repressed anger or unnamed grief. We may be imprisoned by the shame voice of the past or paralyzed by fear of an up-coming event. Often the "why" question can lead us to get in touch with the underlying feeling involved. It is this feeling and other root feelings which we can then take into our dialogue with God. Such conversations done in the quiet of perfect love can bring about inner healing, new self knowledge, further surrender of our will, and the empowerment to make more healthy and holy choices in the situations we will meet that day. This time of quieting and receiving God's secure embrace sets the stage for the process of deep inner transformation. By daily choosing to let our inner monologue become a dialogue with our Creator, we experience a love which empowers inner healing and allows us to see ourselves with God's eyes.

When we choose to rest in the heart of *Abba* each day we then enter that day not alone but with the power of a Relationship

and the guidance that flows from the words and actions of Jesus. Empowered by this listening spirituality, we will begin to notice a new inner serenity. We will become more attentive to other quiet moments during the day when we can stop and feel the precious security of *Abba's* love. Whether the day involves a walk in the park, a drive through the country, a difficult decision, long hours at work, or a visit with a friend, we can find God more easily in every situation if we have rested in God's heart at the beginning of that day. When we feel God's love and goodness in ourselves, we become more attentive to God's goodness in those around us. This awareness of being loved makes us more whole and makes every encounter an opportunity for growth and healing.

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## **PRAYER FOR INNER QUIET**

*Abba*, I want to be quiet inside to hear your precious words for me and to feel your tender love. I know that your voice can give true peace to my heart. I trust that your personal love can heal the wounds I carry within. Give me the inner resolve and discipline to quiet myself each day in order that your voice may heal destructive voices in me and truly become the guide in my life. Allow me to feel your overwhelming love as I quietly bask in your presence. Fill me with the courage to trust and obey the messages you gently place in my mind and my heart. Thank you, Lord, for continually speaking words of love and affirmation to me, even when I block them out with my noise. Be patient with me as I slowly create quiet space in my life for you. Be gentle as I slowly make choices which will lead to greater wholeness and lasting inner peace. Thank you for being so good to me. I love you. Amen.

Our personal resting in the heart of God enriches our perception of life and it may lead us to understand more fully the potential richness of gathering as a Christian community. The scriptures indicate that the early Christian gatherings were filled with an energy and a power that only comes from people in Love. As more individuals of a Christian community take time to daily rest in the heart of *Abba*, and walk their life journey to the rhythm of God's heartbeat, a new energy permeates their Sunday worship time. There is a thirst to be together to hear the stories of Jesus and publicly proclaim their love relationship with him in the sharing of Holy Communion. This was the case in the first centuries of the church. Those gatherings became precious opportunities to soak in God's love as a community and minister that transforming love to those who were in need of healing.

In the next chapter we take a journey into the pages of the gospel and look closely at exactly what Jesus did to change the lives of so many people. By looking at his life we discover the healing and freeing effects of resting in the heart of *Abba*. As we quiet ourselves in the pages of the gospels we can experience God-among-us, and feel the love, the compassion, the sacrifice that opened the way for us to be whole. It is here that we learn the ways of God, the attitudes of God, the intimacy of God revealed to us by the Son, Jesus. His journey, his words, his example offer us insight into wholeness and a spirituality that empowers on-going healing and ultimate fulfillment.

## CHAPTER 8

# Journeying Into The Gospels

***“When Jesus disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with compassion for them, and he cured their sick.”***

**(Mt 14:14)**

Perhaps the most profound aspect of Jesus’ life was the depth of compassion he showed to those caught in the pains of illness, the bondage of sin, or the prison of inner wounds. During his whole public ministry he was consumed with a passion to restore health to those who suffered from sickness and to bring wholeness to those who were compromised by the grip of evil or sin. This intense love filled every part of his being. The gospels describe him as being “moved with compassion” or moved at the very depth of his being when he saw people suffering (Mk 1:41; Mt 14:14). His heart reflected the heart of *Abba* and his time alone in the presence of *Abba* empowered his intense compassion and directed his healing mission. Jesus said in some of his final words, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you” (Jn 15:9). As he received love from the heart of *Abba*, so he could give love through his own heart.

This perfect, *agape* love which Jesus received from *Abba*, had life-changing effects on the people he met. We know that when we are feeling loved, all of life’s situations and challenges feel better.

In the environment of love we have a sense of well being and acceptance that can make even pain feel less intense. We know also from studies that every human feeling has a chemical and hormonal effect on our bodies. In an experiment a number of years ago, scientists took a blood sample from a depressed person and placed a germ in it. The germ spread and grew. They then took a blood sample from a person who was feeling loved and placed the same germ in it. The germ died out. Feeling loved effects every cell in our body and not only protects us from disease, but makes us susceptible to wellness.

In light of what we know about the power of love, it makes sense why Jesus' presence effects physical healings. If human love can effect our cells, how much more can Jesus' divine, unconditional love bring about healing to every person who experiences it. It is understandable then how Jesus could cure a person even when that person did not know him. The story of the man lying ill for thirty eight years by the Sheep Pool in Jerusalem points this out (Jn 5:1-13). The story tells us that through this man's encounter with Jesus, he experienced a physical cure. When the Jews asked him who had cured him he said that he "had no idea who it was." Jesus presence could cure a person's body because he carried in his heart the creative and re-creative energy of divine, *agape* love. If the person desired to be whole, however, that person needed to make a response of love, which might involve inner surrender and change. In this story Jesus verbally invites this man to such an inner change, but the man walks away. He was cured, but he refused the invitation to become truly whole.

The healing stories in the gospels give evidence that Jesus would often cure people as a way of inviting them to the deeper healing or wholeness which flows from being in relationship with God. When people responded to Jesus' cures with a desire to enter into a faith relationship with him, and thus with *Abba*, he promised them the gift of real Life. This is most evident in Jesus'

encounter with the ten lepers recorded in Luke's gospel. There we read:

As Jesus continued his journey to Jerusalem, he traveled through Samaria and Galilee. As he was entering a village, ten lepers met him. They stood at a distance from him and raised their voice, saying, "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!" And when he saw them, he said, "Go show yourselves to the priests." As they were going, they were cleansed. And one of them, realizing he had been cured, returned, glorifying God in a loud voice; and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. He was a Samaritan. Jesus said in reply, "Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine? Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?" Then he said to him, "Stand up and go; your faith has saved you." (Lk 17:11-19)

The power of Jesus' love cleansed the skin of all ten lepers, but to the one who responded to that love by returning love, Jesus offered the deeper healing. The Greek word to refer to the ten tells us that they were physically cured, but the word used for the one who returned, speaks of a lasting wholeness that only comes from being in right relationship with the Creator. His physical cure led him to enter into a relationship of faith and trust with the One who could offer the fullness of life. Jesus promised him a new quality of life in this world which flows from being immersed in a relationship with *Abba*, and the hope of a life that has no end.

We notice in the gospels that at times after Jesus cured someone he told them not to tell anyone (Mk 1:40-45; 8:22-26; Mt 12:16). This might surprise us until we realize that the cure was only Jesus' invitation, it was not his total proclamation. Like his preaching, Jesus' cures offered a call to a greater quality of life, but

in themselves they were not the final goal. If the cured person proclaimed their physical healing as the total purpose of Jesus' mission, their proclamation would have been incomplete and may have distracted people from his ultimate mission, namely, to bring people to wholeness through a faith relationship with God.

The gospel stories never indicate that people needed faith in order to be physically cured. Jesus cured because he love with a passion, because he was moved at the depth of his being when he met people who were suffering from sickness or the oppression of sin or evil. He wanted people to be well. He never demanded faith from the sick. If he spoke of faith it was with the hope of leading them to wholeness. He simply loved the sick with an intense, perfect love that flowed from *Abba's* heart and at times his love elicited a response of faith. Nowhere in the original Greek text of the gospel does Jesus say, "Your faith has cured you." What it does reveal is that to those who freely responded to Jesus' cures with a desire to commit themselves to a love relationship with him, he would offer the gift of eternal wholeness and fulfillment. We see examples of this in the account of the curing of Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46-52) and the healing of the man blind from birth recorded in John's gospel (Jn 9:1-38). Jesus opened their eyes through the power of his love in order that they might "see" life differently and one day see the Faithful Lover face to face. Each of their responses to their cure indicates that their whole life changed and that they would see forever.

Some people did come to Jesus with an expectancy and openness. Whether they knew him or not they seemed to be attracted by the love in his heart and the hope of a fuller life. At times they had to push through their fears to make their way to health, and it was Jesus' presence which seemed to give them the courage for the journey. The woman with a hemorrhage for twelve years described in Mark's gospel (Mk 5:25-34) took great risks to touch the garment of Jesus. She demonstrated from the start a willingness to do whatever it took to feel the power of his love. The

story indicates that her openness allowed Jesus not only to cure her body, but to calm her fears and offer her true wholeness and peace. If indeed the faith described in scripture is what we might call a love relationship, then this woman's encounter with Jesus may well have intensified that relationship and perhaps empowered her to offer wholeness and peace to others.

Jesus did not use any particular technique to bring about healing. He simply loved people in a way that they might best experience feeling loved. He used words and gestures as seemed appropriate to convey his unique, pure love for the person with whom he was relating. Sometimes he touched the person to express his love (Mk 1:29-31; Mk 1:40-42), and sometimes he used a simple word to convey that love (Mk 2:1-12; Jn 5:1-9). At times he went out of his way to offer life to a person as in the case of Jairus' daughter (Mk 5:21-24, 35-43) or the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44). At other times he did not even get very close to the persons he cured, as with the ten lepers (Lk 17:11-19), or the healing of the royal official's son (Jn 4:46-54). What remained constant in all Jesus' encounters with people was the intense *agape*-love which he carried in his heart and his desire to draw each person into the relationship from which that love flowed.

Unlike the pagan healers of his time, Jesus did not only focus on the removal of bodily pain, but sought to free the people who came to him from the suffering they experienced on all levels of their being. Jesus would not have thought of healing just the body or just the soul of a person. His redeeming mission which flowed from the Father's heart, encompassed the whole person. He responded to a person as one, interrelated, inseparable unity, and he concerned himself with bringing redemption and health to the whole person. Whether the person suffered from the pain of physical illness, the bondage of inner hurts, the burden of sin, the oppression of evil, or a combination of these, Jesus sought to alleviate whatever pain hindered the person from living life to the full. Jesus expressed the focus of his mission when he said, "I came that

they might have life, and have it to the full" (Jn 10:10). Jesus wanted only the best for people and he was willing to take risks and even lay down his life to offer that gift.

The intent of Jesus' mission was to invite people to wholeness, even if their journey to wholeness meant going through some pain. We see an example of this in the story of Zacchaeus. There we read:

A man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house." And he came down quickly and received him with joy. When they all saw this, they began to grumble saying, "He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house..." (Lk 19:1-10).

Jesus' invitation to this little man to come down from the tree was an invitation to come out of his bondage of sin. It was an offer to be freed from the pain of alienation and fear flowing from his sin. It was an invitation to wholeness. Jesus did not condemn Zacchaeus or scare him into repentance, but loved him with the unconditional love which flowed from his compassionate heart, and in the security of that love Zacchaeus started down the tree. Zacchaeus knew that accepting Jesus' invitation to share a meal

meant entering into right relationship with him. He was aware that it meant humbly accepting accountability for his former dishonesty. Jesus' unconditional love made these steps of the journey possible, and the new wholeness made the pain of the journey meaningful.

The acceptance and gentleness of Jesus offered people a safe place to name their deepest inner pains, and the intense love in his heart took away the power of those pains. Jesus exemplified an unprejudiced love and care for all people which allowed him to offer wholeness to everyone he met. In the story of his encounter with the woman at the well (Jn 4:4-42), the healing effects of his love are very evident. The love flowing from Jesus' heart invited this woman to step through her fears and name her deepest thirst, a thirst which could not be quenched by her relationship with any other man. Her inner longing for perfect love and acceptance could only be filled as she drank in the life-giving water of God's unconditional *agape* love flowing from Jesus' heart. The safety of Jesus' pure love allowed this woman to step past her shame and prejudice, confess her failures, and receive the fullness of life. Once filled, she could leave her water jar and become the vessel who carried the healing power of Jesus' gentle love to the people of her town.

That same love which moved Jesus to alleviate people's physical and inner pains also compelled him to stand with them in the face of evil and the pain of injustice. When he met evil and saw it tearing away at human life, he drove it out of people with the strength and power of unconditional Love, taking command where the person in bondage was no longer able (Mk 1:25; 9:25). When Jesus saw evidence of sin or injustice with no sign of repentance, he called for change with a passionate love that was strong and he accepted personal risk in order that more people might not suffer (Mt 12:9-14; Mt 23:1-4). The quiet of *Abba's* heart was Jesus' source of saving power, and nothing in this world could stop him from the mission which that love compelled.

Jesus did not cure everyone nor did he eliminate all the pain in this world, but his journey did demonstrate that no physical pain,

no inner distress, and no conceivable sin was beyond the healing and transforming effects of God's personal, unconditional love. We may not always see the immediate results which we desire, but the life of Jesus demonstrates that love received from the heart of *Abba* has power to always effect healing on some level of our being. To those who absorb this *agape* love and respond with a commitment of love in return, new life is given, a more fulfilling life, a life which has no end.

What Jesus did in those three short years of his public ministry not only effected the lives of those he met, but offered his followers the model of a listening spirituality which continues to bring healing and wholeness to the world. To the extent that we receive love from the heart of *Abba* and give love as Jesus did, healing continues to happen.

One last effect of Jesus' healing love is that it clearly demonstrated that God is not against us in our pains as if they were God's way of punishing us for past sins or teaching us a lesson that we should have known. The way Jesus responded to the sick and the oppressed with such compassion makes it clear that God is on our side in the midst of our illnesses and our inner woundedness, seeking to love us into wholeness, standing with us in solidarity, and waiting for us to absorb the love that can lead us to life. Jesus' witness gives us the hope of healing and forgiveness no matter where we are at in our spiritual journey, and his image of a loving, intimate God makes us aware that we never walk that journey alone.

## **PRAYER FOR HEALING**

*Abba*, thank you for the love and compassion that you have for me. Thank you for expressing your love and care through the life of your Son, Jesus. His life, his death, and his resurrection invite me to believe in the healing power of perfect love. The way he responded to people long ago allows me to know that no pain, no illness, no bondage can ever win the victory over me when your love fills my heart. *Abba*, I pray that the love with which you loved Jesus would enter and fill my being right now. I welcome that peaceful, unconditional love to melt away my fears with healing courage, to dissolve my shame with healing affirmation, to lighten my grief with healing comfort, and to soak through my anger and resentment with soothing forgiveness and peace. I welcome your Holy Spirit of love to move through my mind and release the emotional load of wounded memories. I welcome your personal love to enter each cell in my body and cleanse it of anything which has not been carefully placed there by you. Thank you, *Abba*, for allowing me to rest in your heart, for surrounding me with the warmth of your personal love. Thank you for this quiet time when I can be in your presence and let your gentle love heal and transform me. Thank you for the healing which has already occurred in my life and for the healing that is yet to happen as I submit to your precious faithful love. Amen.

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## CHAPTER 9

# Offering The Gift

***“Once when Peter and John were going up to the temple for prayer, a man crippled from birth was being carried in.... When he saw Peter and John on their way in, he begged them for an alms.... Then Peter said: ‘I have neither silver nor gold, but what I have I give you! In the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene, walk.’ Then Peter took him by the right hand and pulled him up. Immediately the beggar’s feet and ankles became strong.”***  
**(Acts 3:1-7)**

In our journey through the gospels we saw not only Jesus’ mission to offer healing and wholeness, but also that he commissioned his disciples to continue his mission. What he showed the disciples in those three years of public ministry was the power of unconditional love flowing from his relationship with *Abba*, and what he offered them was the gift of sharing in that relationship. As he sensed that his life journey was nearing the end, he took his closest disciples with him as he went to rest in *Abba*’s heart. He showed them what happened to him when he took his quiet time, when he went off to be "absorbed in prayer." He allowed them to see how the love and affirmation of *Abba* transfigured him (Mk 9:2-

8), giving him the energy and direction for the final steps of his journey. He knew they would need this treasure, this Life line, as a source of empowerment and discernment if they were to continue the mission of proclaiming the healing power of the Creator's love.

After Jesus' death and resurrection, the disciples would draw life from their love relationship with Jesus and the One he called "*Abba*." They came to feel the power of this love and would later describe it as the Holy Spirit, the perfect love flowing between the Father and Jesus. This perfect love flowing from *Abba's* heart, which raised Jesus from the dead, would empower them to offer healing and new life to others just as Jesus had promised. He had told them before his death, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, the holy Spirit, to be with you always,..." (Jn 14:16)

We see the power of this Holy Love in Peter's ability to bring healing to a man who was crippled (Acts 3:1-7). When Peter arrived at the temple and encountered the crippled man, he offered to him the treasure of this perfect love. He had no coins, but what he had was more precious. He was in Love! What he brought to that encounter was more than himself. He brought the powerful love flowing from *Abba's* heart. Through his listening and receiving spirituality which he had learned from his Master, he could provide a precious gift to the man he met. What Peter did that day was not particularly significant. He simply stopped and lifted up this crippled man. What he brought to that encounter, however, allowed the man to remain standing and become a witness of divine, healing love.

When Peter was asked about the changes in this man he said that it was by the power of faith that this formerly crippled man could now walk. The question for us is, whose faith? We might assume he was referring to the crippled man's faith, but that man only asked for money. He expected nothing more. What made that encounter unique and life changing was the faith relationship which filled Peter with perfect love on that day. Through his committed, faith relationship with God, God's love was given an avenue to flow.

Perfect divine love was allowed to flow through the channels of Peter's human, surrendered love.

Years earlier Peter would have walked past the crippled man without noticing him, but now Peter was a new person with a new image of God. He had learned to listen in the quiet of *Abba's* heart, to wait to receive life-giving love so that he had a gift to offer when he met someone in pain. He had learned from the Master that love heals and he invited the love of God to transform his heart, his mind, his body in order that he might be a healing vessel. Years earlier he would have been too afraid to stop and risk the impossible, but his own healing journey had brought him courage and the knowledge that all things are possible in the power of divine love. When he first met Jesus he felt too shameful and unworthy to even be in the presence of Jesus (Lk 5:8), but now he carried the Name of Jesus with humble pride, knowing that he was a beloved son of *Abba*. Before he met Jesus he would have looked at this cripple with disdain, as a sinner getting what he deserved, but now he responded with compassion, aware that *Abba* wanted all people to have the fullness of life. His own inner healing and spiritual transformation empowered him to make a new response to this man, a response which brought about healing and an invitation to wholeness.

We see from the letter of James that the first Christians continued to recognize the healing power of being in a love relationship with Jesus. We read:

Is there anyone sick among you? He should ask for the presbyters of the church. They in turn are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Name of the Lord. This prayer uttered in faith will reclaim the one who is ill and the Lord will restore him to health. If he has committed any sins, forgiveness will be his. (Jas 5:14-15)

In bringing the “Name” of Jesus or the personality of Jesus to the sick, the first Christians discovered an energy which restored life. Their faith relationship with God empowered them to be vessels of healing love for the sick in their midst. Through their resting in the Heart they discovered a new energy in which to bathe the sick, a bath that brought about healing and the hope of reconciliation with God.

As we take more and more time to rest in the heart of *Abba*, we begin to develop a treasure within us, the treasure of a love relationship with our Creator. We have seen the healing effects of that relationship in the scripture and perhaps we have felt those effects as we invited Jesus to calm our fears, transform our shame, resolve our grief and mobilize our anger. Our own inner healing may not be completed immediately, for it often involves transforming long lived patterns, but through consistent soaking in the heart of God we will gradually come to greater inner wholeness and peace. The more we receive the pure, perfect love from the heart of *Abba* and allow it to cleanse us, the more we have to offer.

Jesus said, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you, live on in my love” (Jn 15:9). To the extent that we live in this Love, we have healing love to offer. Some may have unique gifts or a special call to minister God’s healing love, but each of us is called to offer what we have received and each of us is challenged to receive what God offers. It is through our continual resting in the Heart that we find empowerment for our own healing and develop the treasure of relating to others with healing agape love. As we grow in understanding Jesus’ healing ministry, we may desire to actively become part of that ministry in our community.

The ministry of healing as, Jesus modeled it, is essentially the ministry of bathing people in God's love. It is what Jesus commissioned his followers to do before he ascended to heaven. He said to them:

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and know that I am with you always, until the end of the age."

(Mt 28:19-20)

Once we have been bathed in the love of the Father, the Son, and the holy Spirit, we are empowered and commissioned to bathe others with that same love. We may not be the one to do the actual baptizing of people, but we are called to keep pouring the life-giving, forgiving, and healing love of God over them. We are challenged to soak them in the divine love that can transform their lives and lead them to the wholeness found in their Creator. We are sent to teach them how they can receive that love again and again as they enter into the quiet of God's presence until they complete their journey and arrive "home."

The ministry of Christian healing flows from our experience of God's personal love for us. God's love is the essence of healing. We can experience God's personal love because God loves us personally and uniquely just for who we are. This experience is possible not only because we desire it but because God desires to encounter us, to bathe us in perfect love, to wrap us in the secure knowledge that we are precious and beloved. As we take time to quiet ourselves and experience God's personal love for us, we allow God to transform our lives and fill us with pure love for others. As we choose to receive Jesus' image of God we can dispel old images of God which are less than the gift that Jesus offers to us. With this new image we can feel the intimacy, the compassion, the gentleness and the power of the *Abba* who sustained Jesus. In the love relationship which empowered Jesus, we find our energy source to carry out the ministry of healing.

The secure, unconditional love flowing from *Abba* invites us to daily surrender our will in order that God might lead us to

wholeness and ultimate fulfillment. We may initially fear this challenge to let go of our control and our old patterns, but who better to direct our lives than the One who created us and designed our destiny. In our choice to surrender we open the way for *Abba* to fill us with the healing ointment of compassionate love. In letting ourselves be used by God we allow our areas of woundedness to become avenues of compassion toward others. To the extent that those wounds have been anointed with God's love, we can anoint others with healing and the wholeness which flows from unity with our God.

It is in the power of feeling God's love that we make the choice to honestly look at ourselves to determine what areas in our life are not whole. That looking within often challenges us to make changes. These changes are possible when we feel the security of God's personal love for us. Other people can be vessels of love to help us undo imprisoning voices or destructive behavior patterns, and to resolve our past grief or release repressed anger, but the energy of God's unconditional love empowers our journey. It is through our journey of healing that we prepare ourselves to humbly walk with others on their journey to wholeness.

As we make the journey to wholeness we change our responses to people we meet, making each encounter more healing and life giving. These changed responses are part of the ministry of healing. If we are bound by years of accumulated grief we may not respond in a healing way to someone who is grieving. When we begin resolving our grief, we can listen more attentively to others and share with them the path that is healing our heart. If we live with a large measure of fear, shame, or anger, we may often miss the wounded heart of another person. Because of our own inner turmoil any response we do make may not lead to wholeness but only portray our own inner pain. As the perfect love of *Abba's* heart fills the deepest longing of our heart and our pains begin to subside, we are able to respond to other's needs with a more pure

and healing love. The energy we once used to hide our inner pain or cover our true feeling is now freed up to offer life to others.

Daily bathing in God's unconditional love gives us the security of feeling loved and helps us honestly assess all of our relationships in light of that love. Sometimes our need to be loved has caused us to enter into relationships which are not healthy and only deepen the wounds we already carry within. We may cling to such relationships because the small drops of imperfect love flowing from those relationships bring at least some level of relief to our deep thirst for real love. As we begin drinking in the perfect love flowing from *Abba's* heart, we can begin to look at our human relationships in a new and healthier way. In feeling loved for who we are by the One who created us, we discover a new power to choose how our life can have ultimate meaning and purpose. We can begin gently naming our true feelings and challenging others to do the same. As we begin making healthier responses to people in our life through the power of God's love, we invite them to become more whole.

The power of God's perfect love offers real hope to those who live in destructive or codependent relationships. As one person in the relationship finds healing, their healthy way of relating challenges the other to choose health as well. Rather than retaliating to misplaced anger, they offer the security for the other person to name his or her real sources of anger and the hurts which lie beneath their anger. Rather than shaming the person even more for compulsive behavior, their more pure love challenges the other to take accountability for his or her actions and thus begin the road to recovery. These new responses, born out of feeling the personal love of God, are the kind of responses Jesus made which invited people to wholeness.

Developing a spirituality which empowers us to make healing responses to people is the call of every person who follows Jesus. Through the relationship which allowed him to heal others we find the power to change and offer real life. If we seek to be a

minister of healing in our community, it is this receiving spirituality that must be at the core of our ministry. The gift we offer is not ourselves but the perfect, personal love of God flowing through us.

To keep ourselves accountable and focused as a minister of healing, it is helpful to have a spiritual director or mentor with whom we share our own healing journey and our ministry. The authentic compassion we feel for others can easily be tainted by our need to be needed or loved. The power we experience as God's perfect love flows through us, can tempt us to control a needy person or receive rewards which do not belong to us. A spiritual director or mentor is a safe-guard against such human tendencies and a source of discernment for our life journey. Praying with two or three others for a person can help us stay clear about the fact that the power is from God and not from us.

Offering God's healing love to others can drain us of energy and it is good to have a healing community in which to draw new life. We can do this in part during our quiet moments in the heart of *Abba*, but as humans it is also important to experience the human embrace of love. If each member of this community is sustained by a listening, receiving spirituality, gathering together for prayer can offer a wellspring of energy and affirmation. Singing praise to God together can be a great source of re-energizing ourselves for the next steps of the healing mission.

When people come to us for prayer we may notice from their behavior or sharing that they have some very deep inner wounds. It is important that we do not try to do for them what we alone are incapable of doing. We must be humble enough to use all of God's resources to bathe people in healing love. We may need to refer a person to a therapist, a physician, or a self-help group that can provide a piece of the healing process. The healing which flows from God's personal love does not work contrary to human skills, but rather compliments them while at the same time inviting a person to greater wholeness than any human skill can offer. We can be open to the healing effects of medicine and psychology while also

proclaiming with our lives the immeasurable power of God's unconditional, personal love for us. Our prayer and support may give people the courage to use all the possible means to arrive at wholeness and real life.

Through a spirituality of consistently receiving *Abba's* perfect love, those who have specific trained health care skills can draw on the energy of God's love to make their skills even more effective and life giving. The Association of Christian Therapists is an international organization of health care professionals and clergy who invite the power of God's love to flow through their skills as they seek to bring healing and wholeness to people in their care. As a member of that community I have seen the rich treasure we can offer to others when God guides our words and empowers our skill.

As people who wish to offer healing love to others we must humbly acknowledge the difference between God's call to bring healing and our need to "fix" someone. We may be tempted to give advice, but often if we love a person purely as Jesus did and invite them to rest in the heart of *Abba*, God will give them the advice they need at the perfect time and in a sensitive way. If we give counsel to a person we are responsible to be sure that it is accurate and pastorally sensitive. If we think we have a "word from God" for a person, we better check it out with a spiritual director because it may well be a word for us. At times we may consider scaring or shaming a person into changing their ways, but God's perfect love may bring more lasting and fulfilling results. Being part of inviting people to wholeness is a rewarding ministry and yet without a listening, receiving spirituality, this ministry can be contrary to the Master's calling and lead to further woundedness and pain. As followers of Jesus we must continually seek to do what Jesus did, to trust as he trusted, and to love as he loved. By letting the pure love of *Abba* flow through us, we become vessels of healing.

We never know completely the effects of healing prayers and encounters but we know that if people experience God's unconditional love, something always happens. I remember visiting

and praying with a thirty-two year old woman who was in the last stages of cancer. Her mother had called and asked if I would come to the hospital even though it was quite a distance. She said her daughter was very fearful of death and that she was heavily sedated with morphine to ease her great pain.

When I arrived in the room I could see her pain and her words revealed her fear of death. We talked a while about God's personal love for her. I shared Holy Communion with her and anointed her with oil, praying that God's love would bring healing to her heart, her mind and her body. She seemed to experience a new peace during the visit.

Two months later the woman's mother called again wondering what she could do to thank me for all that I had done for her daughter and her family. Since I had not heard anything after my visit, I asked what had occurred. The mother said, "Oh, my daughter died three weeks after you prayed with her, but from the time you came until her death, she was like a new person. Her physical pain almost completely stopped from that day on, but more importantly, she radiated an inner peace which touched every person who entered her room. Her fear of death was gone and she was able to talk with all of her family members and minister Jesus' peace to us, which made her death much easier to accept." The daughter died but healing happened. We do not understand the mysteries of suffering and healing, of death or life, but we know that God's love brings peace and healing. To the extent that we can receive that love and give it to others, we are well.

As Christians we have rituals and symbols which can open our hearts and minds to the healing power of God's love and be channels for allowing that love to flow out to others. One occasion which I have found to be very effective in setting the stage for healing to happen is a Healing Communion Service. In these services we combine various avenues for bathing ourselves and others in God's unconditional love. Through *music* which touches the heart and offers expressions of our love for God, we invite

people to open themselves to the healing which God offers. The *scripture* texts read at these services invite those who gather to be expectant as we enter into the treasure of God's unconditional love. *Quiet time* to listen offers opportunities to reflect on Jesus' healing compassion, to hear the voice of God and to let go of those things which keep us from wholeness. The sharing of *Holy Communion* provides a personal moment to remember the redeeming sacrifice of love Jesus made in giving his body and blood for us. During this special remembrance time we let Jesus' love melt away the wounds within us and we recommit ourselves to sharing Jesus' healing love with people we encounter. The *anointing with oil* by the minister conveys the healing prayer of the larger church community. The *laying on of hands* by the minister and community members allows those who come forward to feel the healing embrace of that community and the love which flows from the heart of God. These celebrations of God's unconditional love allow people of all denominations to experience healing and the peace of feeling the rich love of their Creator.

In whatever ways we participate in offering Christian healing we become vessels of life. We do not need to have all the answers to life's mysteries, but we must carry the love of God in our hearts. To the extent that we stay connected to our Life line we have life to offer. When we pray with another, we use whatever symbols, gestures, or rituals that convey God's personal love for the person in need. We draw upon all the gifts of the Holy Spirit which have been given to us to bathe a person in divine love. We pray in the direction of wholeness asking God's love to touch the emotional, physical, and spiritual dimensions of a person's life.

To focus our attention only on a physical cure for a person would leave us doing something other than what Jesus did. Praying only for a cure is too small for God. Like Jesus, we are challenged to wrap the whole person in *Abba's* personal, healing love. We invite people to expect miracles, not because of us but because of the power of God's love. We do not have to know what changes

this love will bring about through our prayer. We only have to be faithful in offering the gift of *Abba's* perfect love. The effects of this love may not be visible or they may go beyond the scope of our vision and bring about much more than we could ask or imagine. As ministers of healing we live in constant awe of the power of God's perfect love and we remain humbled by the call to be its vessel.

Some of Jesus' final words to his disciples were, "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:12). In those words we find an invitation to receive and a commission to give freely. Jesus radiated a healing, freeing energy that flowed from his perfect love relationship with *Abba*. He offered the assurance, the power, the gift of that relationship to all who thirsted for real life and wholeness. He gave us a resting place, a heart filled with love where we could stop and be refreshed along our journey to our final being at home with God. He invited us to enter in, to come away alone to be healed and transformed in the quiet of unconditional, personal Love.

We have surveyed the effects of this quiet place, we have imagined its beauty, we have discovered its healing and freeing power for our lives. We are left with a treasure, an invitation to come daily to this quiet place of unconditional love for our own wholeness and for the wellbeing of those along our road of life. We are left with an invitation to enter into this environment of holiness, and let the perfect love that *Abba* has for Jesus and Jesus has for *Abba* swirl around us like a Holy Wind, a Healing Spirit, to re-create us and refashion us in the fullness of life, the life found in the Heart of God.

## **PRAYER FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT**

(adapted from the Sequence for Pentecost)

Come, Holy Spirit, come! And from your celestial home shed a ray of light divine!

Come, Father of the poor! Come, source of all our store! Come, within our hearts to shine!

You, of comforters the best; you the soul's most welcome guest; sweet refreshment here below.

In our labor, rest most sweet; grateful coolness in the heat; solace in the midst of woe.

O most blessed Light divine, shine within these hearts of thine, and our inmost being fill.

Where you are not, we have naught, nothing good in deed or thought, nothing free from taint of ill.

Heal our wounds, our strength renew; on our dryness pour your dew; wash the stains of guilt away.

Bend our stubborn heart and will; melt the frozen, warm the chill; guide our steps that go astray.

On your faithful who adore, and confess you evermore, in your sevenfold gift descend.

Give us virtue's sure reward; give us your salvation, Lord; give us joys that never end. Amen. Alleluia.