

Easter 2A - 2023

Forgiveness: it's difficult.

Charlie Brown is trying to help Snoopy sort out a situation with Woodstock. Snoopy has retreated to lying on top of his doghouse, trying to avoid the whole situation. Charlie says to him, "I have a suggestion." Snoopy responds, "Doesn't everyone?" Charlie suggests, "Why don't you try to find out what it was that you broke at Woodstock's party? Maybe that would be the first step toward your reconciliation." Snoopy thinks for a moment, and then responds, "I always trip on that first step."

Corrie ten Boom told a pastor about not being able to forgive a wrong that had been done to her. She had forgiven the person, but she kept rehashing the incident over and over again, and couldn't sleep. She cried out to God for help. The pastor said to her, "Up in the church tower is a bell which is rung by pulling on a rope. But you know what? After the bell ringer lets go of the rope, the bell keeps on swinging. First, 'ding,' then 'dong.' Slower and slower until there's a final dong and it stops. I believe the same thing is true of forgiveness. When we forgive, we take our hand off the rope. But if we've been tugging at our grievances for a long time, we mustn't be surprised if the old angry thoughts keep coming for a while. They're just the ding-dongs of the old bell slowing down."

The Greatest Scar Story

I can think of no better modern-day illustration of the sacrifice Jesus made for us than a recent scar story I heard from a tennis friend of mine. As we were waiting for another match to finish, she was relating how badly her knees hurt. This friend is the most fit 30-something-year-old I know. Yet she sat beside me with a brace on each knee. I pointed to the open hole of her knee brace and asked if her scar was from knee surgery. She told me, "No, it's from my son, and I actually have an identical scar on my other knee." You see, several years ago she scooped up her toddler son from the swimming pool and began to walk towards a lounge chair. As she stepped onto the tiled patio, her foot slipped on the wet slick surface. She was also seven months pregnant, and it was one of those moments where you feel like you're moving in slow motion but there's nothing you can do to stop the fall. Within a split second, she knew her momentum was toppling her forward, and she could either face-plant and land on top of both her son and her unborn child, or she could fall on her knees.

Of course, as any loving parent would do, she chose to fall on her knees directly onto the unforgiving concrete. Her knees immediately burst open and blood went everywhere. She ended up needing stitches, which resulted in scars, but her son and unborn child were both unscathed. It is hard for me to tell this story without tearing up, because to me, it serves as a miniscule example of the immense sacrifice and love of Jesus Christ for us. You see, we are the beloved children of God for whom Jesus took the fall.

Christ suffered on the cross and endured unimaginable pain for us. His is the greatest scar story ever told. (by Christi O. Brown from *Scars of Hope*)

A teenager remembers a **terrifying night** during World War II, when the Russian army was marching on her home in Vienna:

"[The] victorious Russian army was raping its way to the center of the city. In the face of such a threat, Father had closed the door to our house, but did not lock it. With his wife, daughter and some family guests in the cellar, he waited upstairs, no doubt in prayer. When the Russians approached and pounded against the door with their guns, Father opened it and stood before them in a way they could not have expected. He pushed aside their rifles and gestured that they should come in, as if they were invited guests.

"Of course, a soldier's attitude at such a moment is one of suspicion. He has seen six years of war and wants to survive. He is ready to shoot before he is shot. But they saw in my father's gesture that perhaps their fear was not necessary. They looked in the house to see if it was a trap. They found it wasn't.

"My father could see that they were relieved. They took off their rifles, and then my father called the others up from the basement. He was able to create an atmosphere of welcome, of trust, of love, of belonging.

"Far from raping the women and killing any of the occupants of the house, the soldiers were moved to share their own meager rations. They could see how thin and hungry we were--for the city had been cut off for quite some time. They shared with our family and guests from their own food."

On Easter night, the Risen Christ leaves his new Church the gift of his "peace"--peace that is much more than the absence of conflict but a deliberately, conscious act that transforms, re-creates and renews; is the peace that is born of wisdom, integrity and an attitude of thanksgiving.

Just as this father manages to create peace within his home despite the war beyond its walls, **we, too, can bring the peace of Christ into our lives and the lives of others.** (Hildegard Goss-Mayr, *A Non-Violent Lifestyle*, quoted in "Stubborn, unstoppable peace," *Connections*, (7 Lantern Lane, Londonderry, N.H. 03053-3905), April 1999.)