

## Our Pain And What To Do About It

November 2021

Pain is something no one misses out on.

It's a basic human reality.

If you want real conversation with people talk about pain because we all get it

There is physical pain and soul pain.

It's soul pain I want to speak about.

Soul Pain is the heart wounded, the spirit grieved by life in the world as it is.

The world is far from perfect and it wounds us all, especially if we try to do right and follow Jesus.

Jesus was fully aware that living in the World he was leaving his friends to live in as his disciples was painful to the soul. In John 16:33 he said:

<sup>33</sup> I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. (even for doing right) But take courage; I have conquered the world!

As a pastor I have heard a lot of deep soul pain expressed so know that believers are not exempt from soul pain or heart grief.

Our coffee table always has a tissue box on it as pain often flows.

I can also say that Pastors are not exempt, Soul Pain, finds us all.

Such pain can be personal and individual or Collective and shared.

A clear example of collective pain in this Country came from the huge losses in World War 1 that are commemorated on ANZAC Day.

That is 3 or 4 generations ago and yet the pain is still felt through families.

Three years ago Barbara and I placed a wreath with NZ flax on the grave of her Grandmother's brother Jack in France representing her wider family 100 years to the day that he was killed in action.

The side chapel in this church building remembers those lost in wars and represents the pain of their loss in this congregation.

Then for us as St Matthew's there is a much more recent shared Soul pain coming from the drastic departure of so many church members three years ago in a church split.

It was part of a bigger split in the NZ Anglican Church but the local pain of that is all we know here.

So there is both individual and corporate spiritual pain.

I am now going to focus on the individual experience and what to do about it.

### **BODY**

So, when we experience inner pain in soul or heart, what are we to do with this?

In brief; there are 3 options:

1. The right and best option is to Take our pain to God for his healing love.

2. The second option is to bury it within ourselves
3. Option three is to spread it around by throwing it at others

My message in a nutshell this morning is: **We need to take our pain to God.**

Those who wrote the Psalms knew this:

Psalm 34:18

<sup>18</sup> The LORD is near to the broken-hearted,  
and saves the crushed in spirit.

Psalm 147:3

<sup>3</sup> He heals the broken-hearted,  
and binds up their wounds.

So the message again, If we have soul pain or a wounded heart, God is our healer.

But you may think: Why take our pain to God?

John 16:20

<sup>20</sup> Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; **you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.**

This is something that Jesus himself powerfully committed himself to on the cross as Hebrews celebrates it. Hebrews 12:1

... let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, **who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame,** and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

He accepted pain to the maximum level for the joy that would come in God's Salvation for us. He trusted his Father with his pain for our sake.

So the message is: **Take your pain to God.**

I'd like to pray now but need to seal this message by considering how options 2 and 3 for dealing with our pain are inadequate.

Instead of bringing our pain to God, many people opt to bury their pain in themselves. This is not healthy.

Story

In 1990 my uncle was clearing a back section and invited me to clear fruit trees for fire wood. At the back of the property was a small Peach tree which he suggested I transplant to my own property. He said it had never done well there but I was welcome to take it.

So I decided to dig it out with a large clump of soil but it came a way quite easily. Once I had it out on a sheet I noticed something. The clump had lifted really easily because underneath it was a pile of burnt rubbish which the roots had not pushed into. I remember seeing burnt batteries and pieces of metal. Once upon a time before rubbish collections people used to burn their rubbish in a barrel and then bury the embers and remains in the back yard. Someone had done that and then planted this peach tree on top of it.

No wonder it had not done well.

That illustrated what happens when we bury our pain and the grief of it.

Like the tree if we live on buried pain we,

- Fail to thrive and develop
- Bear little or no fruit
- And are inclined to bitterness as our roots draw on the buried pain.

Turning our souls into rubbish heaps of buried pain is not good for anyone.

The third option is another bad choice but it's very common, that is to spread our pain around to other people. It's not hard to recognise when this is happening.

It can be either aggressive or passive.

Jesus once pointed to the basic mechanism of this by referring to logs and specs. In Matthew 7 Jesus asks:

<sup>3</sup> Why do you see the speck in your neighbour's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> Or how can you say to your neighbour, "Let me take the speck out of your eye", while the log is in your own eye?

So he understood that the pain of a log in the eye leads some people to then focus on addressing the specs they see in others.

That log is a ridiculously large issue that obscures perspective while causing pain. For some reason people in that state then try to remove specs in other people's eyes.

Today this is described as either Projection or Transference.

Instead of dealing with the log which is actually causing the pain some people try to quieten their pain through addressing issues in others.

There is an aggressive way of doing this and a less aggressive or passive way:

A NZ saying frames the aggressive way quite well:

"If you throw enough mud, some of it might stick!"

In this manifestation accusations and even condemnations are thrown at another to offset the pain that is part of their experience.

It's an attempt to make someone else responsible for the pain being lived with.

Church Pastors are typical candidates for this as are the Prime Minister or anyone we don't like.

The key to recognising this projection of pain is suggested by Jesus in the Log and spec metaphor. It's a joke Jesus told about lack of proportion. If the amount of energy being expressed is more than the issue warrants then it could well be a projection of pain onto someone else.

There is a quieter or passive version of this too referred to as 'Passive Aggressive' behaviour.

So instead of taking the pain to God or actively throwing mud or trying to remove specs it just plays uncooperative and talks about issues to third parties. This fuels gossip and slander. Instead of being free and bold this passive outworking of pain can find 10 reasons for not doing anything that is suggested or needed.

Some of that is active in the response to Covid management and it's a big spoiler of elections and referendums in much of the world today. The logic runs:

"If I have to live with pain and can't be happy then why should I cooperate so that others can be happy?"

That's a common passive aggressive outworking of pain.

### **Summary**

Soul Pain and Heart Grief is going to come. It's part of life in this world, especially if you walk with Jesus.

If we want healing, we need to take it to God.

Jesus has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows (Isa 53:4)

He is willing to receive our broken hearts and wounded spirits.

That is the healthy option.

If we do not take it to God it will distort, infect, cripple, pollute and sour our spirits

Then in our relating it will impact others and damage people and communities.

God can and wishes to heal our pain.

Prayer