



Some would say seminary is where us clergy learn how to be better agents of healing, or something: where we grow in crafting prayers or how to fine-tune the spoken blessings over water and oil to be used in worship or individual pastoral care visits. But, for me, there was something about deepening my own awareness of where the most beautiful healing can emerge in the places and people we least expect it.

I was fortunate enough that during my time on campus, a class was offered for a two-week stint in Israel and Palestine. But it wasn't just about the usual Christian touristy thing of visiting as many historical sites as possible, but also engaging in the present reality, of the humanity who call some of the most adored land in all the world, their home. Of course, when we started flying towards Tel Aviv, tensions escalated between the two sides. Not that there has ever been a time when there were no tensions at all, but nevertheless, needless to say, our carefully crafted itinerary needed to change a bit.

And yet, we still managed to see plenty of the usual Christian touristy spots: from Capernaum to the Church of the Beatitudes and Jericho. Many awe-inspiring sights, to be sure, including some rather coveted spots for numerous Jesus-followers from foreign countries all over the map; where maybe in the supposed Holy Land is the best chance for healing. Maybe if we swam in the Dead Sea, or got a vial of water from the Sea of Galilee with a special blessing added on, or if we did a little prayer at the Church of the Nativity: maybe we would experience a bit of long-sought-after healing for whatever was on our hearts and minds at that point in our life. Maybe that works for some, but sometimes the most beautiful healing can emerge in the places and people we least expect it.

Not too far from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, marking the spot where Jesus supposedly died, and not far removed from the Garden Tomb, where some believe Jesus resided in death for three days, and a little down the ways from the Upper Room, where others insist is the place Jesus shared the last meal with his disciples before the cross; in the midst of all that: in the hustling and bustling and tension-filled Jerusalem, there were these boys just kicking around a soccer ball like it was no big deal. Except, it was: because in that group of random youth were Israelis and Palestinians. Now, even after a minimal quick trip around their homeland, and a few orientation sessions preparing us for our international venture, and however many years of watching the near-depressing news coverage of the supposed Holy Land, we had been ingrained into believing that what those boys were doing could not possibly happen. It wasn't a big deal. It was a huge deal.

Because amidst our point A to B to C to D seemingly non-stop Christian touristy itinerary check-off list, there were also times to sit and listen to the people who call these coveted historical places their present-day home. They shared stories of family and dreams and hopes and sorrow and heart-wrenching travesty. As we clergy were being shaped to be storytellers from a pulpit, we had to learn to be on the look-out for the stories amongst the children of God today. And in those precious times of shared stories, we grew attached to the humanity behind them. We grew so attached that we desperately yearned for healing for them, as if they were no longer just people on television screens and statistical body counts. Years later, we still long for a healing not just of physical health, but of heart and mind and to the very depths of the human soul, as if there is even the slightest bit of hope not just for Israelis and Palestinians, but for our collective humanity.

Sometimes, the most beautiful healing can emerge in the people and places we least expect it. For some reason, those boys stick with me just as much as any Christian touristy spot. For some reason, they missed the memo from the supposedly more mature adults, who would insist they never play together, they never share laughter, or joy or a common humanity of love and basic human respect. For some reason, they lived in a holy juxtaposition to the rest of the world's standard operating procedure. In the

midst of the hustling and bustling and most tension-filled city of Jerusalem, they offered their most beautiful healing to the human heart that desperately longs for peace and wholeness.

So, whenever the church attempts to offer healing for any children of God, for some reason, I cannot help but think back to those young boys. Because, as much as I wouldn't mind a certain level of physical healing for loved ones, I still crave a different healing. I want a healing of heart, mind, and to the very depths of our soul; the very depths that the Psalmist we heard today cries out from: a cry of sheer desperation. I want a healing of the very depths of our humanity, overrun by the hustling of cynicism and the bustling of hatred and the tension-filled, "It's just always been done this way, and there isn't much we can do about it."

I want a healing of our very hearts to believe that what Jesus spoke in the Capernaums and Nazareths and Jerusalems of long ago is just as relevant and true and life-altering today as it was thousands of years ago: that it isn't just history, but our present-day Gospel, too. I want a healing of our minds to believe that God has blessed us as the Holy Spirit to empower us to be small but absolutely vital agents of healing in this world that God still so loves. I want a healing to the very depths of our soul, to start chipping away at the cynicism and the hatred and the standard-operating-procedure tensions.

Some would say it's too late. We're too far gone now. But I'll always come back to those boys who hadn't been plagued by the supposedly more mature adults yet. I'll turn back to God in them, for even the slightest bit of hope that the Gospel still applies: that healing can still happen, that this Risen Lord of ours is just as much alive in our hearts today as he was in the streets of Jerusalem long ago. As if nothing can ever happen in this life to separate us from God's love in Jesus Christ, our still-Risen Lord. And for that Greatest News of all, with its own soothing healing to the depths of our soul, to be sure, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!