

Savior: A Saved Heart

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Isaiah 61:1-3

*The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.*

Early this spring, just around Easter time, Mandy Nathan, a member of St. Luke's who has two college-aged sons and a husband, went into the hospital for treatment of her diseased heart. She was placed on the transplant list but finding a heart was going to be a real challenge. Her body produced some very rare antibodies that would make it reject almost any heart that became available. They worked hard to try to get the antibodies down with all sorts of treatments, but it just didn't work very well. Our hospital team went to see her often, prayed with her and worried with her, commiserated and then prayed some more. But very frankly, it just didn't look good.

Then late on a Saturday night, after she'd been in the hospital more than six months, on November 9 they received a call that a tragic accident had happened and the woman who had died was an organ donor. Amazingly enough she had exactly the same antibodies that Mandy had. So on that day out of that tragedy grew something incredible - a miracle, a new heart. The doctor said that there was a one in 5 million chance that they would find a heart that matched.

What do you think during those six months that salvation looked like for her? What did a savior look like?

We've been talking during this season about what a savior is. It's interesting that this passage we read today was the passage that Jesus used as his mission statement. He walked into the synagogue in the town where he lived and he unrolled the scroll of Isaiah and he read those words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, to bind up the broken hearted. Today the Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

So it's interesting this word savior we recognize that Jesus' name comes from the Hebrew root meaning "to save." Scripture says, "You shall name him Jesus for he will save his people." But the New Testament is written in Greek and the verb for savior is the Greek *sozo*. If you look it up in the concordance it means "To save, to rescue, to deliver, to heal." It's interesting in the English language too, we say, "Do you need a salve on your hand?" That means "to heal." So for her, salvation meant healing.

In fact, throughout the New Testament when Jesus speaks to people and touches and heals them, the verb is always *sozo*, to heal, to save.

I suspect there are some among us, some you know, who look this year, this Christmas season, for healing. And that's what a savior would look like for them.

This idea of binding up the broken hearted though is a much broader thought. There are lots of ways to have a broken heart. Perhaps your heart has been broken by grief or betrayal. Hear the words of the Scripture once again: "To comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion. To give them a garland instead of ashes. The oil of gladness instead of mourning. The mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit." I wonder for some of you if your hearts are broken, a savior might look like a healed heart.

Another way that hearts are broken is when they've become hardened. Sometimes we find ourselves with hard hearts. There's actually a disease, a stenosis of the heart valve that is the hardened heart. It comes in all sorts of different ways. The Scripture said in Exodus that Moses told the Pharaoh to let his people go but Pharaoh's heart was hardened. Maybe you find yourself with a hard heart and you're angry and bitter. That sometimes happens to us - like the Ebenezer Scrooge kind of spirit as described in Charles Dickens story *A Christmas Carol*, where Scrooge says, "Bah! Humbug!"

Just this week I found myself wanting to yell at some kids. "Get off my lawn!" Sometimes our hearts get hard. Or maybe it's just a lack of compassion. You find yourself driven by people who are suffering, and you don't even feel anything anymore. Compassion fatigue. A broken heart.

Or maybe your heart has become diseased with shame. A woman came to me not long ago and told me a story about her past and how she'd been carrying shame for so long. She didn't seem to know how to shake it. She went to visit her sister at one point and her sister told her a story about a woman in Scripture who had had a flow of blood for twelve years; and as a result she had been "unclean," and she carried shame around with her. Then she reached out and touched the hem of Jesus' garment and he said, "*Sozo*," and she was saved." Her shame was taken away.

The woman who came to see me opened her purse and removed a tiny little one-inch square of fabric, and said, "When my shame comes over me again, I get this out and feel it and remember that my shame has been taken away."

I don't know what kind of broken heart you may struggle with during this season. A heart that's physically sick, perhaps. Or one broken with grief or betrayal. One that's grown hard and lacks compassion. Maybe one that's diseased with shame.

Friends, the promise of Scripture is that a Savior is coming to bind up your broken heart, to save you - *sozo* - to heal.

On Friday, I got a text message with a picture on it. It was Mandy Nathan standing in her front yard with a big sign that said, "Welcome home, Mandy!" After all of these months she's been healed. And we are so grateful. You can be healed, too.

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.