

The Truth Will Set You Free . . .

by: Miriam D. Ukeritis, CSJ, PhD

How often have you heard someone say, “the truth will set you free”? Usually, those words are spoken as an encouragement to someone to divulge a painful secret reality or to engage in a difficult conversation.

My association with the phrase is a bit more mundane. It goes back to the 1970’s or so when posters by Argus and similar publishers populated our offices and classrooms, replacing holy cards and images of saints with more “contemporary” depictions of spirituality and wisdom. The poster I have in mind pictures a rag doll caught midway between the rollers of a wringer of an old-fashioned washing machine. At the top, the poster read, “The truth will set you free,” but, at the bottom, the message continued: “but first it will make you miserable.” This image has remained with me because, I believe, it names why we so often struggle with speaking the truth to others (or ourselves).



Facing the Misery. Who of us might envy the position of that rag doll? Placing oneself in the midst of a painful reality – especially if one has seemingly managed to avoid it up to now – does not appear to be a smart move. Hence, resistance to the “truth that will set is free” is understandable. Most of us are at least intuitively aware that engaging in an honest dialogue regarding destructive behaviors could have disastrous results. This is true whether it involves one’s admitting to such behaviors, or whether one is to confront another regarding his or her behavior. Life in a wringer is not pleasant.

The “misery” involved in facing the truth may be the invitation to respond to a call to change or conversion, or to relinquish a long-held but unreal image of oneself that has served well for a long time. When one knows that he or she is caught in an unhealthy pattern of behavior, naming it is a first step to healing and wholeness. If this behavioral pattern has been secretive, bringing it into the light of day may be fraught with fears of rejection and accompanied by a deep sense of shame and guilt. The same may hold true when the need is to name the truth of another’s unhealthy patterns.

When such unhealthy patterns seem to be lifelong, an individual may see no options or

alternatives. Life may indeed seem over – and, in some real ways, it is. Persons recovering from struggles with depression or addictions have often phrased their recovery in terms of needing to adjust to the loss of a lifelong companion. They may have no idea of how life might be lived outside the context of those behaviors and patterns that have shaped their lives.

There are also times when the truth may seem to lead us to imprisonment – possibly quite literally – rather than to freedom. At the very least, it may involve consequences that involve righting of wrongs done that may inhibit or limit one’s options. As has been often noted, facing reality without denial or illusion can be a very painful experience, but clearly one that will lead to freedom.

Naming/Seeking the Truth. It does not seem unreal to ask, “what is that truth that will set me free?” If one is speaking of truth that will undoubtedly have painful consequences, why is such truth to be pursued? The truth we are speaking of is the truth that enables one to responsibly and faithfully choose life. This truth is not to be found in an exercise of self-flagellation whose purpose is to examine

“... the truth of my life is manifest in my very person and being.”

“Are not our hearts burning within us!”

by Wendy Cope, MA, C.Psych Associate



The following is adapted from a reflection offered by Wendy Cope at a 'commissioning service' as residents prepare to leave Southdown.

“Jesus came to them unrecognized, subtly bringing about a ‘change of heart.’”

Most, if not all who come to Southdown, arrive in the midst of their own Good Fridays. Having experienced disillusionment and defeat, humiliation and shame, rejection and abandonment, they arrive and begin to hear what can only sound like absurd proclamations of Good News and Easter Faith. For many, Southdown can become a real experience of Easter – a long process of slowly internalizing this Good News as they make difficult choices that result in transformation and healing. Easter at Southdown is very much like walking the road to Emmaus.

There is a well-known passage in Luke’s gospel (Luke 24: 13-32), where we see two persons walking the seven mile trip from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They are baffled, confused by the events that had taken place where Jesus, the one whom they expected to redeem Israel, had instead been viewed as a threat and been crucified. That road symbolizes the roads each of us are required to walk. The one leading to Galilee is the road of hope; the other, the road to Emmaus, represents the road of disappointment and disillusionment. Often, when men and women arrive at Southdown, they feel that they have lost the way toward their dreams. They are walking toward the Emmaus in their life.

There are many ways to walk on a road and each way can bring about new experiences. Often there are roads that we never considered: the broken pathway, the hilly climb through the woods or the frightening walk along a speeding highway. But we cannot live without some form of walking.

Fr. Ron Rolheiser, OMI, writing on this passage, began with a statement that “Every dream eventually gets crucified”. Now this can be taken as a statement of hopelessness and defeat or, it can be understood in a different way. The crucifixion of one’s dreams is a more realistic appraisal of how our “plans” will never go quite as we desired or expected. For those of us with a strong need to control, this can be a difficult challenge. It is a call to let go of rigid plans and expectations, and to open oneself to a newness.

Fr. Rolheiser states, “There’s no smooth ride for what’s whole, good, true or beautiful”. This represents the Bad News. However, the Good News is that while nothing of God can avoid crucifixion, God never allows us to remain in the tomb forever. (Southdown residents only stay for several months!) The stone is rolled back and things are seen in a new light. We come to a realization that “our plan” was not the way things were going to go.

We can be angry at this apparent loss of control of our dream and may even get caught in the resentments that forced this detour. There is a book called “When Bad Things Happen to Good People” that addresses how to deal with the sometimes tragic events that force changes in our outlook on life. It is often out of a tragedy or significant loss that we are pushed into a new perspective on our life, on our priorities. Sometimes we are left questioning the purpose of these “bad things” and feel a fury towards God. That shift into a new understanding may take months or even years to discover, but when it finally “clicks” and becomes integrated, we are left in wonderment and awe of its wisdom and the sense of rebirth that it brings.

On the road to Emmaus, a stranger approaches the two travellers. He asks questions of them, eventually developing enough ease with them that he is asked to come for supper. Think of how we tend to view strangers in our lives. We are cautious, often avoiding them. We teach our children about “stranger danger” in order to protect them from that unknown element that a stranger brings to any situation. In this passage, they do not recognise the stranger to be Jesus, but were able to be open to him.

We need to try to be open to the strangers that accompany us on our journey. By being open to the stranger, we are being open to a new perspective. We listen in a new way and this can lead to re-lighting the torch of hope; to bring our hearts to burn once more with the passion and excitement of when we first set out on our course of serving God. Jesus came to them unrecognized, subtly bringing about a “change of heart.” He redirected them towards Galilee, the place where their hearts had burned with hope and enthusiasm.

Apparently Emmaus was known for its spa and Fr. Rolheiser likens it to a modern day Las Vegas, a place where one went to seek consolation and escape from shattered dreams. The road to Galilee represents our dreams. But to be on the road to Emmaus is to walk away from one’s original purpose, resentful, bitter, grieving that one’s plans had “failed”. But is it truly failure or is it more like an unpredicted road that if one is open, can lead back to the dream?

SOUTHDOWN HOSTS 37TH ANNUAL ICCRC CONFERENCE

by: Anne Shaw, MSW, CBT

On September 24-27, 2009, Southdown was honoured to host the annual **International Conference of Consulting and Residential Centers (ICCRC)**. This year's conference was themed "*Honouring Wholeness: Body, Mind and Spirit*", and was attended by participants from as far away as Germany, Texas and Newfoundland.

The conference featured two guest speakers: Sister Catherine Nerney, SSJ, PhD. from the Institute for Forgiveness and Reconciliation at Chestnut Hill College, Philadelphia, and Dr. Vera Tarman, MD, the Medical Director of Renascent, a Canadian drug and alcohol treatment centre.

Sister Catherine Nerney spoke on "*Forgiveness and Reconciliation, a Pathway to Healing and Wholeness*". Early in her presentation, she quoted from the epic poem of Seamus Heaney, "*The Cure of Troy*" that "human beings get hurt and get hard". This is what happens to us when we are aggressed against, abused, betrayed or deal with the violent loss of a loved one. She delineated three ways to respond to the pain of brokenness. Hurt can be held and we can let it define us; we can seek to get even, avenging our pain; or, attempts can be made to heal the hurt and to release the pain inflicted on the human spirit.

She spoke of the revision of the myth of forgiving and forgetting and of healing the heart through remembering. Tolerating, excusing and condoning the injustice of wrong are not part of this process. The healing process involves naming the wrong and acknowledging that it should never have happened; that it needs mourning, grieving, lamenting, so that pain may be released. A distinction was made between forgiveness and reconciliation, as reunion with the perpetrator is not always possible.

Dr. Vera Ingrid Tarman's presentation was entitled: "*Addictions Unplugged: The Biology of Addictions and Recovery*". Dr. Tarman spoke of how addictive substances such as alcohol, cocaine, THC and prescription medications hijack the brain, impairing our capacity to think and interfering with our natural "feel-good" neurochemistry, i.e. the reward pathways of the neurotransmitters serotonin, dopamine and the endorphins. The drugs interfere with our system by creating an intense, concentrated experience which

the body is not equipped to handle. Triggers and cravings activate the limbic system, the emotional and reward center of the brain, while concentrated addictive substances delay and weaken the connection with the cerebral cortex,

"Hurt can be held and we can let it define us; or attempts can be made to heal the hurt."

the thinking part of the brain.

The Recovery Method involves recouping the natural reward pathways in the brain. The individual recovering from addiction needs support throughout the process of stopping his/her addiction. Twelve Step fellowships, connection to spiritual communities, prayer and meditation, as well as good nutrition and a sense of humour are all recommended. These experiences create a natural endorphin release which helps to recover the natural reward system in the body vs. the use of unnatural substances.

Southdown staff member Anne Shaw, MSW, then discussed

the concept of "mindfulness meditation" as a way of turning towards experience; of accepting all of our experience without judgement; and of using our curiosity to see experience as it is in each moment. This approach can enhance self acceptance, reduce anxiety, and provide a nuanced way of looking at human experience. Another important mindfulness concept is that of impermanence, i.e. becoming aware that all human experience is transitory, whether we are dealing with our bodily sensations, emotions or thoughts. Acceptance of this reality can be helpful in reducing rigidity, depression, ruminative thought and generalized anxiety.

Several other presentations were made by Southdown staff. Neuropsychologist Dr. Ben Williams explored challenges of dealing with an aging population, where frequently cognitive diminishment occurs "co-morbid" with other mental health concerns. Differentiating between symptoms that arise out of cognitive impairment, as opposed to, for example, depression, and discussion of principles to guide case conceptualisation and treatment planning within this context were discussed.

In keeping with the theme of the conference, "*Honouring Wholeness: Body, Mind and Spirit*", another member of Southdown's clinical staff, Grant Smith, presented a session entitled "*So, What's your Story? - A Psychodrama Perspective*". Psychodrama, a longstanding component of the Southdown program, was developed by the Austrian-American psychiatrist Dr. Jacob L. Moreno (1889-1974). It is a group method in which participants explore internal conflicts through acting out their emotions and interpersonal interactions. Grant's presentation included some explanation of psychodrama concepts and vernacular. Participants were then exposed to some elements of a typical psychodrama group session.

The ICCRC membership is comprised of clinicians from across North America and overseas whose professional work involves treating clergy and vowed religious in either an outpatient or a residential treatment setting. Their next annual conference is scheduled for September 23 -26, 2010. It will be held in the Washington, DC area, hosted by Saint Luke Institute.



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every sordid detail of one's life with the intent of humiliation and shame. Rather, the purpose of naming the truth of one's life is to be able to stand in the clear light of day and accept the reality that, in naming the truth of all these gifts and graces that are mine, and in naming the truth of all these faults and failures that are also mine, I know I am a person valued, loved and redeemed by God.

The one who said, "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life" is the one who desires us to live in freedom and light. Several years ago, my Latin teacher pointed out that the Latin translation of Pilate's question, "What is truth?" is contained in the answer itself. The letters of "*Quid est veritas?*" can be rearranged to read, "*Est vir qui adest.*" "It is the man who stands before you." In seeking wholeness and holiness, each of us must be able to respond similarly: the truth of my life is manifest in my very person and being.

Living into the Truth. Hearing or speaking the truth is not enough in itself. Our lives must witness to the truth that we hear and that we speak. Acting on the word needs to be more than a familiar phrase or cliché.

As I reflect on the lives of our residents at Southdown, I see living examples of persons who have chosen to live into the truth of their lives. I often stand in awe of the courage that these women and men have demonstrated in their response to hearing the truth. Whether powerful addictions, childhood abuse or uncontrollable anxiety were among factors that precipitated their arrival at Southdown, these individuals have committed themselves to a journey through "misery" that only faith tells them will lead to healing and wholeness. They have chosen to act on the truth they have heard – often painfully communicated through the caring intervention of a friend or leadership – in order to move toward the fullness of life that Jesus deeply desires for each of us.

At this time of year, we celebrate our stories of moving from death to life, from slavery to freedom, through death and deserts. Choosing life is often a journey that, like the rag doll on the poster, takes us through the wringer of pain. May we have the courage to respond to and embrace those opportunities to opt for life. The One who is the Truth will surely lead us to life.

Welcome

Dorothy Heiderscheit OSF, MSW, ACSW



As the Coordinator for Continuing Care, Dorothy Heiderscheit, OSF is our most recent addition to the Southdown clinical staff. Previous to coming to Southdown, Dorothy served in Congregational leadership for 8 years.

Her understanding of the issues and concerns facing both leadership and members is a great asset to the Continuing Care program.

Dorothy is a member of the Sisters of St. Francis of Dubuque, Iowa. She holds a Masters in Social Work from Tulane University, New Orleans, and a Bachelors in Nursing from Marycrest College in Davenport, IA, as well as membership in the Academy of Certified Social Workers (ACSW). Previous ministry experiences include the Office of Family with Catholic Charities of Jackson, MS, counselling with religious and clergy and numerous workshops. We are pleased to welcome Dorothy to Southdown.

Are not our hearts burning...

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At Southdown, the therapeutic modalities may be regarded as a "stranger", an unknown process that seems intimidating. Alternatively, the therapeutic and spiritual opportunities may be viewed as gently guiding, giving direction back to your dreams, your Galilee, your burning heart. Just as Jesus was not recognised, the process here may initially be unrecognised as a venue to lead you back to your original quest.

Fr. Rolheiser concludes: "In one guise or another, Christ always meets us on the road, burns holes in our hearts, explains the latest crucifixion to us and sends us back – to Galilee and our abandoned discipleship."

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