



Fearful Places

In Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas visited the city of Lystra. Their time in Lystra started successfully with the healing of a crippled man, but then everything went south. The people thought Paul and Barnabas were gods and tried to worship them. Not only that, Luke wrote, “Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city” (Acts 14:19-20).

Christians go back to the city—to the place of pain, dark and fear and “kiss the demons on the lips.” But it isn’t just geographical “places” to which we return, it’s also places of the heart.

Counselors talk about repressed memories, and while I’m not sure I agree with a whole lot of that, there are places in our hearts we lock up because they are so painful. Sometimes it’s a place of shame or abuse, or a person—other times a memory.

In Isaiah 65, God says, “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.” (vs. 17-18).

That is a covenantal and national promise and hope—but it’s also the way of God. It’s a pattern of joy and release from the past. Paul wrote, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

So where am I going with all this? Among some other good things that happened when Jesus found us, there is the surprising realization that our past shame has been erased. And not only that, we are free to revisit it without fear. We are new creatures and, because we are, we can walk toward the dark knowing that we are now bathed in the light of his love.

I have a pen pal in Australia named Noel, who is an executive in the Lutheran church. His wife, Kirsten, writes the most delightful

children’s stories I have ever read (*Bearen Bear and the Bunbury Tales*). In a statement on her webpage, Kirsten wrote, “A truly good story is one which wraps you up in its Word and carries you out of yourself to a place of restoration and healing like you never thought possible.”

Of course, the really Good Story is the one Jesus gave us, and it takes us to a place of restoration and healing so that the fearful places of the past are no longer fearful and the dark not nearly so dark.

I got an email from Noel in which he told me about his recently diagnosed cancer. It is particularly difficult for Noel because his first wife died of cancer several years ago and that was a very dark time.

But his email was surprisingly upbeat. He talked about God’s faithfulness and the hope doctors had given him because his cancer had been discovered early and the prognosis was good. In his email, Noel talked about his cancer in the same way he talks about a new discovery in a theological book. What’s up with that?

Let me tell you, because of Christ, Noel had found that no matter how dark the past or the future, no matter how profound the pain, and no matter how deep the wounds, he could go there and face his demons. Those demons didn’t matter to a new creature in Christ.

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.... The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18). Are there places in your life you don’t want to return to because they are just too dark and too painful? Are there dreams at night that turn into nightmares when they reference the pain and trauma in your life? Me too! You don’t have to run from the fear anymore.

Here’s a principle I’ve learned in dealing with the dark and fearful places in your life: You take the first step, Jesus will take the second step, and by the time you get to the third step, you’ll know it was Jesus who took the first step and walked the whole way with you. He asked me to remind you. □

—Steve Brown