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God's Band-Aids

A question to begin: what color is a Band-Aid?

Johnson & Johnson has been making Band-Aids since 1920 and estimates that it has sold more than 100 billion worldwide. The company's answer to the question is that the standard, ubiquitous Band-Aid is soft pink. The packaging did not say soft pink, rather it said simply: flesh colored.

I have been asking the Band-Aid question to as many people I could this past week. The question was prompted by an observation that Debby Irving made in her book Waking Up White that we've been reading as part of Christ Church's participation with the One Town, One Book experience in Exeter. The book is both memoir and a lesson plan for how people, mostly white people living in America, can find constructive ways to think and talk about race, privilege, history and inequality without getting stuck and mired in the quicksand guilt – so much so that change and self-examination never takes place. As the author noted, one of the advantages of “waking up white” in this country is the ability to walk into any drug store in America and buy a so-called “flesh” colored bandage and have it match her skin color. Probably something many of us never gave much thought about.

Here's the story of someone who did think about it and then did something.

Toby Meisenheimer is a Chicago father of six children. He and his wife have two have two biological children, three adapted and one adopted child. Toby and his wife are white, as are their two biological children. Their adopted and foster children are black.

When his adopted son Kai cut his forehead back in 2013, he didn't think twice when he reached for a Band-Aid. “It stuck out like a sore thumb,” he told reporters later (Huffington Post) about the bandage he put on his son's head. “We can choose from the cartoon bandage world or a bandage that matches my skin and that's it.”

The father expressed his frustration for the lack of bandages for people of color. His response was to start his own bandage company. He created Tru-Colour Bandages. Using his own funds he designed three different shades of brown bandages to represent various skin tones.

As a parent, he knew there would be challenges in adoption, but he didn't think he would find inequality in healing.

Meisenheimer said. "There's something special about what a bandage does in terms of the connection between a parent and a child at the right moment in time where there's hurt, there's pain and a grown up can show up and provide care and love in the form of a bandage."

When Kai was finally able to see a Tru-Colour bandage, he said: "This bandage is for me, dad. This one matches me," Meisenheimer recalled. "He could identify... a four year old could at least articulate, 'this was meant for me.'"

What struck me about this story is the awareness of the connection between healing and belonging. When a child is hurting, a parent can't always make the wound or injury disappear – all parents know this – but they can, when they are in the right place and time – find a way to care. To match care to the person hurting.

A Band-Aid that matches and fits the one it covers is one way to say: it will get better. The bleeding has stopped. Recover can now begin. Go on your way.

The Christian faith is grounded on a truth that goes back to the very beginning of creation. We are created in God's image and blessed us with all we have been given. When we in turn bless ourselves in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit we are ascending to a basic belief that God creates, Jesus expresses God's love, and the Spirit breathes life into all we do. Our God is not a remote God that gave up caring when the Big Bang was set into motion, but is fully aware of all, cares for all and desires a relationship with all that God has made. Jesus said: (Matthew 6:26) "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"

When we gather to worship, we listen to a lot of scripture. It is not always easy to get the point of stories that are centuries old. A preacher does not have time to unpack every reading, but it is our hope that we can pull of a few things from one or two – pick out a thread to follow – that will give us all something to think about this morning and throughout the week ahead. That is our collective ongoing project. To bring the ancient into daily lives.

If we stay with the readings – week after week -- sometimes patterns begin to develop and themes emerge. Luke's gospel is especially interested in the lost, the last and the least. We heard a week ago that even a small amount of faith, like the size of a mustard seed, is all we need to grow our faith.

Today presents us with Naaman, the great commander of an army who was in high favor with his king, and an unnamed Samaritan in the gospel who was simply in the right place at the right time for a chance meeting with Jesus, both of them carried with them a burden that only God could lift. And each of them were healed and found a way to return and give thanks to God. Both stories are full us surprises. The great military leader had been aided by the intervention of an unnamed young girl from Israel, taken captive and separated from her homeland. Naaman was not a

perfect patient: he whined and protested. Yet God's desire to heal extended to this outsider.

And the same was true of the Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? 18 Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well."

Everyone needs encouragement from time to time. From the toddler taking their first steps into the outstretched arms of their parents, to the young people making their way through their teen years with all the insecurity and self-doubt that often goes with them, to couples setting out on their own, to grandparents trying to make good decisions about where they are going to live and how they are going to care for themselves well into their older years.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be." We need some inspiration to keep going, pushing forward, dreaming, to not to lose heart or get discouraged, or give into fear. To not give in or give up.

With one month away to the election, we all could use some encouragement! A month from now, after the results are in, our country will need many Band-Aids to heal the wounds and raw feelings it has been uncovered and stirred up.

We are well familiar that on many days the news we hear is often bad news. Global temperatures rising and glaciers melting, natural habitats threatened, wars unrelenting, refugees fleeing, wages stagnating, voters turned off or angry. The risk, even if we are generally positive glass half full people, is that slowly we are tempted to pull back and unsubscribe.

One of my favorite writers Anne Lamott ([Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life](#)) tells of a story of when she was young, watching her older brother, "who was ten years old at the time, was trying to get a report written on birds that he'd had three months to write, which was due the next day. He was at the kitchen table close to tears, surrounded by binder paper and pencils and unopened books about birds, immobilized by the hugeness of the task ahead. Then my father sat down beside him put his arm around my brother's shoulder, and said, "Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird."

Paul is in encouragement mode to Timothy. (2 Timothy 2:3-15)

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David—that is my gospel.

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;
If we endure, we will also reign with him;

if we are faithless, he remains faithful.

One step at a time. Bird by bird.

If we give into God's desire to break through in our lives, God will not disappoint. When to push forward and move through adversity, Jesus is by our side as constant companion. And even or if we lose our faith or courage in the great mystery that is God, God never loses sight of us and remains a constant, though at times a very silent and hidden loving partner.

Like a parent who wants a bandage to match the skin of her child, God, I believe, wants to find to match our needs with our hopes. To match our gifts with a world full of pain.

A son says to his father: "This bandage is for me, dad. This one matches me,"

We are not expected to find faith, truth, love, grace and forgiveness out of thin air.

God initiates, we respond. God begins, we continue. God invites, we join. God speaks, we listen. God loves, so we can love.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

The flesh that Jesus took on was the color of Naaman, the great commander with leprosy.

The flesh was the color of the young girl from Israel who helped him.

Of the prophet Elisa who cured him.

The flesh was the color of the Samaritan leper whose life had been given back to him through the power and grace of God – who returned to give thanks.

Healing begins now. Go on your way.