

Tikkun

Mark 9:29, Jeremiah 17:14, and Matthew 6:9-13

By John Roy, Pelham Road Church, September 2010.

The actors change from generation to generation but the script is remarkably the same. Those who are young or young at heart look around and see a world full of opportunity. The birds are singing and opportunity is the low fruit hanging on the tree of tomorrow. Those with a little mileage on their tires look around and say, "I've never seen it so bad." Their experience and age tells them the light ahead is not sunrise but an on-coming train.

It's hard to interpret the signs of the times. Are times really bad or are they just different? Do I see darker skies because the skies are dark or do I still have my sunglasses on? And while the fruit may be hanging low it may not be ripe?

In a similar fashion our message of faith, like this script, remains remarkably similar. The words and phrase evolve but the ideas stay the same. Humanity has a problem. We call it sin. Sometimes we say we need to be saved, other times we say we need to be redeemed. What we are testifying to is that is that we know something is wrong. We've been saying something is wrong for a long time. Now the problem is serious but it is only fatal if left untreated. We may not be able to agree if opportunity is knocking or if the skies are dark but surely we can agree that we live in a broken world. Let's open our eyes and be honest---the world, our world, and our lives are broken. We need to be healed.

The word Tikkun is an ancient word meaning to repair. If our eyes are open surely we can see that there is much in need of repair.

Exhibit A. A California man jealous over a message on his girlfriend's Facebook page tortured and imprisoned her for four days while their children were in the house. Deputies arrested 36-year-old Anthony Lozano at his home over the weekend on suspicion of false imprisonment, kidnapping, torture and other charges. Apparently Lozano accused the 23-year-old victim of having an affair after he saw the Facebook message. Lozano is suspected of grabbing the woman's hair, dragging her and threatening to kill her before choking her with a rope and a towel. The couple's child and another child belonging to the victim were in the house at the time.

Exhibit B. As the death toll has climbed from drug-related violence in Mexico, it's fallen largely to newspapers to keep the count. For three years the government of President Felipe Calderon has been cracking down on the drug trade and in three years 22,700 people have died.

I could go on but I think you get the point. This world is broken.

In typical fashion we are trying to find someone to blame. If you don't hear anything else I say at least hear this, nobody is to blame and everybody is responsible. Yes, even us, we are responsible. The usual solutions to problems, personal or social, is money or politics. However, the old stand by, is no longer working. Overuse or fatigue may be the explanation but it

is clear, poverty, drug use, impulse control, greed, envy, and selfish ambition cannot be remedied by a check or public policy. So what is the answer? Tikkun, to repair what is broken will demand a soulful answer.

“Heal me, O’Lord and I will be healed.” Tikkun is not our idea, it’s is God’s. To repair the world will require God and God’s people. It want happen without one or the other. It want be by God’s people writing checks or voting a certain way, to heal what is broken will require elbow grease and bended knees.

With a crowd this size we may not all agree on what is broken and in need of repair. If we made a list it may 20 or 30 entries. It will be as personal as marriages to as social as education. What’s on the list does matter, but the solution does not change. It demands tikkun----

The disciples on one occasion could not relieve a person of their suffering. Jesus, when he meet the boy, healed him. The disciples were puzzled, they ask, “Why were we unable to drive it out?” Jesus said, “Nothing can drive this out but prayer and fasting.” Some problems, some pain, some brokenness is so deep and deadly, the tried and true solutions become like poison. To repair brokenness requires, “prayer” the divine, us going to our knees and elbow grease, commitment or as Jesus put it “fasting.” Some brokenness require us to be all in, to make a difference.

How can we be a part of God's plan to repair the world? Keep in mind this want come out without prayer and fasting. You must make a difference or nothing changes.

In 2 weeks we will take a group of people to the Triune Mercy Center. We hope this is only the first of many. Our purpose for going is to prepare lunch for the homeless after church. Not only will we prepare lunch but hopefully we will walk among the homeless. It's a few hours, but it is chance to tikkun. To repair what is broken. Of course one meal is not going to fix the issues of homelessness. However, a meal given in Jesus name will say, Jesus cares and you can be healed.

There are parents who use our CDC and they drop their children off between 7 and 7:30 then they may not return until after 5. In the baby room for instance we have two teachers, or 4 hands and 8 or so babies. Which means at any given time there are six children not being touched. Periodically of course they are touched. This is the ratio demanded by law and it is what parents have come to accept as suitable care. But is this good? Does being touched as an infant make a difference? Would Anthony Lonzola turned out differently if he had being cuddled and held?

For a baby, tactile stimulation can be a matter of life and death. Michelangelo understood this: when he painted God extending a hand toward Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, he chose touch to depict the gift of life. From the nuzzling and caressing between mother and infant that form the foundation of the self, to the holding of hands between a son

and his dying father that is our most intimate and powerful form of communication.

The effect of even the most casual touch has been seen in several studies. In one, waitresses who touched their customers on the hand or shoulder as they returned change received larger tips than those who didn't. Small wonder that politicians believe wading into crowds to "press the flesh" will pay off on election day.

The idea that touch can heal is an old one. The first written records of massage - the word comes from an Arabic word meaning touch - date back 2500 years to China. A bas-relief on the tomb of Ankhma-hor, an Egyptian priest from 2200 B.C., depicts a seated man receiving what some historians interpret as a foot rub, or massage. Hippocrates, the Greek physician known as the father of modern medicine, was a zealot for massage in the fourth century B.C. He wrote, "The physician must be acquainted with many things and assuredly with anatripsis the medical art of rubbing."

When we say that somebody touches us emotionally, it means he or she has gone to the core of our being. Physical touch, too, is more than skin-deep. Skin is the human body's largest organ, containing millions of receptors - about 8000 in a single finger tip - that send messages through nerve fibers to the spinal cord and then to the brain. Positive, nurturing touch appears to stimulate the release of endorphines, the body's natural pain suppressors. That may explain why a mother's hug can literally "make

it better" when a child skins his knee. Babies are made better by being held, but we can't hold them all.

The church and the CDC are forming a partnership for "Reading and Rockers." We are looking for some folks to come in and rock babies. Hold babies. This is a twice a month commitment. No diapers to change. Not even diapers to buy. You just hold and rock babies, and also you tikkun what is broken.

Maybe you would prefer to read. What we learn from birth to three, is what will matter most to me, what we learn from three to five will keep us alive.

In South Carolina, 22% of all children are assessed not ready to learn to read for first grade and therefore not likely to become readers in first grade. (SC KidsCount 2007). The problem manifests itself 12 years later when students drop out of school as adolescents. In 2005, 35% of South Carolina high school students failed to graduate within four years.

Early literacy readiness statistics point directly to high school dropout figures. Too often these students came to school lacking reading readiness skills.

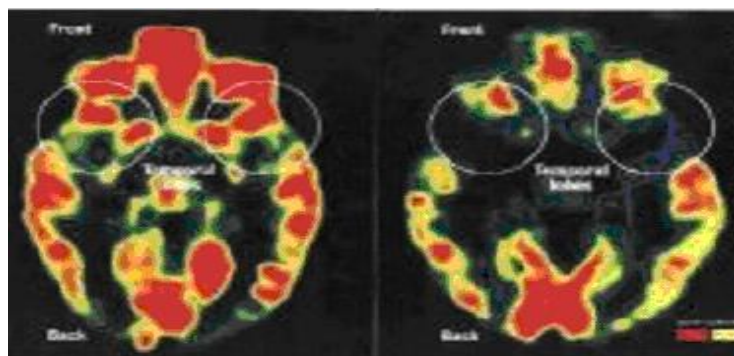
A fundamental key to success in school is the ability to read. Often due to reading problems, 9.6% of South Carolina children fail by grade three. A child who does not learn to read by fourth grade is likely to struggle with reading as long as he or she stays in school and then into adulthood. $\frac{3}{4}$ of

school dropouts and ½ of adolescents with criminal records have reading problems. States project future prison cell needs based on third grade reading scores; 67% of inmates read below fourth grade level. South Carolina has the highest incarceration rate in the nation.

Literacy is a legacy; a four-year-old child's vocabulary size predicts 11th grade reading scores. The best source of new words is reading aloud from picture books. Children who have not been read to by adults are the children at the end of first and third grade who cannot read. Would you come twice a month to read to children. No sweating, no digging holes, only reading.

A baby is born with more than 100 billion brain cells. Some of these cells are already connected to other cells at birth. But much of the brain's wiring does not happen until after birth. In the first three years of life, brain cells form connections in many parts of the brain. Some of the most important of these connections are involved with language development.

In two brain scans, one belongs to a child who has been cared for, interacted verbally with, and stimulated. The other brain scan is a child who has had little interaction, and offered no stimulation. Areas of the neglected child's brain have failed to form altogether.



Source: The brain scan comparison was adapted from the Special Edition of Newsweek, Spring/summer 1997

A wide range of experiences with printed and spoken language, from infancy through early childhood, strongly influences a child's future success in reading. All young children need frequent conversations, interactive read aloud time, and questions that develop vocabulary and thought.

We need people in their lives that show them how to read a book, how to ask questions, how to have fun with reading. Teachers have to discipline and have mandated tasks that they must complete each day. Parents are the first teachers but we know that in this tight economy, parents are very

busy and sometimes cannot provide that model. You as a reader can be that person for the children.

Another way we see the brokenness is in common politeness and kindness. In an organized fashion we would like to perform 150 acts of kindness in 30 days. Now, to me, 150 sounds like a low number, but we came to this number because it is a way of celebrating with the Greenville Baptist Association on their 150th anniversary. I would hope we could do 150 acts of kindness in less than a week. Nevertheless to tikkun the world we will have to get the ball rolling, help someone fix a flat, give someone a ride to the store, bring a co-worker who works through lunch something back from your lunch. Small acts of kindness but a way of opening our eyes. Throughout the year you will hear of other ways to tikkun. If you are willing to pray and fast then we can make a difference, if you don't want to, then two things. One, don't complain, if you don't bend your knees then don't complain. Two, get out of our way, because the world is broken and God----has sent us to offer his healing touch.

These efforts will make a difference but the real problem, I have yet to address. The real reason for our brokenness is yet to be identified. In general it may be sin, but in specific it is---

Jesus give us a hint at the problem and offers a solution. In Matthew's gospel Jesus is asked to provide his disciples with a prayer. Jesus arms them with this prayer.

*'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
¹⁰your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹Give us today our daily bread.
¹²Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.*

Do you recognize the problem? Do you see Jesus' solution? It's right before us. It's not something we do. It's not a verb, not even a noun. We are broken because of a pronoun. And the better news is we are healed and we heal the broken when we use Jesus word. The problem is "me" "my" "I" "you" and "them." The solution is "our" and "us." It's not simply a pronoun change, it is a change in attitude—a change in latitude, a new way of seeing.

The attention deficit child you teach is not a "them" he is an "us." The drug addict teenage girl is not a "you," she is an "us." Prayer is not about "me" or "mine," but about "us." The prayer Jesus taught was void of anger or selfishness—I don't wish forgiveness on myself but judgment on you. "Forgive us our debts" we want everyone forgiven. It's not "my" daily bread, it is "our" daily, we are concerned about the homeless getting bread, the working single mom, the senior adult living on a fixed income, and ourselves.

By changing this word, we open our eyes. The baby in the CDC is important because she is God's child and our brother or sister. The service woman returning home and looking for a job is important because she is

our brother and sister. The needs of our youth are important because they are our brother and sister. The needs of the elderly are important because they are our Father's child. When I use the word "our" I am reminded we have only one father. The rich woman and the poor woman, the red neck and the blue blood, the Arab and the American.

This is a revolutionary prayer, because no longer are we divided. No longer is it OK for me to be blessed and you to be cursed. This is a prayer which says boldly the way to heal the world is to refrain from selfishness and unite with compassion for each other.

What would You Do is a television program on ABC. Each week they hire actors and create situations which call on people (the unsuspecting public, seen on hidden cameras) to face ethical scenarios which require action. If you watch it long enough you see that there is more inaction than action. The producers create situations where people have to react from being insulted with a racial slurs to stopping someone from driving home drunk. In one episode an airplane pilot is drinking heavily less than an hour from his scheduled departure. In the bar most people look at him with disguise but do nothing. You never know how many folks actually spoke up, but the show reveals one person who asked for his business card and then calls his office and ask them to re-schedule his assignment because he is in no condition to fly. While some bought the pilot drinks most just looked away and minded their own business. One man, when asked why he didn't do anything said, "Well it wasn't my flight." All this man wants is his father in heaven to watch over him, he really does not care much about what

happens to me or you. There's the biggest crack that needs to be repaired. The world revolves around me.

Our Father who is in heaven help me to care about, your children, the sisters and brothers here on earth. Hallowed be your name, don't worry about my reputation or my image, it's not important. Your Kingdom come and your will be done, even if it conflicts with my own plans. Give us our daily bread, give bread to those in Pakistan, give bread to those living under the bridge. Forgive us our debts. Forgive the man who tortured his wife and forgive those who simply do not know any better. And lead us not into temptation. Protect the addict. Protect the embezzler.

The first step to repairing what is broken is by seeing others as God's children. When we do this then it is easier to say yes. Remember some things only come out with prayer and fasting. It's time to bend the knees and roll up the sleeves.