

# Too Much Pain to Participate

## *UnDone*

22.09.18 | Jeff Martens

Well, it's fun that we got to start our in person gatherings this morning with a communal game of rock paper scissors, a good way to just have some enjoyment together. And, you know, if you think about it, I think the thing that keeps the game, rock paper scissors, interesting, despite its simplicity or how many times you play it is actually the paradox of it. You know, have you noticed this, that on any given turn, any of the elements, rock, paper, or scissor, they can either help you or hurt you. That's kind of the paradox of rock paper, scissor, you know, when I'm going in with rock, I know that the only thing I'm imagining, my only expectation is that I am gonna smash scissor, but as we play the game at least half of the time we are surprised or at the very least reminded that paper does in fact cover rock, and in that case hurts rock, or you could say that that rock actually hurt me for relying on it. And I think that's what kind of keeps the game interesting, no matter how many times you play it. But that kind of paradox, I think, can really mess with us when there's way more on the line.

And I wonder how many of us have actually bumped into that paradox when it comes to the church, whatever your relationship with the church has been. You know, when you, when you come to a church, you join or participate in a church, or even if you're watching the church from a distance, you participate in the church, only expecting it to help until it doesn't, until it actually hurts. And in this UnDone series that we find ourselves in, that's what we wanna talk about today, asking the question: "Is there a way for us to be undone with the church even, or especially, in light of all of the hurt that it may have cause?"

And I know that too many of us have been hurt by the church and the rock paper, scissor metaphor might be a good one because the range of hurts can be anything from, from paper cuts to stones, thrown to scissors, jabbed. I know for some of you, you've had experiences of feeling, neglected or overlooked or forgotten or UN cared for in some way by the church. You know, some of you have been met with condemnation in the church when you should have been met with grace. Some of you have experienced exclusion when you should have experienced welcome. Some of you have given a lot to the church. You've poured yourself into it, your time, your talents, your treasures only to be left feeling kind of worn out and burned out while the church still seems to want more. And friends when we're talking about being hurt by the church, what we're talking about is being hurt by people, cuz the church is people and we're talking about names and faces people in our life groups on our ministry teams. Sometimes even at the hands of church leaders or maybe, your hurts in the church they've even come from outside of the church sort to activities and programs, but in your personal life, maybe even with someone you live with who is aspiring to follow Jesus and participating in the church, but then they hurt you in a way beyond what you can imagine. It makes you wonder is this church thing even working or worth it because of all the hurt it's caused, and friends, I wanna do my best to empathize with you today. Not that I've been hurt in the ways that that you have been. **But** I've experienced hurts within the church too.

And I spent some time in preparing for this, reflecting on some of those experiences, sometimes from simply feeling, sort of overworked and underappreciated in the context of the church, to other times having well thought through and sincere decisions, get knee jerk, sort of criticisms and shot down right away. Some of the most painful experiences for me, they they've come when folks have transitioned away from this faith community, and knowing that can happen in our lives from time to time, there's been some that have just happened in a really painful and hurtful way. Some that I've even cried myself to sleep over. You know, a bunch of paper cuts, a number of stones thrown and even a few scissor jabs and friends that all adds up to a pretty good reason to feel done with the church. And it's because of that paradox that we know this isn't how it should be, that our inclination, that the church should be a community and a place that helps rather than hurts is a good one.

Now I think we can concede right off the bat that like any group of people, the church is made up of imperfect people, even broken people. And the cliché that we've heard that, "hurt people hurt people" is a good one, cuz that's true. It's true in the church; there's hurting and broken people who create hurt and brokenness in people. However, when we come to the church, we expect if this life of following Jesus in faith together makes any difference at all, we expect that the church should be a place that is breaking that cycle helping far more than it hurts, but that hasn't been the experience for all of us. So with the hurts that we carry, how can we be "undone" with the church today? I wanna tell you that I believe there is absolutely reason to not be done.

And I think that reason is found in Jesus, and that's what we're focusing on this in this series: looking to Jesus to see if we can be actually undone by Jesus, by who he is and what he has done....then maybe we can be undone together with the church. And I wanna tell you today that when we start by looking at Jesus, I wanna spend a few minutes doing that together. I think we can see that when it comes to our hurts, Jesus gets it. That Jesus has the capacity more than anyone else to empathize with all of the hurts we've experienced. Jesus gets it because Jesus hurts. Jesus himself hurt. I don't know how familiar you are with the stories of the gospels, the life of Jesus recorded in the gospels. But if you follow them along, you actually start to notice that frequently and consistently, Jesus was hurt by the people around him, that any of us would've expected only to help. Right from his birth, Jesus' family actually had to escape to a neighboring nation as refugees because the king of Jesus' people wanted to kill him. When Jesus grew up and he started his ministry, after the very first sermon he ever preached in his home town, in his home church, his home community reacted to him by grabbing him, taking him outside as a mob and trying to throw him off a cliff, and Jesus had to sort of escape from the crowd.

Friends, can you imagine the disillusionment, the disorientation, the pain and betrayal? It's amazing that Jesus didn't give up on the entire thing right there. And then Jesus had many accusations thrown at him as a blasphemer or unclean or as a law breaker, as a glutton and a drunk. His family once called him crazy and two times the religious leaders in his community said that he was from the devil. And ultimately, if you know the story, he was betrayed by one of his disciples into the hands of political and religious leaders to be executed. Based on my quick and very sophisticated theological rock paper, scissor math, I would say that he'll look at just one of the gospels and Jesus experienced at least seven paper cuts, nine stones thrown and 13 scissor jabs, from the people in his life and even faith community that he would've expected to help.

But when it comes to Jesus getting what it means to be hurt within the church and hurting himself, I think there was one instance and one relationship, one name and face that created the potential for Jesus to be hurt and to be done more than any other. Many of us are familiar with Peter, who was one of Jesus' closest friends and disciples and Peter, he walked with and lived with, followed and learned under Jesus for three years of Jesus' life and ministry. And he helped care for Jesus and was cared for by Jesus. They had a deep, intimate bond together as friends, and Peter, as a follower of, of Jesus, at one point in their ministry (we heard about this last week as well), as Peter began to see who Jesus was, more than any other, Jesus made this incredible promise to him when he said to him, you are Peter - and Peter's name meant rock, so it's kind of a play on words- He said, ***you are Peter, and on this rock, on you, Peter, I will build my church.***

It's an incredible promise. And it's actually the moment where Jesus first initiated and invented this idea of the church, of a community that would unite itself together around the idea that Jesus is God. And he committed and promised to Peter that it would be built on Peter and people like Peter, but as the momentum around this movement and this community grew, do you know what happened between Jesus and Peter as Jesus ministry advanced and increased? So did its opposition, and at the height of its opposition in the time where Jesus needed his friends and his faith community more than ever, Peter got out the scissors and he hurt Jesus with them, not just once, but, but three times denying Jesus, denying and cursing the one that he had called Messiah, turning his back on the one who had promised to build the church on him.

Friends, I think Jesus gets it. Cuz Jesus hurts. Jesus hurts at the hands of the church. And Jesus hurts along with you in all the ways that you've been hurt. And Jesus agrees with you that this isn't how it should be. This is not how the church was intended to impact people. But here's the thing. Not only as we look at Jesus, I think not only do we see that Jesus gets it because Jesus hurts, but that in his hurting Jesus actually heals. That in his hurting, Jesus has the power and capacity to bring healing to us. And that's because after he was denied and abandoned by Peter, Jesus went all the way to the cross. The pinnacle of human hurt, enduring public shame, enduring physical torture, enduring emotional abandonment and a deep sense of spiritual forsakenness until he ultimately gave up and sacrificed his life for the world. The cross where Jesus not only suffers for us, but he suffers with us.

He suffers with you this divine act of solidarity and co-suffering love and a co-suffering love that creates the possibility for healing. The prophet, Isaiah, hundreds of years before Jesus even lived. He prophetically imagined what Jesus would accomplish, what he had accomplished, writing as though it was complete. In Isaiah 53, he writes this,

***“Jesus was despised and rejected by a mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain.”***

Jesus gets it, cuz Jesus hurts. Surely he took up our pain and he bore our suffering. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our inequities and here's the good news today. And by his wounds, we are healed. Friends by the wounds of Jesus on a cross, healing is possible. That the cross unleashes the divine energies of loving confrontation facing wound and hurt head on, but then offering compassion and grace and forgiveness, even a love for enemies that can create healing.

And that's what exactly what Jesus did in his hurting with, and for Peter. Because following his Easter resurrection, he went to Peter, demonstrating this divine way, in loving confrontation, speaking the truth in love, not ignoring it or pretending it was okay. But then with grace and compassion, with forgiveness and an invitation towards reconciliation, Jesus invited Peter into a journey of mutually healing together so that Jesus wouldn't be done building the church on Peter and people like him.

Friends it's because of Jesus, his hurting with us and that through his hurting healing is possible, that I don't think we need to be done with the church today. We can be undone by Jesus in this way. So how do we respond to this? What, what do we do to participate in what we see in Jesus? I think there's two simple instructions we see in the New Testament that can help us respond today.

The first thing is that we need to come to Jesus with our hurts, that in all the raw transparency of how we've been hurt, we need to seek to come to Jesus, come to know Jesus, come to experience the power and presence of Jesus that can bring healing. The apostle Paul described this when he wrote to the Corinthian church, the beginning of 2 Corinthians, he writes this,

***“Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's come with gratitude to the God we see revealed in Jesus, the God from whom all help comes.”***

The God from whom all comfort and all healing and all help comes, that when we come to this God, we are only going to experience the help and healing that we need. And we can find that in the God revealed in Jesus. And that's what we're about as a church, wanting to continually get to know, practice the presence of, and follow Jesus in a way that can bring this help, this comfort and this healing.

And then out of that, I think the second thing that we can do, is we can become “healing people who are healing people” – that out of our healing, we can offer healing to others. That passage on 2 Corinthians continues this way. It says,

***“God helps us in all our troubles, all our pains and all our hurts.”***

Why? So that we are able to help others using the same help and healing that we ourselves have received from God, extending that then to others, becoming healing people who are healing people, breaking the cycle of just being hurting people who are hurting people. I think that's how we can be undone by who Jesus is and what he has done so that we don't have to be done with the church.

Friends, I believe that's possible, not just because of what I see in Jesus. But because how I've tasted and seen Jesus do that through people, real people in this faith community. As I was reflecting on some of the ways I've experienced hurt in the context of the church, the paper cuts and the stones thrown even a couple of scissor jabs. I was reminded of this really difficult season back in 2013, where we were going through a few ministry changes and it was creating some friction. I was experiencing a variety of criticisms and some strained relationships and it kind of felt like paper cuts were coming from all sides in a way that really hurt and had me wonder whether I might be done with this whole church thing. And I remember one night when I went back to the church office kind of late, hoping to get just ahead of my work, trying to work my way out of the heaviness and the pain and the difficulty.

And I walked in my office and I remember seeing the voicemail light blinking, which in a digital age of texting more than talking, I don't know about you, but the, the voicemail notification, it could be kind of terrifying, a little anxiety inducing. And my default instinct was that it was probably just another paper cut coming my way. But I picked up the receiver and I punched in the mailbox number and right away, I heard a familiar voice of a familiar church member, a guy named Andy from our Welland location, who was leaving me a short message because as he told me later, he had been nudged by Jesus throughout the entire day. For whatever reason, he didn't know what all was going on in my life, to leave me a message of encouragement and appreciation. After I finished listening the message, I called Andy right back to express my gratitude for the impact of his words and the healing they were bringing in that moment. And when I hung up the phone, I broke down in tears.

I remember getting on my knees in my office feeling quite overwhelmed and emotional. And then I had to send Andy one more note and email to try to further express what that moment had meant to me. And I want to just read a few of the words from that email to you, this is dated September 12th, 2013, 8:45 PM.

*Hey Andy, I can't help, but write you a quick message. As, as an immediate response to our phone conversation tonight, for the second time today, I find myself in tears. As I mentioned, I'd had a tough day dealing with many doubts and fears so much so that I became overwhelmed with a sense of inadequacy and a burden that was feeling too heavy. I was hurting and wondered if I might be done against all my natural impulses. I had a moment where I actually broke down crying at home in my living room this afternoon. Interestingly, I found myself overcome with emotion once again, as soon as we hung up the phone, but thanks to your encouraging and supportive words, I was overcome with a mix of gratitude, humility, strength, and a renewed sense of passion and confidence, a healing experience. I can't thank you enough for what our conversation meant to me tonight. And I love that we get to be the church together.*

Friends. Andy is an example as a guy who's been around the church long enough to have a few paper cuts of his own, an example of a person who brings his hurts to Jesus and is becoming a healing person who is healing people. People, like me, he'd be the first to say he is not doing it perfectly, but in a work in progress, Jesus-like kind of way, on a day when I thought I might be done with church, Andy made it possible for me to be undone and on September 12th, 2013, I loved getting to be the church with healing people like Andy.

And guess what? On September 18th, 2022, I still love getting to be the church with healing people like you. And my hope today is that we can be undone by the healing of Jesus that helps us not be done with becoming the healing community of the church. Not that there isn't still hurts that we're carrying or that there won't be hurts along the way.

And before I close, I wanna say, I know I, I alluded to very briefly earlier, that some of you are carrying hurts at the hands of leaders in the church. And I know that some of you listening today, or maybe some of you know someone who might need to hear this today might need to listen to this. Some of you are carrying hurts at the hands of us, of Southridge leadership, in a way that we should never have hurt you, and in a way that's not okay.

And I wanna say today that, we're sorry. We wanna make it right. We want to do better. We want to keep bringing our own hurts to Jesus, to experience the healing that he provides so that we can become healing people with you and help guide this community to be the healing community that the church is meant to be. And maybe some of you are carrying some hurts right now that are hurting and are unresolved. And if that's you,, I wanna say with, with humility, with trust, with patience, that we invite you to bring that to us, to let us know, because we want to say sorry directly. We wanna make it right. We wanna repent. We wanna participate together in the mutual healing that we can see and we can find, and we can be undone by in Jesus.

Yes, the church has caused far more hurt than Jesus ever meant it to, but friends, Jesus gets it. Jesus hurts with us. And by Jesus's wounds, he promised that people like Peter and people like Andy and people like you, and even people like me would get to be healed by him so that we can participate in bringing healing to others as the church. And friends, that's a church I don't want to be done with. That's a church that I don't think the world wants us to be done with. And if we're undone by Jesus in is healing in our lives, I don't think we have to be done with it either. That's my prayer for you. Amen.