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I have a friend who is a dermatologist. We were catching up on the phone the other day. Since we have seen each other last, years ago, we have both had kids. We laughed as we compared our children's injuries, especially the scraped knees and cut-up elbows that summertime brings. As we talked, she made one comment that stuck with me, and I know she had no idea it would work its way into this Sunday's sermon. She said (remember, she's a skin doctor), "If kids would just learn to not pick at their wounds, they would heal faster."

I realize this illustration is fairly gross for some of you who are made up of a delicate nature, but trust me, I am going somewhere with this. But first, a warning—it's gonna get grosser before it gets better.

I thought back to my own childhood and realized how right she was. I am sure your childhood was similar...in the summer, how many mosquito

bites did we scratch and scratch until they bled? How many scabs did we pick until they bled? In the winter, how many chapped lips did we chew on until they bled? I still have one scar from a blister I got from a terrible sunburn when I was fifteen years old; the scar more than likely would have healed and faded over time had I not picked at it so much as a kid...but it tormented me so much, I couldn't help myself.

Wounds like these would heal quickly and cleanly if they were left alone. But the childish instinct is to *not* leave them alone; the childish instinct is to pick and pick until the wound is reopened and bleeds all over again. Such is a child's nature...*when I was a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child...*

*...but now that I am an adult, I put an end to childish ways...*or so says Paul. Good for him. He must know something I don't.

So does Paul mean that, as an adult, the picking stops? I mean, I, as an adult, say the same things to my kids my father always said to me, “Don’t pick at that bug bite, just let it heal,” or “Don’t pick at that scab, just let it heal.” They nod at me and then turn around and pick behind my back. It’s the way of children; so, as grown-up, wise and mature adults, surely, then, we have stopped picking at wounds, since we know that leaving them alone lets them heal faster. Adults know better than to pick at wounds.

Or do we? Have you ever seen my fingers? Sometimes my very fingers bleed, because I pick at them, not as a nervous habit, but rather when I have a lot on my mind. I researched this habit and learned that oftentimes, highly intelligent people have this habit, because the brain can get bored even when being bombarded by many different thoughts and so the thinker picks at his or her fingers, allowing the brain to sort of multi-task as it processes. I have done this since I was a child. My father picked at his

fingers when he was a small child and still does. I noticed the fingers of one of my sons the other day, and my heart sank. It seems as though I did not put an end to childish ways, but instead passed on an undesirable habit to my son. And so children and adults share the same nature.

This human tendency—for both children and adults—to pick at wounds does not apply only to the physical body, of course. We also pick at the wounded human heart. We do not let scars from the past heal quickly and cleanly; we pick at them over and over again until we become one great big bleeding heart...I wonder if that's where that phrase comes from? If someone hurt us long ago, we do not let that wound heal; instead, we pick at it for the rest of our lives, as a way of reminding ourselves that we are unlovable, undesirable and worthy of nothing but scorn and rejection.

Love between people is rarely the kind of love Paul describes for us today in his letter to the church in Corinth. It sounds beautiful that love is

patient and kind and all-enduring...but in reality, more often than not, love leaves wounds in its wake, wounds that never heal because our picking at them won't let them heal.

And sometimes, ironically, it is issues of faith that open up old wounds and make them bleed again, which is exactly what happens in today's Gospel. Jesus goes back to his hometown and speaks to the people about love and grace. "You are sick people," Jesus tells them, "but I have come to heal you. I have come to bring good news to you who are poor! I have come to bring freedom to those of you who are enslaved! I have come to give sight to you who are blind, to make the lame run, to give speech to those of you who can't talk! I have come to liberate all of you who are oppressed!"

And who among you is not oppressed and condemned and enslaved by your own wounded heart that will not heal because you are constantly picking at it so that it never stops bleeding?

But Jesus hits too close to home here, and I am not just talking about the town, I am talking about the fact that when people are told they are sick, that they need a doctor, that they are not going to get any better on their own, that they are literally bleeding to death and there's nothing they can do about it, they get defensive, and these people get so angry at Jesus that they try to kill him by throwing him off a cliff.

Clearly, Jesus hit a universal human nerve here. Jesus proclaims that he has come to heal those wounds that we have been picking at all our lives. One would think we would rejoice over this good news...but we don't...we push Jesus away, over a cliff if we have to. Because we do not want to be told we are not well, that we cannot heal ourselves.

But that's the difficult truth, isn't it, that we are not well, that we are wounded and scarred and we cannot be healed because we never stop picking long enough to let the healing begin? But does it have to be that way forever?

Or, as Lent approaches and we consider our own mortality and as we ponder Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, can we be strong enough to still our hands and stop picking at our wounds—our physical wounds, our emotional wounds and our spiritual wounds—long enough to let the Spirit of God begin its miraculous work of healing...*to give speech to the mouth that has been told it has nothing valuable to say...to give sight to the eyes that have been convinced there is nothing beautiful left to see in this world...to give sound to the ears that have had nothing but abuse and condemnation poured into them...to give speed to the feet that have long*

*been told they are lazy and good for nothing...to give strength to the heart
that has lost its will to keep beating?*

It is my personal goal in 2013 to finally let some wounds heal, once and for all...some wounds that go back a long, long time. Join me on this journey! It's time to stop picking at our wounds...time to stop reopening them, time to stop bleeding. Truth be told, we can't afford to lose any more blood...but Jesus can...and he opens his wounds on the cross and his blood pours out over the entire world, opening his own wounds so that ours can finally heal.