

This past week, Sarah started a new job in management at a different hospital emergency room. Yes, it's a good way for her to grow in her career, help her gain a broader perspective on the workings of emergency medicine, but it will, also, mean more time in an office as opposed to by a patient's bedside, which she will miss. Because, every once in a while, there is healing that happens even before any kind of medical treatment is given.

Now, the usual happening in the ER is either someone is rushed in by ambulance or you go through the main entrance with some kind of physical pain. What the patient is looking for, even family and close friends, who come in as well, is an end to that pain as fast as humanly possible.

Oftentimes the nurse is looked upon as a nuisance roadblock between them and the doctor, who will, obviously, come in with all the answers to solve your medical issues through a simple drip through an IV or maybe down the hall for a quick painless procedure. But, things tend to get slightly more complicated than that when you're dealing with bones, muscles, nerve-endings, organ functions and plenty more that requires all these people in scrubs and white coats to stay in school far longer than the basic anatomy and physiology class in high school. And in those complications, comes the

nurse who has to deliver the news that with those complications comes the wait and the wait that feels as if it can rival the time of all eternity.

Nevertheless, every once in a while those moments turn out to be the ones of healing, too, because some patients come in not just with physical pain, but overwhelming emotional pain: feelings of worthlessness, and wondering if any care will be given to them because of where they come from, or how little money they make in comparison to the patient the next room over. It may seem trivial to most of us, but the circumstances in hospital emergency rooms not just around Cleveland, but all over the world are absolutely endless, beyond anything we can possibly imagine. We are not just talking about heart attacks and strokes. We're talking about helpless bystanders of gang violence. We're talking about young women who have been raped in sex-trafficking rings. We're talking about children who grow up in homes who never have food to eat. Such people do not just come in with physical trauma, but pain that tears their very soul apart. Every once in a while, the powerful healing that emerges is when the patient is, simply, treated like a human being, not a number on a chart, not a line to be checked off to move them out to get someone else in, not to mention limiting their

entire identity into the title of victim or whatever the disease may be. We're not just talking about physical healing. We are talking about transformational healing, which is not limited to emergency rooms, but wherever God shows up; which is, by the way, everywhere.

So, today, we offer such a glimpse of healing. However, it should be mentioned that there is no promise given this morning that when the oil is placed on your forehead, if you choose to do so, that you will be instantly healed of all your physical ailments; that you will never experience pain again. Instead, the oil is meant to be the same oil used at baptism, when the youngest of children of God have absolutely no idea what they are getting themselves into: into a life of random circumstances that could lead to unbearable suffering; and yet the promise that no matter the pain, no matter how it got there, God is not going to let you go through it alone. When the oil is placed on the child's forehead, marked with the cross of Christ, it is by no means a promise that the life they are about to take gradual hold of is going to be easy, without its fair share of complications, to say the least. The oil is meant to let the child physically feel the love of God is seeping

into the pores of their skin, even into the pores of their very soul: that they will be forever identified ultimately as a child of God.

So, today, you get the same divine promise. No matter what you are going through, you are not defined by whatever aches and pains you are fighting off day-by-day. You are not identified by God with whatever emotional or spiritual baggage you carry, no matter how long you have tried to get rid of it. The oil this day is a reminder that you are still God's child, and God will be right beside you in spite of whatever this life attempts to throw at you, whether that be in a sanctuary on a Sunday morning, God forbid a hospital emergency room, or your own home in the middle of a sleepless night. God has already showed us the endless limits to just how much God is willing to stick it out with us. The cross was not just about eternity; it was about right here, right now: God with us through the depths into the heights and everything in between. God's love, simply, cannot operate any other way. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen.