

ON A COMMON SAYING

It Was Not an Enemy

*The wounds friends leave, the scars Christ kept, and the forgiveness he
gave away*

Essay · By **Larry Herzog Jr.** · *Ordinary Means*
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There is a line making the rounds. You have probably seen it on a black background in white sans-serif, or heard it read over piano music in a video that ends before you can think about it:

Not a single scar on my heart came from one of my enemies. They came from people I thought loved me.

It is passed around with a name attached. Usually the Joker. Sometimes it appears in a longer form, about wearing a lot of scars and not one of them coming from an enemy. The attribution is false. The line is in no Batman film, no comic, no graphic novel. It is anonymous, it was built to travel, and attaching a famous name to an anonymous sentence is simply how sentences travel now. Nobody is being deceived on purpose. The name is packaging.

I want to be careful here, because there is a cheap essay available at this point and I do not intend to write it. The cheap essay says: *your meme is fake, but the Bible said it first, therefore checkmate*. That is a satisfying thing to write and a useless thing to read. Being older is not the same as being true, and Scripture is not improved by winning a citation contest.

So let me start by granting the saying everything it deserves.

What the saying gets right

It is right. Not partly right. Right.

The wounds that go deepest are not delivered by opponents. An enemy who hurts you has at least done you the courtesy of announcing himself. You knew where he stood, you had your guard up, the injury arrived more or less on schedule. What undoes a person is the injury that comes from inside the circle, from someone who was given access precisely because access had been earned. It is not the size of the wound. It is that the hand holding the knife was a hand you had held.

Scripture knows this, and says it with more force than any meme has managed:

Indeed, it is not an enemy who insults me, or else I could bear it; it is not one who hates me who arrogantly taunts me, or else I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like me, my close friend in whom I confided. We would share personal thoughts with each other; in God's temple we would walk together among the crowd. (Psalm 55:12-14 NET)

Read the last line slowly. *In God's temple we would walk together among the crowd*. This was not a friend, generically. This was the man beside him in the pew. The meme says the

wound came from someone you thought loved you. The psalm says it came from someone you worshiped beside.

And the psalm knows the specific bewilderment of it, the part that only makes sense in retrospect:

He attacks his friends; he breaks his solemn promises to them. His words are as smooth as butter, but he harbors animosity in his heart. His words seem softer than oil, but they are really like sharp swords. (Psalm 55:20-21 NET)

Smooth as butter. That is why you did not see it coming, and why you have spent so long since then re-reading old conversations looking for the seam. There was no seam. Nothing looked wrong. That was the point.

If you carry that particular scar, you are not being melodramatic and you are not weak for still feeling it. You are in the Psalter.

Where the two part company

Here is the difference, and it is the whole essay.

The saying is a diagnosis that hands you a weapon. Look at how it gets used in the comments underneath. Guard your heart. Trust no one. Watch the people closest to you, because they are the real threat. Keep the circle small. Every one of those conclusions is reasonable. Every one of them is the sound of a door being closed and bolted from the inside. The aphorism gives you your pain back, certified as real, and then leaves you alone in a room with it. That is all it has to give. It is not being stingy. It has nothing else.

Psalm 55 does not stop there. The very next verse after the butter and the swords is this:

Throw your burden upon the Lord, and he will sustain you. He will never allow the godly to be upended. (Psalm 55:22 NET)

That is not a nicer feeling than the meme offers. It is a different action entirely. The saying tells you what to do with the *people*. The psalm tells you what to do with the *weight*. And notice what it does not say. It does not tell you to process it, or sit with it, or grow from it. It tells you to throw it, off of you and onto someone else, someone outside yourself who is not sick of hearing about it.

That is the Lutheran instinct in miniature. Comfort is never something you generate from inside the wound. It arrives from outside you, extra nos, delivered by someone else, usually with hands and a voice. The aphorism can only turn you inward, because inward is the only direction it knows.

The night in which he was betrayed

And then there is this.

Every wound Christ carried into the grave came from a friend. Not one from an enemy, not really. Rome was an instrument. The Sanhedrin was an audience. The wounds came from inside the circle. A kiss from a man who had been given a seat at the table and the money bag besides. Three denials from the one who had sworn he would die first.

Zechariah had already said whose sword it was, and who stood on the other end of it:

Awake, sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my associate,” says the Lord who rules over all. Strike the shepherd that the flock may be scattered. (Zechariah 13:7 NET)

The man who is my associate. Even here, at the highest possible level, the one struck is not an adversary being put down. He is the companion. The pattern runs all the way up.

And on the road to the garden, Jesus quotes that verse over the eleven of them, to their faces:

Then Jesus said to them, “This night you will all fall away because of me, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’” (Matthew 26:31 NET)

He walks into it knowing the count.

Now notice *when* he institutes the Supper. Paul did not have to give us the timestamp. He gives it anyway, and he gives it before the bread is even in his hands:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed took bread. (1 Corinthians 11:23 NET)

That hour. Not before the betrayal as a precaution, not afterward as a repair. During. The bread is broken and the cup is given at the exact hour the scars are being inflicted by the people who claimed to love him, and both are handed to the men inflicting them. The Supper is not what he did in spite of the betrayal. It is what he did with it.

He kept the scars, and then he gave something away

Sunday evening, the doors are locked, because the men inside are afraid. These are the ones who scattered exactly as predicted. He does not knock and he does not wait for an apology.

Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. (John 20:19-20 NET)

Peace first. Then the wounds. Not brandished, not itemized, not held over anyone’s head. Shown.

And then watch what he does with the next breath. Having displayed to these particular men the scars these particular men had a hand in, he hands them an office:

If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone’s sins, they are retained. (John 20:23 NET)

That is the sequence, and it is not decoration. The risen Christ shows the wounds his friends gave him and then, immediately, puts the forgiveness of sins into the mouths of the friends who gave them. The men who scattered are made the ones who absolve. What was done to him becomes what is given through them. If you have ever wondered why a Lutheran will not let go of absolution spoken out loud by another human being, it is because it was instituted in a locked room by a man with holes in his hands, standing in front of the people responsible for them.

Eight days later he does it once more for the one who missed it, and he does not scold Thomas so much as offer him the evidence:

Put your finger here, and examine my hands. Extend your hand and put it into my side. (John 20:27 NET)

He kept the scars. He kept the scars his friends put in him, carried them through death, brought them back, and used them as evidence for the defense.

What to do with your scars

The aphorism is true, and it is a dead end. It can tell you where your scars came from. It cannot tell you what they are for. And it can do nothing whatever about the scars you have put in other people, which is a subject it never raises and never will, because the entire appeal of the line depends on your being the one who was wounded.

The gospel raises it. You are in that locked room on both sides of it. You have been the friend who was wounded, and you have been the one who swore he never would and then did. And the answer to both is the same: peace be with you, your sins are forgiven, take and eat, this is my body, given for you, on the night he was betrayed.

That is not a line that fits on a black background. It fits on an altar.