

The Healing Power of Belovedness
Healing Sunday, January 8, 2023, 10:00 a.m.
All Saints Church, Pasadena
The Rev. Mike Kinman

And a voice from the heavens said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

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I am going to invite us to do a little light yoga this morning – and I'm not talking about the usual Episcopal stand-sit-kneel yoga – this is just a couple of poses that you can do what you want with.

Now I want to preface this by unpacking that word invite ... because it's an important word. We don't get invited enough ... especially when it comes to our bodies.

Our bodies are sacred. And part of what makes them sacred is they bear the wounds and scars of what has happened to them before. Invite means you are in control of what you want to do with your body and how long you want to do it.

I say invite because much of what we carry in our bodies has been put there without our consent. Either into our bodies directly or through the bodies of our ancestors. And it's time to reclaim that agency over our bodies.

I say invite because it is an invitation into a relationship with your body ... and we each have a different relationship with our body, and you get to meet yours where you are.

And ... I hope you will find some way to accept this invitation ... because it is an invitation that is a doorway to healing.

There's a great book called [The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma](#) and the author, Bessel van de Kolk, says that we cannot recover from trauma until we "become familiar with and befriend the sensations in (our) bodies. Being frightened means that you live in a body that is always on guard. Angry people live in angry bodies. The bodies of child-abuse victims are tense and defensive until they find a way to relax and feel safe. In order to change, (we) need to become aware of (our) sensations and the way (our) bodies interact with the world around (us). Physical self-awareness is the first step in releasing the tyranny of the past."

So that's the water I'm going to invite us to dip our toes into for just a moment .. of becoming familiar with and befriending the sensations in our bodies.

Now at this point you're probably just thinking – would you get on with it already –so here we go.

There are two poses I'm going to invite us into, and you, and do them any way you want.

First, I invite you to get as small as you can, as small as you want, in your body. Get as small as you can.

If you reach a point where either you don't want to or your body won't comply with what comes to your mind when I say get as small as you can in your body, just hold wherever you can and use your sacred imagination to feel what it feels like in that position.

So, hold that position.

Feel what that feels like.

Pay attention

What memories does this position activate?

What do those memories feel like in your body?

OK now slowly come out of this position.

Now that might have been easy for you or that might have been really hard for you, or it might have been something in between ... and knowing we aren't alone is always a good thing ... so I invite you to turn to a neighbor and say "I got you."

Now turn to another neighbor and say, "I got you."

OK, second pose.

I invite you to get as big as you can, as big as you want to. Be as visible as you possible can. Take up as much space as you can.

If you reach a point where either you don't want to or your body won't comply with what comes to your mind when I say get as big as you can in your body, just hold wherever you can and use your sacred imagination to feel what it feels like in that position.

So hold that position.

Feel what that feels like.

Pay attention

What memories does this position activate?

What do those memories feel like in your body?

OK ... now slowly come out of this position.

And relax.

Once again, knowing we aren't alone is always a good thing ... so I invite you to turn to a neighbor and say, "I got you."

Now turn to another neighbor and say, "I got you."

Let's just take a breath for a few seconds.

Let yourself feel your body.

Remember that your body is sacred and good.

Feel the wounds. Feel the scars from wounds that have healed but the evidence of them is still there. Scars are powerful things.

Leonard Cohen writes "Children show scars like medals. Lovers use them as a secrets to reveal. A scar is what happens when the word is made flesh."

Our bodies are full of wounds and scars. Some are visible. Most are not. And, broadly speaking, those two poses represent the two poles of how we respond to our wounds and scars.

Making ourselves really small.

Making ourselves really big.

Both are natural and human.

Neither are bad.

All of us find ourselves in the extremes of these positions at one time or another.

And ... while it may absolutely be necessary to spend some time at either one of these extremes ... neither one is a place from which healing can occur.

Let's take making ourselves small.

This is one of the most natural things to do when we are wounded.

We curl up around ourselves in self-protection.

We don't want to let anyone else see that we are hurt.

There are any number of reasons.

Maybe we are afraid that if we show weakness or expose our wound we will get hurt again.

Maybe we blame ourselves for the wound and we hide it out of shame.

Maybe we are afraid of ridicule and pity, of others making us feel as small and weak as we already feel.

We are especially good at socializing girls and women this way. Though certainly across the gender spectrum we have our ways of driving that message home.

We tell women to take care of others' feelings and ignore their own.

We tell women to shrink who they really are and "act like men" if they want to "get ahead" ... then beat on them for exhibiting the same qualities we reward men for.

And, of course, one of the most ubiquitous ways we tell women and girls to make their wounds small

... You should smile more.

Sometimes hiding our wounds looks like being aggressive ... of putting on a strong face or even an aggressive one so that nobody will guess the pain that we are in. It's why animals are often most dangerous when they are wounded.

We are especially good at socializing boys and men this way. Though certainly across the gender spectrum we have our ways of driving that message home.

Boys don't cry.

Man up.

We react this way to being wounded as individuals and we also act this way as communities.

It is the learned helplessness and internalized oppression that leads so many to believe that wisdom is keeping your head down and mouth shut ... or find a substitute for the power we are not rightfully given over our lives through the gripping of a gun and the cultivating of steely eyes and a firmly set jaw.

It is accepting the denial of self that comes from not having your history taught in schools and settling for your culture turned into ornaments on someone else's Christmas tree or once again seeing a lesser qualified man get the job.

Now there can be a time for making yourself small. There are absolutely times and spaces for hiding our wounds ... especially in a world that keeps on poking us with sharp sticks. No one should force you to show your wounds ... and beyond that, making ourselves small is sometimes all we can do ... it is natural, there is nothing shameful about it ... and ... as long as we stay in that place, we cannot be healed.

Because hidden wounds don't heal.

Hidden wounds fester and emerge again and again and again.

Next let's look at making ourselves big.

Now here I'm not talking about taking up the amount of space that a fully thriving you would take up ... I'm talking about taking up much more than that. I'm talking about instead of hiding our wounds shouting our wounds.

I'm talking about telling everyone about our wounds every chance we get.

It can be the compulsion to share our wounds and insecurities again and again and again, to flood social media and every conversation with our woundedness, fearing we will never get the love and attention we crave just by being who we are.

It can be the seductiveness of clinging to the small power of victimhood because it is the most power we have ever felt.

It is the desperate cry of "look at me" "hear me" "love me" when some of our deepest wounds are feeling unseen, unheard and unloved.

It can also be the defiant scream that is the language of the unheard and unseen.

Now there can be a time for this, too. There are absolutely times and spaces for shouting our wounds and taking up an extra amount of space ... especially in a world that runs on erasing the identity and pain of so many.

It is the sanitation workers marching in Memphis with the sign "I am a man"

It is Helen Reddy leading millions of women singing "I am woman, hear me roar"

It is Queer Nation marching through Manhattan chanting "We're here, we're queer, get used to it."

Making ourselves big, claiming and screaming our wounds sometimes is an act of incredible courage. There is nothing shameful about it ... and ... if all we do is stay in that place, we cannot be healed.

Because wounds don't heal when you keep ripping the scabs off over and over again.

Continually exposed wounds just get infected and grow deeper and deeper until we are tempted to believe the wound is all we are.

Making ourselves really small and making ourselves really big.

Both are natural.

Both can be necessary stops on the road to healing...

but neither is where healing actually happens.

And both are evidence of a poverty.

Both are evidence of a poverty of belovedness.

In this morning's Gospel, Jesus is about to launch into his ministry. A ministry where he will receive many wounds, wounds so deep they will one day kill him.

Being wounded is unavoidable. It is part of being human. Remember Leonard Cohen "A scar is what happens when the word is made flesh."

What healing means is not that wounds magically disappear. Healing means being able to receive our wounds, name and claim our wounds, being able to cry in pain from our wounds without being ashamed of our wounds, without being defined by our wounds, without letting our wounds or our wounders steal our joy and steal our lives.

And the key to that is trusting in our belovedness. And that's why when God is looking to equip Jesus for all that awaits him God doesn't give Jesus a sword or a shield or an army or even a hidey-hole. God gives Jesus four words.

You.

Are.

My.

Beloved.

When we trust that we are beloved.

When we have a community that affirms our belovedness.

When we are secure in our belovedness, we don't need to hide our wounds because we know that there is no wound that love cannot eventually heal.

... and let me be clear that healing doesn't mean it will stop hurting or be forgotten. Scars hurt and scars carry memories. Healing means we will not be stopped. That the wound will not have the last word because love will always have the last word.

When we are secure in our belovedness, we don't need to broadcast our wounds so people will see us because we already know that we are seen and that we are loved.

When we are secure in our belovedness, we can share our wounds without needing to center our wounds.

And the same is true of communities.

When we assure communities of their belovedness, when we do the long, transformative work of helping communities trust not only that they are beloved but that their belovedness will be seen and honored, when we become beloved community ... that is when the swords will be beaten into ploughshares, political maneuvering will be transformed into dancing and Twitter will turn into pebbles tossed at a window by a lover longing for their love to come down and take a roll in the grass..

And until that happens, yes ... there are times when we will need to make ourselves as small as we can.

And there will be times where we need to make ourselves as big as we can.

And ... because what we do here is create glimpses of not just the world that is but the world God dreams for us ... because we strive to become Beloved Community here at All Saints Church... today we are going to offer a glimpse of a third way.

In a few minutes, what we are doing today is inviting each other into a middle space.

A space that is not this (small)

Or this (big)

But this (feet on the ground, arms slightly extended, palms up).

We are inviting each other into a posture of healing where wounds can begin to meet community. Where we take up all the space that God created us to take up ... no more and no less.

Where we let our wounds be seen just a little bit ... and open ourselves up to receive the healing power of love.

It is not magical. There is no unique power that some people have to heal that others don't have. It is the power of love in community, and it is primarily a power of loving presence with. Of being at least one person who will affirm your belovedness so that you can offer your wounds for healing without having to scream your wound for acknowledgment.

This is the power of love lived in community ... and it is the most powerful force for healing and change in the universe.

It is the power of the truth of your belovedness. That you are never alone in your pain or in your joy because God is following you around like a lovesick puppy, wagging her tail every time you cast a glance her way and resting her chin on your leg wanting nothing more than to just be with you in whatever you are going through.

It is the power of the truth of your belovedness. Yours. Mine. Everyone's.

Whether you come forward for healing this morning or not, I hope you leave this place reminded that your body is sacred. Your wounds are holy. And who you are and who you are becoming is nothing less than the image of the divine. That whether you show your scars like medals or hide them like secrets that they are nothing to fear and nothing of which to be ashamed, but what happens when the word is made flesh.

I hope you will trust just a little more that you are God's beloved. And in you God is well pleased.
Amen.