

POWERFULLY VULNERABLE



Scripture:

Psalm 27:7-14

⁷Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! ⁸“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, LORD, do I seek. ⁹Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! ¹⁰If my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will take me up.

¹¹Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. ¹²Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.

¹³I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. ¹⁴Wait for the LORD; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!

Luke 13:31-35

³¹At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” ³²He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ ³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



The Pharisees came and told Jesus that Herod was after him. Jesus could have responded, “I know people. I know tough people. I can tell you I have the support of the Jerusalem police, the support of the Israeli military, (bikers hadn’t been invented yet) – but Jesus could add I have the angel armies and the archangels, who could get very, very mad and that would be bad!”

Instead of threatening to call upon those who would fight for him, Jesus pointed out the good work he was doing and agreed to get away from Herod... for a while. He chose to be vulnerable instead of violent.

Then he lamented. Jesus lamented for the whole city of Jerusalem. He even painted an image of himself being like a hen that wanted to

gather her brood under her wings, but the leaders of both the Roman army and the temple were too proud to listen and allow Jesus to show them what the kingdom of God looks like in loving action. Jesus chose vulnerability versus showing his supernatural strength.

THE HUMBLE PEACEFUL WAY

Jesus chose the humble peaceful way rather than threatening violence. Those who choose peace over violence are always the stronger ones. But being peaceful may feel vulnerable, too. It's hard to not put up a wall around us, or to not respond with a build-up of weapons when we feel threatened. But the ways of peace and vulnerability are the ways of Jesus.

Vulnerability is difficult but powerful.



BRENÉ BROWN

“Courage is borne out of vulnerability, not strength.” This is a main finding of Brené Brown’s research on shame and “wholeheartedness.” She recommends sharing with one another our struggles and mistakes, our infallibilities and our sorrows. Brown says that our struggles make us who we are. “Vulnerability is the core, the heart, the center, of meaningful human experience.”

When Brené Brown asked people what vulnerability is, the answers were things like “sitting with my wife who has Stage III breast cancer and trying to make plans for our children,” “my first date after my divorce,” saying I love you first, asking for a raise, sending my child to school being enthusiastic and supportive of him and knowing how excited he is about orchestra tryouts and how much he wants to make first chair and

encouraging him and supporting him and knowing that’s not going to happen.

Dr. Brown believes: “Vulnerability is courage. It’s about the willingness to show up and be seen in our lives. And in those moments when we show up, I think those are the most powerful, meaning-making moments of our lives even if they don’t go well. I think they define who we are.”

She goes on to say, “I cannot find a single example of courage in my research that was not born completely of vulnerability. And so, I think we buy into some mythology about vulnerability being weakness and being gullibility and being frailty because it gives us permission not to do it.”

BEYOND YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Vulnerability is going beyond your comfort zone to share your life with another. In my forty-two adult years, I have opened the door of hospitality in our family home to twelve people who needed a place to live. Each time, it was a bit uncomfortable trusting someone to live inside our home at different times, learning someone else’s habits, needs, and expectations. But after a few weeks, it always smoothed out and a routine of trust was established.

I know it was a bit risky when I did not know some of the people very well, such as the seventeen-year-old tough looking girl who looked like a motorcycle mama. She had been abused nearly every day of her life that she could recall. But by the end of that year, it was a wonderful mutual blessing to have Michelle live with our family. I took in her boyfriend, too. He grew up with eleven siblings and never slept on a bed.

Sister Joan Chisitter said this about the power of being vulnerable through “hospitality.”

The people who live vulnerably in a healthy way still don’t always find it comfortable. To learn the power in vulnerability you have to practice being uncomfortable. And there is no guarantee it will go well all the time. But to be creative, to grow, to serve God, to promote a healthy life, you must reach out in hospitality and help someone in need, even when it feels uncomfortable. The more you do it, the more comfortable it feels.

SHARING OUR BEAUTIFUL FACILITY

Some people here might be worried about all the different groups coming into the church using our facilities. Currently we have Al-Anon, AA, Co-Dependency Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous and occasionally Narcotics Anonymous using our church as a meeting place. We also have the Sonoma Developmental Center folks having worship here in the afternoon and the Korean Presbyterian congregation worshipping here in the morning. There is a Catholic-led Handicapables group that once a month serves a nice lunch and communion to a group of disabled folks from the area and of course all the breakfast kids that come into the church in the mornings. Soon we will have the Council on Aging here on Mondays and Wednesdays, too. Plus, we have other non-profit groups that occasionally utilize our church rooms for their meetings, like our Presbytery. If anyone has an issue with these people using our church, please talk to me or Steve Fenner.

My philosophy is that God has blessed us with a beautiful facility, not to keep it just for our own small congregation, but to share it with those in need.

If we had not opened our doors as a shelter during the fires, we would not have our new paint and carpet to enjoy. Gracious hospitality often ends up being a mutual blessing.

JESUS WAS VULNERABLE AND POWERFUL

Jesus was vulnerable and yet powerful. He let the people touch him, he exhausted himself to serve those in need, he allowed Mary to anoint him with precious oil and he cooked a fish breakfast for the disciples even after his resurrection. Jesus even used the metaphor of a mother hen to describe himself as he yearned to gather all the people of Jerusalem like little chicks under his wings. Ultimate hospitality!

All of this teaches us to be powerfully vulnerable, too, and to bravely serve God without fear in whatever ways we are able.

ST. PATRICK

Saint Patrick was another great example of serving and being vulnerable at the same time. He was born in Scotland in the year 375 and was captured by pirates and enslaved by the Irish at age sixteen until he escaped six years later. Instead of staying angry and violent towards those who enslaved him, he was determined to forgive and “save” them by providing all of Ireland with the Good News of the Bible.



He became a priest and returned to Ireland as a missionary. Patrick was given the credit for converting Ireland to Christianity. They say he chased all the snakes (pagans) out of Ireland, but actually St. Patrick was very skilled at appealing to the pagans by helping them understand that the same God they were worshipping through nature was the God of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. He used an example from nature, the three-leaf clover, as a way to understand the Trinity, and he Christianized some of their pagan rituals.

History.com explains that: "Familiar with the Irish language and culture, Patrick chose to incorporate traditional Celtic ritual into his lessons of Christianity instead of attempting to eradicate native Irish beliefs. For instance, he used bonfires to celebrate Easter since the Irish were used to honoring their gods with fire. He also superimposed a sun, a powerful Irish symbol, onto the Christian cross to create what is now called a Celtic cross, so that veneration of the cross would seem more natural to the Irish." St. Patrick's legend says he lived one-hundred-twenty-two years, but most historians believe that he actually died in 461 AD at age eighty-six.

Saint Patrick was an example of using his vulnerability, which was his history of enslavement in Ireland, and he turned it around for God as a powerful entre' to capture the attention

of the Irish. He forgave them for his enslavement and ministered to them with love and compassion. Due to his restorative justice successful approach, St. Pat is considered the Patron Saint of Ireland even though he was born in Scotland.

THE DEATH OF THE INNOCENT

Yet sometimes it takes the death of the innocent (at the hands of hate) to wake us up to hear the call to restorative justice. Jesus was vulnerable and allowed himself to be crucified. The Roman leaders thought they were done with him and people would forget about the rebel King of the Jews. But upon his death and resurrection, a powerful movement rose up with him and spread his Good News around the world.

Those who killed him never guessed that Christ's ministry would rise and expand across the globe and still be in existence over two-thousand years later.

And now with the death of fifty more innocents as a result of hate in New Zealand, we are called to do something powerful to protest the massive hate crime and racism affecting so many around the world. One way is to reach out to our Muslim neighbors and show our care and sympathy for their sufferings. To stand by them in solidarity so they don't feel alone and targeted locally. You have been given cards to write a note of sympathy to our Muslim neighbors. You might write something like: "When one of us suffers we all suffer. Know that we are so sorry for the loss of the Muslim brothers and sisters in New Zealand. We pray for God's comfort and peace to heal the families and friends of those who were so tragically killed. We want to express our condolences for their losses." Sincerely, Your name.

These will be delivered to the Islamic Cultural Center in Oakland by my Muslim friend who is very active on the Interfaith council of Sonoma Co., Moe Jabbari. Many of you may have met Moe when he spoke last year about the true Muslim faith compared to terrorist extremism.

God calls us to stand up for one another in a powerfully vulnerable way. So, if you are in a situation where someone near you is being threatened or harassed, here is a tried and true technique on how to peacefully intervene:

<https://www.buzzfeed.com/ryanhatethis/someone-made-a-guide-for-what-to-do-when-you-see-islamophobi?fbclid=IwAR058-rIREyPSIWNxTIV9MY3PBEAIPsNfLwnAtK3RRYkmBMVOM3Fs8qwRTs>

Benediction:

May those who love us, love us.

And those who don't love us,

May God turn their hearts;

And if He doesn't turn their hearts,

May He turn their ankles,

So, we will know them by their limping.

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God and the fellowship of the
Holy Spirit be with you now and
forevermore. Amen**



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