

Healing Divisions, Becoming Whole

A homily written and preached by Jennifer A. Hudson at St. Paul's on the Green Episcopal Church, Norwalk, CT, March 12, 2015

In the name of our Creator, Healer, and Sustainer. Amen.

“Why do girls have to buy pink stuff and boys have to buy different colored stuff?” This was a question posed by a 5-year-old boy in a U.S. toy store.

It's a good, logical question.

Walk into a toy store today and you can't help but notice the pink and blue aisles. And we know the formula for what's found where: Dolls, dollhouses, plush animals in the pink. Action figures, toy weapons and vehicles in the blue. Despite 40+ years of modern feminism, I ask the same question that boy did: Why the pink or blue? Why the demarcations?

In tonight's readings, we hear a lot about divisions. The God in Jeremiah speaks of a people who “looked backwards rather than forwards,” who are given God's words and commands, yet choose not to heed. In turn, they cut themselves off from God. In the Gospel from Luke, Jesus says: “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me, scatters.”

Seems like God lays down some very black and white conditions: If you follow me, you'll be found in good favor. If not, you'll be broken off from me. Sounds almost like “this” or “that.” But I don't think that's Jesus' point. This isn't really about enforcing divisions. If we take a closer look at tonight's Gospel from Luke, I think we'll find that Jesus is really talking about bringing together and making whole.

We know Jesus was someone who, like that 5-year old boy, called categories of difference into question. His ministry was built on transcending boundaries and he took a lot of heat from the Pharisees and Sadducees because of his work with those considered unworthy. He healed lepers, the disabled, even the woman who bled. He welcomed tax collectors and prostitutes. He spoke to a Samaritan woman. He called little children to him. Jesus never failed to extend God's compassion and all-

inclusive love to every single person with whom he came into contact, especially those living on the margins of society, and despite the criticism he received for it.

Jesus understood the power of unity. I think that's why in tonight's Gospel he says "every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert" as well as "whoever does not gather with me, scatters." He's calling us to unity with God's kingdom, a unity that is achieved when we stop seeing "us" versus "them," "this" or "that," and start focusing on "with." One way to start is by extending radical welcome, love and justice to our neighbors—the homeless man on the street, refugees and immigrants, even the irritating boss or in-law.

Not easy things to do. And work for God's kingdom doesn't stop at doing unto others. Even more difficult, and necessary, is an extension of radical welcome and love to our own selves, in particular those aspects of which we're ashamed.

Lent is a time for reconciling with God. Yet we can't reconcile with God, nor with our neighbors, if we don't first learn how to reconcile with the self within. Lent is a good time to ask: What divisions lie within myself? What aspects of myself have I broken off?

Maybe there's been a traumatic experience we've endured, the memory of which we are still sweeping under a rug. Maybe we're dealing with internalized shame about our sexual orientation or the stigma of mental illness. Maybe we said or did something we regret, and we're still feeling guilty. Whatever the case may be, when we deny our feelings of fear or shame or guilt, when we try to push their sources out of our consciousness, it decreases our ability to move forward. It becomes debilitating. It pulls us apart. It fragments us. We then end up walking through life like broken dolls, wandering in a psychological desert. That's when our precious energy scatters.

This prompts me to share a story with you. A pastor of a Mennonite church, sexually abused as a child, decided to share his story with his congregation during an open mic sharing time. He did this in an effort to heal the pain and brokenness which the incident continued to cause him, as his story had stayed in the shadows for years. He trusted in the support of his congregation. He writes "That was one of my most authentic and unmasked moments in my life, and it felt marvelous and freeing.

Until I was told how inappropriate it was. Pastors, apparently, don't do that kind of thing. I was forced to pull my healing journey out of the context of church and

spiritual friendship, and compartmentalize my pain into my private self and counseling. There was nothing healing or hopeful about that compartmentalization.” I wonder: what would this pastor’s healing experience have been if his congregation had allowed him the safe and validating space he’d created for them? Would he have been able to heal his fragmented self, knowing he had a congregation unifying with him in support?

Why the pink or blue? This *or* that? Why the limiting compartments?

The Sufi poet Rumi writes “Both light and shadow are the dance of Love.” Only when we heal the divisions within can we heal the divisions that exist in our communities and in the world-at-large. This Lent acknowledge your broken parts. Claim (or proclaim) them. Extend them Jesus’ own radical compassion. Reconcile with them. For in unifying our compartments within, our light and shadow aspects, we can unify without, fully participating in the dance of Love that is the glue of God’s kingdom.