

Meditation for Folsom #7, Feb 6, 2010

Vulnerability

Part of what we are about as a Kairos team is to bring a Christian community into the prison, not just to talk about Christianity and Christian faith but to demonstrate it. When you stop to think about that, it is quite a remarkable exercise in many ways. A group of believing and practicing Christians go into a place where few are allowed to go, and few would choose to go, in order to bring Good News in a place where there is a lot more bad news than good. And again, we come not just to deliver a message in our talks and other items on our agenda, but we come to embody that Christian message as a community and in individual interactions.

We do that by practicing what it is to be Christians. We do that by working cooperatively and respectfully with each other, by loving. The scripture tells us the way people will know that you are my disciples is that they will see that you have love in all that you are, in your mind, body, heart, speech, actions. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

But to be a Christian community we must become a Christian community. Christian communities do not fall out of the sky; they are constructed by means of interacting with each other and by working with each other, and by finding our way to love one another, as he loved us.

It requires practice. And a major task before us in these weeks of preparation for Kairos #7 at Folsom is to become the Christian community that has the privilege of entering the prison in March. We come together to practice being a Christian community. We come together with each of us bringing talents and energy and commitment and all that we are to become the body of Christ.

A key element in the interaction that creates a Christian community is vulnerability. The word vulnerable comes from the Latin word for wound. To become vulnerable is to become capable of being wounded. Or stated a little differently, becoming vulnerable is to risk being hurt or embarrassed or rejected.

We become vulnerable by exposing who we are to others. It is easy to

expose the good parts of ourselves, but it's kind of risky letting people become aware of your imperfections and brokenness. To do that is to become vulnerable.

Exposing the truth about one's self can bring risk and even can bring wounds. If I let it be know that I was arrested, that I have engaged in inappropriate behavior, I have suffered from depression, I have what some would think of as irrational fear, that there are things in my past that make me appear to be less than pure and perfect and whole. I could be attacked. By such exposure I make myself open to criticism and rejection. And there are those who would criticize and reject on the basis of that knowledge. Indeed there are settings in which it is not safe to become vulnerable.

In the New Testament it is clear that Jesus is pretty big on vulnerability.

1. The man who prays "Thank you God that I am not like these lesser beings." That's a presentation of being Invulnerable
Compared with the one who prays "Lord have mercy on me for I am a sinner." That's an expression of vulnerability.

2. The puffed up religious experts of Jesus day - Pharisees- a textbook example of persons unwilling or able to become vulnerable. They have the truth all packaged up. Invulnerable.

Compared with those who come in their imperfections with open heart and mind to hear and be transformed by the Good News. That approach is wonderfully presented in the stories of those who come to Jesus for healing. That is vulnerability.

In the context of a caring, loving community it is safe to become vulnerable. A community of persons committed to agape love follows the lead of Jesus in this regard.

One way to not be vulnerable is to withhold or gloss over the truth about self. A word we use to describe that is DENIAL. You cannot do that with Jesus. Oh, I guess you can try to cover up your brokenness with Jesus, but it makes no sense to do so as Jesus cuts through all that to the truth.

To become vulnerable requires building trust. That's a good part of what we are about in our preparation as a team for #7. We are building trust. Creating a safe place to reveal and share who we are, the good and the not so good,

without fear of being wounded. Trust does not come automatically. It is built.

To find a safe place where I can show who I am and know that it will be treated safely is an enormous gift. What generally happens is that when one takes a chance to reveal at a deeper level and to become vulnerable, particularly in a setting in which persons are following the life and teachings of Jesus, others are encouraged to reveal who they are including their brokenness and we come to see that we are all in the same boat. We are all broken creatures. We realize that we are all human beings cut from the same cloth. And the Christian message has tons to say to persons who are broken and seek wholeness.

We do that (we create and sustain a safe space) for each other in our team and in our team building, but more importantly we do it to create a safe place for residents who will present themselves to us for the weekend in March. They come with vulnerability. It is no secret that they have been convicted of serious crime and are serving time in prison. It is no secret that they have been rejected and are separated from much of the rest of the community. It requires courage to come before free world people that you do not know. In so many cases persons with that knowledge of your criminal convictions are only too happy to dish out further rejection, disrespect, and even hate. Under guard, under rules and regulation which greatly restrict freedom, behind bars, in prison garb. The men in blue come to us vulnerable persons, uncertain whether they will be wounded further by us, but willing to take a chance.

A great step forward toward becoming vulnerable is to recognize and to begin to let go of those things which interfere with our relationships with others and achieving the embodiment of peace and love expressed in the term Shalom. Shalom is often translated as “peace” and it clearly means that, but a slightly expanded translation is that shalom means right relationship with God, with others, and with ourselves. We, just like the men in blue (and every other person on the face of the earth), are not perfect. We carry brokenness and life patterns that keep us from Shalom – keep us from right relationship with God, self, and others.

When we get honest with ourselves we can and will see those patterns of thought and behavior that keep us blocked from a life of greater liberation and love. This is a life-long struggle to let go of that which binds us. For many of us, including me, that probably has something to do with letting go of my

expectations that things go the way I want them to go. A good phrase for that is EXAGGERATED EGO. The alternative is to recognize that what is evolving is part of a larger picture than is contained in my preferences and wants. Probably for many of us, including me, it has to do with letting go of some unreasonable fears and insecurity.

A good distinction which I think helps us along these lines is the distinction between false self and true self. The false self involves those parts of us that tend to be self centered, fearful, controlling, combative, and defensive. The false self come in large part from our encounters with this culture and from our own take on what is needed to be successful and accepted. On the other hand the true self involves an embodiment of agape love and tends to be manifest in cooperative, loving, and empathetic relationships.

In just a few minutes we are going to have an opportunity to let go of unhealthy patterns we carry and struggle with. This is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on that which it is good for you to let go of. To do that is to take steps toward becoming vulnerable. To let go of that set of defenses we hide behind. We ask men in blue to do that in the weekend. It is a good thing for us to do as well.

Let's take a couple of moments of silence for bringing to mind the particular aspects of self that I am ready to let go of. Then when you are ready to do so please place your rock in this area as a symbolic act indicating what you, with God's help, are letting go of. Come to place your rock with others in silence, but after you have placed your rock on the pile, please join us (one-by-one) in singing I Surrender All. As we do this we join our Kairos team as a group of vulnerable individuals coming together to let go of that which binds us by surrendering to the will and direction of Our Heavenly Father, to the God who loves us and rejoices in us, the God of infinite mercy and hope and new life. As we do so may we indeed become a team who follow Jesus' commandment that we love one another as we prepare to bring that love to men in blue in Kairos #7 at Folsom.

