

THE VULNERABILITY OF GOD

Colossians 1: 15-22

Let me begin with a few stories shared with me in a previous congregation... Stella had a troubled relationship with her daughter Cynthia. Even as she gave all she had to her daughter as a mom, once the teen years came and once she tried to justify her divorce with Cynthia's dad, the relationship between mother and daughter soured. Cynthia was having difficulty focussing in school. She felt she had few friends. She felt sorry for her dad. It was all her mother's fault and she had no space for sympathy or understanding. Cynthia was hurting and it was easier to blame her mother than face the vulnerability of things not always working out as we would like... And Stella, try as she could to reach out to her daughter, all she got back was anger and accusation. According to her daughter, Stella was an awful mother! She was a heartless wife! She was just selfish and only thinking about what was good for her. Would the relationship between mother and daughter ever heal and find wholeness?

And then there was Maya. Maya was an only child with a father who was ill. Hassan had worked hard all his life but often his work involved long hours in difficult conditions, and now in later years he had serious health issues that required regular medical intervention and care. His daughter Maya had grown up in a devoted Hindu household. She embraced her duty as a caregiver for her father. But some days, it was just too much. Maya loved her father dearly, but what about her life? What about her cultivating friendship, love and activities outside her home and constant on-call availability to her father? Maya felt guilty and vulnerable at the same time. She was exhausted much of the time and her self-care was suffering. At the same time she felt a simmering resentment and she was ashamed to admit that even to herself. Her father had given her everything. How could she not give everything of herself back without complaint? Would Maya ever find her freedom and healing toward wholeness?

Today is Holy Trinity Sunday when we ponder God imagined as creative and creating love, love embodied in the human Jesus and love as a powerful energy seeking to flow through all life as Spirit... And yet there is so much brokenness in our world in need of healing toward wholeness. Why this contradiction? Why this contradiction between brokenness and suffering on the one hand and the wholeness who is God who is Love on the other?

One word: vulnerability... Think about it... How are Cynthia and Stella vulnerable and how does such vulnerability undermine the wholeness of love in their lives? Stella has made decisions for herself as a woman, a wife and a mother. She has tried her best for all her abilities. And yet she has a daughter who is super angry at her. Is her daughter's issues simply with her mother? It's easy to blame others for the hurts and troubles in our lives. Cynthia wants a stable family. She loves her father who clearly has not chosen the separation leading to divorce. But who knows all the ins and outs of the marriage relationship? Vulnerability...

And what about Maya and her father Hassan? How does obligation, commitment, loyalty whether family, friend, culture or whatever, play a role to make us vulnerable in all kinds of ways emotionally and spiritually? Maya has complicated feelings and who knows what Hassan is feeling as a man in his elder years in need and dependent in ways that can feel humiliating? Vulnerability...

How do any of us find our way to wholeness with all the emotional and spiritual rollercoaster that can be our lives and relationships regardless of any blame or fault on anyone's part? How do we find our way to wholeness? How may faith in God, in Christ, through the Spirit offer a pathway for any who would open their hearts to such a flow of Love? How does God meet us in our vulnerability and take us through our own brokenness toward healing on a journey toward wholeness?

Let's seek out such a divine pathway through what we are given in our scripture reading. Here we have some highly contradictory ways of imaging God in Christ. On the one hand you have truly lofty language about Christ. He is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers - all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn of the dead, so that he might come to have the first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to God's self all things, whether on earth or in heaven..." Wow! Christ is it, no? Can anything greater be attributed to him? All the greatness and glory that can be attributed to God is also attributed to Christ.

And yet, in the very next verse here's what we also read: God was pleased to reconcile to God's self all things, whether on earth or in heaven, **by making peace through the blood of Christ's cross**. And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind and spirit, doing evil deeds (because you were broken), God has now reconciled in **Jesus' fleshy, vulnerable body through death**, so as to present you holy and blameless and whole before him."

And so, you have the greatness of Christ on the one hand and the vulnerability and brokenness of Christ on the other. How may such a contradiction lead to healing and wholeness? Well, somehow, our brokenness can begin to heal when God in Christ enters our brokenness by becoming broken. God has entered our vulnerability in Christ to walk the journey with us, beside us, experiencing what we experience in the worst of it - the injustice, the suffering, the inability to make life as we want it to be and all we want it to be... God in Christ has entered it and lived it in the life and sad, cruel death that Jesus passed through.

But here's the difference. And here's where the door to healing opens up. How did Jesus live his vulnerability? How did the brokenness live in him? How did he respond to it all? And how may that impact and transform our living once his Spirit also flows through us?

Jesus suffered the vulnerability of needing essentials to live – food, drink and loving care. We all need that. And Jesus also lived both the beauty of friendship, but also the cruelty of injustice all the way to a horrible death. How possibly can any of that be of God? How possibly can any of that lead to healing? Because Jesus embodied God's love in and through it all, and his resurrection shines a light on what the power of love can do in the face of vulnerability and brokenness. We all fall down sometimes – spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically too. We all fall down. How is our fall also something that affects others or has happened because we have been part of wounding others? How has our fall happened because others refuse to forgive us, because they judge us and because we have caved in on ourselves or reacted and struck back out of spite or humiliation? How has our fall happened because we are simply human and afraid and have not been able to stay standing with all that life has thrown at us?

However we fall down, it will either be fear that will drive us in our vulnerability and brokenness or it will be love. Where do we find the kind of love that is strong enough to sustain us, renew us, and raise us up? Where do we find the kind of love that can give us the wings of faith, hope and power to rise up stronger because we are more understanding, compassionate and gracious through what we've lived?

By passing in and through our vulnerability, our suffering and our brokenness, Jesus has shone a light and invited us to follow his way. He has also given us his Spirit because we cannot rise up in his powerful love without his Spirit. As we receive his love as gift, as grace, we shine his love in how we live, despite all we may go through in life...

We are all human and therefore vulnerable. Stuff happens and will happen. Like Stella and Cynthia, Maya and Hassan, relationships will get complicated and we will suffer as we try to come through with integrity and peace in our choices despite complicated feelings. But how may the fullness of God in Christ also pass through us so that we keep growing stronger in love through all the ups and downs and beyond? How may we grow in our healing, even with and through the wounds and scars, so that we see a pathway to wholeness even if we won't fully complete the journey in this life?

Today we have welcomed 8 new members to the church through baptism and profession of faith. Some of them have lived difficult things. Others are still early on in their lives. How may love grow to engage fear so that our lives are a healing journey toward greater wholeness? The gospel is all about how God does not heal us by waving some magic wand from heaven. No. The gospel is all about God entering our space in all our vulnerability, to be where we are, to suffer the worst life has to offer, and then rise up with a love stronger than any fear and pain.

Love empowers. Love forgives. Love welcomes back those who have lost their way. Love gives 2nd, 3rd, 4th chances and more. Love also holds us accountable. Healing cannot happen if we refuse to face the consequences of our actions and those we have hurt whether we meant it or not. Love also must heal us when the consequences of our actions cannot be reversed. We heal as we let go and we heal as we commit to greater compassion and justice in our lives and for others. We heal as we see others and we heal as we see ourselves as beloved children of God for all our mistakes and imperfections. This is the gospel of God in Christ through the Spirit.

On this Trinity Sunday we recognize that God never stays in some heaven. God is invested in this world and in us. In becoming embodied in the human Jesus God is not only among us but seeks to be with us in the darkest and most difficult moments and struggles. But God through Christ and the Spirit wants to flow through us as wind and fire so that we rise up like Jesus to become more powerfully compassionate because we have suffered, more gloriously caring because we know hurt, more astonishingly resilient in grace because we know what it's like to fail and fall. Through death to resurrection is the pattern of the Christian life in this world and into the next. May you and I internalize the gospel message now and into the life to come. And may we embrace our call in our own lives to become the hands, feet, voice and heart of Christ for each other and in our world, for all our vulnerability. Amen.