

Good Morning, KC. I am Theresa Gale and welcome to the fourth week of Lent. I am coming live from my home and welcome each of you into it as we gather together, virtually, to spend some time together. Over the last few weeks, we have been studying the book, *Life of the Beloved*, by Henri Nouwen who is helping us explore what it means to be Beloved and Blessed. This week we are delving into a more difficult yet critical topic, our Brokenness. I will be reading the later portion of Psalm 139 from *Psalms for Praying* and then offering a sharing on these words and the theme of Brokenness. At the end I will offer to you some questions to consider, reflect upon and take into this coming week. Thank you in advance for bearing with me as we try this new medium to stay in touch during these days apart from each other.

Psalm 139:18-22
Psalms for Praying by Nan Merrill

O that you would vanquish my fears, Beloved;
O that ignorance and suffering would depart from me --
My ego separates me from true abandonment,
to surrendering myself into your Hands!
Yet are these not the very thorns that focus my thoughts on
You?
Will I always need reminders to turn my face to you?
I yearn to come to You in love,
to learn of your mercy and wisdom!

It was 4am and as I awakened, I heard God ask me, “Why am I not enough for you?” It was the first day of my Intensive at The Living School in Albuquerque. I knew it was to be the question that I would ponder over the next 5 days. That first day I had an opportunity to be with a spiritual director and I brought that question to our time together. She helped me unpack it and to find a place within where I could feel “enough” and open a space for God to be enough. I left with a fullness of “enough-ness” but it was to last only seconds. As the next two days unfolded, my ego did everything it could to point out how inadequate I was to be at the School, how inappropriate my question was that I asked, how undisciplined I was during meditation, and so on ... I wasn’t aware of its grip for those two days and yet I noticed that I felt “numb” inside and as if I was a shadow in the midst of others. On Wednesday evening as I sat with my small group, I saw it – my ego just couldn’t let me be “enough” and its efforts to remind me of that were as automatic as my breath. Luckily it only lasted 2 days, as in my past, my ego would have been fully in charge for days on end.

What I know to be true is that my ego has protected me since in the womb. Its job was to keep me safe; to protect me from harm and to get love by being a good girl, keeping everyone happy, and blending in. The less needs I had, the better. If Mom and Dad were okay, then I was safe and that was all that mattered. “Enough” was not a word in my vocabulary, rather not important, not worthy, not loveable were.

Henri Nouwen would name that as my brokenness – he says, “our brokenness is always lived and experienced as highly personal, intimate and unique. It is where we are most needy and vulnerable that we most experience our brokenness.”

I didn’t look broken from the outside during my days at the Living School; rather, I was engaging, interactive and revealing yet inside I was numb and felt very separate from myself, others and God. I mentioned a few times to others that I just wasn’t feeling right. My questioning of my every interaction, my self-doubt and self-rejection was a familiar habit that I have worked years to eliminate, yet, in those moments in time, I was in the grips of it once again, no one knew it, even I didn’t recognize it for two days.

How often we judge others by their outside appearance? Looks are deceiving, the old adage says. I, for one, am an example of that. So many say to me “you have it all together” or “you take such good care of yourself” or “you are so

good on your feet” or “you are so capable.” When someone says that a part of me cringes because I know, at times, my outer appearance is a coping mechanism that protects me from the real truth – the sometimes, inside myself, I don’t feel enough and I don’t feel worthy of love. But here is the good news as Henri Nouwen reminds us – **we all are broken** – To be human is to be broken. Richard Rohr, in his book, *The Universal Christ*, explains that we have all gotten it wrong for way too long – we think God wants us to be perfect when the true message is that God’s Love was so great and so expansive that 13.6 billion years ago it exploded outward and took on physical form -- first in the creation of the universe, in the creation of the living things and creatures, human being, and then in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus, fully human lived as we live today – within a culture that is broken, religious institutions that are dying, a planet that is being destroyed by human hands, individual greed, isolation and poverty that live side by side – and yet, Jesus’ message in the midst of these realities, was and is today, Love. Fr. Richard says “God is in the suffering with us. This is the message of the cross – to live in the intersection of great love and great suffering – that is what we, as Christians, are called to do.” He goes on to say that “it is in community, that we hold this tension for each other when the suffering is too great to bear on our own.”

My classmates held that center for me that week. You hold that center for me on a daily basis. Yet know that I am only as capable to hold that center for you if I am working on my own self, as Nouwen, says, “to courageously embrace my own brokenness, to make this most feared enemy into a friend and to claim it as an intimate companion.” That truly is our work yet Nouwen writes, “suffering, whether emotional, physical or mental, is almost always experienced as an unwelcome intrusion into our lives. It is difficult to see anything positive in suffering; it must be avoided at all costs.”

It does take courage to face into and befriend that which we fear or seek to keep hidden because it is too painful to face, yet I don’t know about you but in hindsight, many times there is a “blessing” that a time of suffering reveals. Nouwen says, “embracing our suffering and bringing it into the light of the One who calls us Beloved can make our brokenness shine like a diamond.”

The beautiful cover that Ken Katzen has done for this week’s bulletin is stunningly beautiful. The quote is taken from Leonard Bernstein’s *Mass* where near the end of the performance the priest, adorned in liturgical vestments, is lifted up at the top of a pyramid. In his hands is a glass chalice that he holds high up above the pyramid of human bodies. Suddenly, the human pyramid

collapses, the priest comes tumbling down and the chalice falls to the ground and shatters into many pieces. He rips off his garments revealing blue jeans and a tee shirt and bare feet. As he walks through the debris of his former glory, children's voices singing "Laude, laude, laude" – "Praise, praise, praise." Suddenly he notices the broken chalice. He looks at the broken pieces, examining them closely for a long time and then, haltingly, he says, "I never realized that broken glass could shine so brightly." Nouwen says that this moment touched him greatly about his own brokenness.

He writes "The great secret of the spiritual life is that everything we live, be it gladness or sadness, joy or pain, health or illness, can be a part of the journey toward full realization of our humanity and life with God."

Nan Merrill speaks about our brokenness in Psalm 139 ... "Yet are these not the thorns that focus my thoughts on You? Will I always need reminders to turn my face to you?" If we believe the message of the Cross, creation and our own suffering, then the answer is categorically, "Yes!" This is the good news today friends! Our brokenness does not separate us from God, rather, it brings us ever closer into the true mystery of who we are in the eyes of our Creator – we are loved, we are beloved, we are blessed and the surrendering to and befriending of our brokenness draws us closer and more deeply into a relationship with the Source of unconditional, unwavering Love – Love that is ours to claim and ours to share with others.

While we are not physically in each other's presence today, let us take a few moments to hold ourselves and all within the KC community in our thoughts and hearts. Let us envision our shards of broken glass shining brightly and radiating out to each other and to all of God's creation. Amen.

I encourage you to reflect on Ken's picture this week. Sit with it and let its image sink deep into your being.

What does the glass' brokenness reveal about your own brokenness?

What about your brokenness opens you up to yourself? to God? to others?

How might you, during this week, hold the tension of great love and great suffering for yourself and others?

"I never realized that broken glass
could shine so brightly"

Leonard Bernstein

