

Sermon for Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Central Michigan

November 15, 2020

Rev. Andrew Frantz, contract minister

Healing Within

Part I: How have I been wounded?

Today the theme of the worship service is “healing within,” and I’m going to take two opportunities to speak to that topic. First, I want to take time to acknowledge the ways that all of us have been wounded; later, we will reflect on what it looks like to heal from those wounds. “Healing” is the worship theme for the month of November.

In asking you this question, “How have you been wounded?” I’m aware that I’m inviting you into vulnerable space...into brave space. Hopefully into safe space, because I believe that this congregation is a place of compassion and support. However, I want to caution everyone. I don’t think this time and place are appropriate for us to access our deepest wounds. So if you’re aware of a trauma in your life, or a really deep emotional wound that you’ve suffered, this may not be the time to go there. When I ask you, as I will in a few moments, to breathe into your body and to become aware of how you have been wounded, I’m inviting you to choose the ones that are not the deepest ones. To identify a wound that can be examined in this context, in this time and place here in this congregation.

We all are wounded, simply as part of being human. As Parker Palmer says, “Heartbreak comes with the territory called being human “ However, this is not to invite you into an identity of Victim. I don’t think that is productive for any of us. We have all been wounded, but that doesn’t mean that we have to think of ourselves exclusively or primarily as victims. Here is what Henri Nouwen says:

Nobody escapes being wounded. We all are wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. The main question is not “How can we hide our wounds?” so we don’t have to be embarrassed, but “How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?”¹

The important concept here is that we are wounded healers. Since all of us are wounded, we can use that experience to heal others. As the Rev. Angela Herrera said in the poem we heard earlier today, “bring your need for healing / and your powers to heal.²” Each of us has both.

Now I’m going to ask us to think about, and to acknowledge, and to name how we been wounded--and I’ll suggest two categories. One is, how have we been wounded by society, by forces “out there?” Maybe we have been wounded by the trauma of the election, the difficulty of the political moment we live in. The divisiveness of this country: protests, and (according to what I read in the news today) fistfights in the streets of Washington D.C. Is that wounding you? or something else that’s coming from outside, including the racist divisiveness of our society?

The other type of wound that we might feel, and might be able to name, is a personal wound. Maybe we have been wounded by grief or loss. This loss could be the death of loved one, or the loss of health and vitality, or the loss of an opportunity. Or we might be aware of being wounded by disappointment. The disappointment of love that probably all of us have experienced, and we carry that wound somewhere within us; disappointment about work, something we wanted to accomplish but haven’t been able to.

Let me share now the full quotation from Parker Palmer:

Heartbreak comes with the territory called being human. When love and trust fail us, when what once brought meaning goes dry, when a dream drifts out of reach, a devastating disease strikes, or someone precious to us dies, our hearts break and we suffer — but there are two quite different ways for the heart to break. There’s the brittle heart that breaks apart into a thousand shards, a heart that takes us down as it explodes . . . Then there’s the supple heart, the one that breaks open, not apart, growing into greater capacity for the many forms of love. Only the supple heart can hold suffering in a way that opens to new life.

May we have hearts that are supple, so that when they break, they break open and give us greater capacity to love.

Now in this brave space, I invite you--as you are willing and able--to acknowledge within yourself and to name within yourself: how have I been wounded? What am I carrying? What wounds have I suffered from the outside world, or from my personal life? My belief is that those wounds, although they are emotional, manifest in our bodies.

Now I'm going to invite us to breathe into our bodies and to acknowledge: *I have been wounded. It's not my fault. It's part of being human. I know from my body how I have been wounded, I can acknowledge and name how I have been wounded. Through awareness is the path to healing.*

¶ *

Part II – What Does Healing Look Like?

The poem by Rev. Nancy Shaffer says what I want to say: that healing is possible within ourselves. That we can heal our soul, that we can mend the woundedness that we identified earlier this morning in the first part of our service.

Of course, there is a big part of healing in which we heal one another, although that's not my focus today. Certainly we call upon doctors, therapists, chiropractors; on friends and loved one to help us in healing our wounds. But what I want to expand upon here is how we can heal ourselves.

What I heard in the poem is that we can offer ourselves things for healing: we can offer ourselves food—oatmeal with raisins; we can offer ourselves music, which is healing; we can offer ourselves beautiful colors; we can offer ourselves silence; and sitting in a rocking chair with a cat. All of these things I heard in this poem. How else can we heal ourselves? What does healing look like for you? We know that we have all been wounded. It's not our fault, it's part of the human condition. So how can we heal ourselves? Maybe with herbal tea; maybe with exercise; maybe with prayer, meditation, yoga or some other spiritual practice that works for you. Whatever you do to take care of yourself is a way to heal the woundedness of your soul.

The thing that I want to emphasize today is the practice of Reiki. Reiki is grounded in the philosophy that there is a flow of energy within our bodies; that through our intention we can facilitate the harmonious flow of energy in our bodies, which is connected to our emotion and to our spirit.

In saying this, I want to address the skeptics among us in the congregation: those whose mind is of a scientific nature, people who want to talk about medicine and physiology and science, and who might be skeptical of this claim of energy flowing and that we can heal ourselves and one another and that we have that power. I say we have that power in our hands.

From a scientific point of view, let me assert that there are energy systems in the body. The system of breath is an energy system. The circulatory system—actually two parallel systems, one that circulates blood and the important system that circulates lymph to our tissues—these are energy systems. The system of digestion and elimination; the system of thinking and feeling, the nervous system with all of its mystery. We can understand it scientifically, to an extent: what happens in the brain, the electrical impulses that flow through the body.

I say that all of these are energy systems that flow through the body, and then to take a leap from that scientific point to view to the spiritual (or magical) idea that there is healing in our hands and that we can facilitate the harmonious flow of energy in our bodies there are two steps. First, the Reiki concept is to simplify all of that scientific understanding into just saying that there is energy flowing in our bodies. There are energy centers from the top of the head to the root of the spine that we can identify...and for me that's easier to understand than knowing the names of the blood vessels and the nerves in my body. But I know that there's energy flowing, and I can feel it. And the second leap to get to where we can heal ourselves is to acknowledge that we do have power over our own systems, to some extent. We can control our breathing to some extent. If our heart is pounding, we can do things to calm ourselves down and slow the pounding of our heart; if our mind is racing, we can do things that will calm ourselves down and calm the feelings in our mind.

Clearly, then, we have some agency, some power over the harmonious flow of energy in our own bodies. And Reiki is nothing less than an understanding that there's a harmonious flow, and that that flow is sometimes blocked.

I asked you earlier to think about how we have all been wounded, how you individually have been wounded. What can you name as something that's been a wound for you? And I asked you to think about: where does that lodge in your body? I know that when I am stressed or tense, I get tense in my jaw, or in my shoulder muscles.. This is a physiological truth, and I think of it as energy, as a blockage of energy. What I'm going to invite all of us to do now is to consider that we have power in our hands to heal ourselves. Where do you experience that wound or blockage or tension in your body? where are you aware of that? I'm going to invite you in a moment to place your hand there and to offer yourself healing.

If you're more comfortable doing this with the video turned off, you can do that. If you're not comfortable doing this at all, that's fine! But I'm going to invite you into belief and imagination and faith that you have the power to heal yourself, and to try what that looks like with your own hands. I put my hands together—and I invite you to do this. I feel the warmth in my hands, and that's energy.

When I think about where I am aware of wounds in my body, it's an emotional wound or stress, but it's somewhere in my body. And I can, with intention and love, place my hand there and offer myself healing. I invite you to do that and I will speak these words:

I am worthy of healing. I want to be well. I can heal myself through my intention, through my awareness, through love for myself.

I'm going to speak those words one more time as I invite us into this moment of healing for ourselves. What is the wound that you can acknowledge? Where is it in your body as tension, as pain, as discomfort? And I invite you with this intention to offer yourself healing.

I am worthy of healing. I want to be well. I can heal myself through my intention, through my awareness, through love for myself.

In this safe place of healing and compassion I invite you to linger in this moment of healing for a few more moments as we breathe together.

May all know healing. May we all know the power of healing within ourselves.

¹ The Wounded Healer, by Henri J. M. Nouwen

² "Mending" by Nancy Shaffer, from Instructions in Joy, Skinner House.