

Message for 3-27-22

Shared by Rev. Ken Heintzelman

*The Chief Rabbi of Israel and the Pope are in a meeting in Rome. The Rabbi notices an unusually fancy phone on a side table in the Pope's private chambers.*

*"What is that phone for?" he asks the pontiff.*

*"It's my direct line to God!"*

*The Rabbi is skeptical, and the Pope notices. The Holy Father insists that the Rabbi try it out, and, indeed, he is connected to God. The Rabbi holds a lengthy discussion with Him.*

*After hanging up the Rabbi says. "Thank you very much. I needed to talk to God, but listen, I want to pay for my phone charges."*

*The Pope refuses, of course, but the Rabbi is steadfast and finally, the pontiff gives in. He checks the counter on the phone and says: "All right! The charges were 100,000 Lira." The Chief Rabbi gladly hands over a roll of bills.*

*A few months later, the Pope is in Jerusalem on an official visit with the Chief Rabbi. The Pope notices in the Rabbi's office a phone identical to his and learns it also is a direct line to God. The Pope remembers he has an urgent matter that requires divine consultation and asks if he can use the Rabbi's phone.*

*The Rabbi gladly agrees, hands him the phone, and the Pope chats away. After hanging up, the Pope offers to pay for the phone charges.*

*The Rabbi looks on the phone counter and says: "1 Shekel!"*

*The Pope looks surprised: "Why so cheap!?!"*

*The Rabbi smiles: "Local call."*

The Word About Life from the fourth chapter of Ephesians is about our calling and it is long-distance and local at the same time.

*As a prisoner (**The nature of being human is not "absolute freedom" but conditional and relative freedom. The nature of being human is that all of us are in bondage to something or someone and who we are in bondage to determines***

***the quality of our lives.) for the Lord (Spirit of Life and Love), then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 (This is how you do it.) Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another (annoyances, irritations, quirks, unique qualities and gifts and graces) in love. 3 (This is what you are called to do and who you are called to be.) Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord (one source of life which makes all of us connected), one faith (a single grounding trust that life is a gift), one baptism (one great commitment that makes us family); 6 one God and Father (Source of Life and Love) of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (This is the universal, big picture, long-distance call to being) 7 But to each one of us grace (a unique and very particular grace) has been given as Christ apportioned it. (Verse 6 speaks of the universalism of God and verse 7 speaks of the intimacy of God) Ephesians 4:1-7***

I have been operating on a major assumption. Whenever a minister says this we should pay attention. If my sermons or work among you is not clicking with you it may be that my assumption is wrong or it is an assumption that does not resonate with you. You should be able to tell me that. My assumption for this season of Lent is that many of us are still trying to protect the traumatized person we are and in trying to protect ourselves we miss our best lives which we are called to.

I want to remind us that our entire faith narrative could be read as a story of intergenerational religious trauma. Adam and Eve were thrown out of the garden. The murder of Abel by his brother Cain. The flood story of Noah. The slavery of the Hebrew people. The invasion of the Hebrew people into the homeland of the Canaanites. On and on, the narrative can be seen through the lens of religious trauma and the desperate attempts to heal, restore, and not pass on the pain to the next generation. Religious and Church trauma is real. At the beginning of Lent, I put an ugly truth out there for all of us. What does it mean to start a religion with the story of trauma at its centerpiece?

We are halfway through our season of Lent which means we are 3 weeks from Easter. In this season we explore the theme of the experience of human trauma and how the church has contributed to the problem and to the healing.

We looked at the traumas related to mental health, purity culture, and fear-based theology. We acknowledged that sometimes we added to the hurt in some ways that only the church could. We name it, confess it, and pray. We embrace new understandings and ways of grace and healing.

In regards to mental health let us deepen and broaden our capacity to be a safe people and a safe place.

In regards to purity culture let us reject the dualism of flesh is sinful and the spirit is holy. Instead, let us celebrate our bodies and our diversity.

In regards to fear-based theology let us reject the concept of hell and embrace that every human being is a child of God and if there is anything beyond this life, we are all going there together. We are all just walking each other home.

What all of these traumatic experiences have in common is that our humanity is wounded because it is not honored. For centuries the Church has been referred to as the Army of God. We may be the only army that wounds the wounded and leaves the wounded behind. Let us hone our skills for hospitality and look for the traumatized in our midst.

[https://www.gcrr.org/rt?fbclid=IwAR3fVLivZVTZEraQOxKN5\\_dVDpsdn7MSpaGW-nz324\\_08ckg3Hbn78bC1XA](https://www.gcrr.org/rt?fbclid=IwAR3fVLivZVTZEraQOxKN5_dVDpsdn7MSpaGW-nz324_08ckg3Hbn78bC1XA)

People traumatized by the Church can look like:

- Growing up with chronic fear or anxiety around salvation, rapture, Hell, Satan, or demons.
- Deep or chronic shame about not living up to expectations or being a sinner.
- Fear of rejection by God or the faith community.
- Feelings of unworthiness, being unlovable, or bad in some way.
- Lack of self-compassion.
- Feeling that they can't trust themselves, their body, or their emotions.
- Superstitious beliefs about what will lead to positive and negative outcomes in life.
- Perfectionism or hypervigilance, and a fear of making mistakes.

- Extreme dualistic thinking - judging your own every individual thought and action as "good" or "bad".
- Spiritual bypassing - denying the presence and validity of mental health issues due to a belief that those feelings come from Satan or a lack of faith in God, and if they pray enough or are favored, then God will heal them.
- Difficulty with experiencing pleasure. Either pleasure is bad or you don't deserve it.
- Feeling bad or wrong for having sexual thoughts or feelings, or having physical reactions to sex or sexual thoughts such as crying or feeling a disconnection from the body.
- Denying sexuality.

I have touched on these in the previous Sundays but now I am asking that we acknowledge that it is not just about us in the here and now.

Generational trauma — also called intergenerational trauma — is an emotional wound that extends from one generation to the next. It is like poverty and abuse. There are intergenerational realities, metaphorical demons, at work. Its effects can be seen in individuals, families, and entire communities, and the cycle of inherited trauma often repeats itself. We can see it in our bible stories, our conflicted congregations, our families, and in ourselves. So, like the story of the healing of the man in the tombs of the Gerasenes, we can name the demon and begin the journey of healing.

### **How Do We Start to Heal From Intergenerational Trauma?**

<https://www.livestrong.com/article/13769661-what-is-intergenerational-trauma/>

Breaking the cycle of inherited damage can help you heal from intergenerational trauma. Here are some strategies to get you started:

#### **1. Name Your Trauma**

Vocalizing your trauma can be a powerful first step to your healing.

"We have to name what [intergenerational trauma] does to us," Breland-Noble says. "Sometimes you have to name it to yourself because the people you love aren't ready to hear it." That is okay but find someone that will honor your story and your humanity.

Acknowledging that you have experienced trauma can then help you process the emotions associated with it.

## **2. Claim Your Trauma**

You don't have to accept or make peace with your trauma. I am not suggesting in any way to wrap your trauma around yourself and wear it like a badge of honor. That is how you can guarantee to pass it on to your children and grandchildren. However, living in denial will affect the quality of your life because it controls you and it will make it even harder to process and heal.

## **3. Practice Self-Care**

Doing something about your trauma can start with tackling your emotional wellbeing. Spiritual maturity is taking responsibility for your emotional wellbeing. It is the famous cliché' that before you can help anyone else you must put your oxygen mask on first. Taking care of yourself is as important a spiritual practice as praying, reading, and serving the poor. Let us add guided meditation, exercise, eating nutritious foods, monitoring our intake of social media, art, music, and good company.

## **4. Allow Relationships to Change**

When your trauma is connected to someone you love, it isn't always easy to end the relationship or establish the boundaries you need to feel safe and be healthy. Relationships are always in flux. They are a wonderful dance of coming together and going apart. Another mark of spiritual maturity is our capacity to all for this. In junior high school, we are devastated by the emotional distance from our significant other. Friends, we are not in junior high anymore.

## **5. Allow Yourself and Others to Grieve**

Ending the cycle of intergenerational trauma can lead to disenfranchised grief, where you may experience feelings of loss even if a death wasn't involved.

"It is key that trauma work is done alongside grief work," Robinson says.

"Inevitably, when we peel back the layers of trauma, we are faced with having to 'grieve the gap' between what we received and what we needed."

## **6. Seek Support**

You don't have to face your trauma alone. Receiving support can make all the difference. This can come in the form of seeing a mental health professional or joining a community that has an orientation toward life that is life-giving and joyful.

I did my Master's thesis on the church being a healing community. I wrote the Church already possesses key insights conveyed in the recovery programs of AA, Alanon, Naranon, and Adult Children of Alcoholics. We as the church already have built into who we are the gifts, tools, and insights that make us a healing community. We forget. We don't know it. We lose sight of our calling because we become blinded by our fear, immaturity, and pain. It is the way life is but Easter is coming.