

## Message for 4-2-22

Shared by Rev. Ken Heintzelman

*One day, while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting nearby (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven you.' Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, 'Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?' When Jesus perceived their questions, he answered them, 'Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven you", or to say, "Stand up and walk"? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins—he said to the one who was paralyzed—'I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home.' Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen strange things today.'*

The story's main point is that the one who heals also forgives and the one who forgives also heals. To forgive and heal and to heal and forgive is one of our superpowers as human beings. It is how we remake the world but often we get in our own way.

Getting in our own way because of our own trauma, fear, shame, pain, guilt, doubt, and cynicism. All of these negative things that come out of our personal experiences of trauma, and our attempts to protect our wounded selves, are what prevent us from owning our power and living our best lives.

Sometimes the Church helps and sometimes the Church adds to the trauma. This morning we acknowledge that we at Shadow Rock have done this but we are committed to healing.

The Word About Life presents the story of persistent friends. In Luke's version, it just says some friends and in Mark's version, it says four friends. I want to use the picture of four friends carrying a stretcher with their friend who is paralyzed to

Jesus for healing. The number of four friends works for today's message. Luke the storyteller does not give their names so I want to give them names.

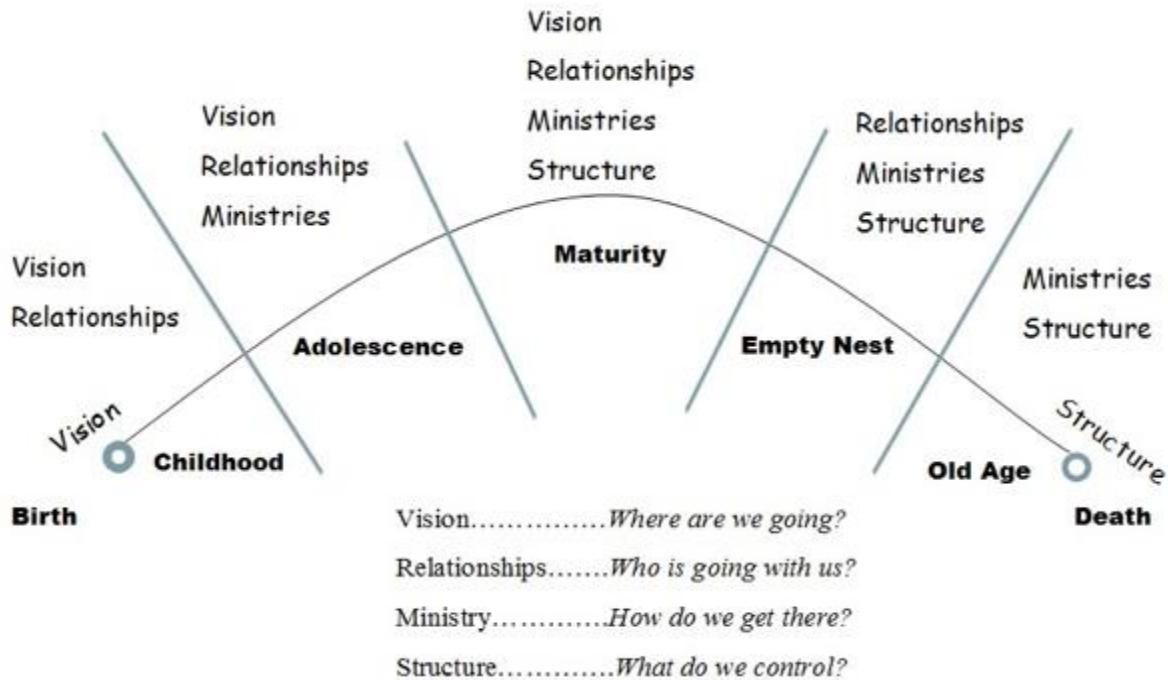
One friend is Vision. The second friend is Relationship. The third friend is Ministry Program and the fourth friend is Structure Management. Remember the four friends have names and we will come back to them.

I want to share this image with you about the life cycle of a church. You can see there is a bell curve of growth and decline. This model was developed by George Bullard. Mr. Bullard outlined the process of growth and decline and stated that you can see which values were prioritized at each stage of the life cycle of the church.

(Insert slide of the Life Cycle of the Church.)

<https://healthygrowingchurches.com/a-season-for-everything-life-cycle-of-a-church/>

## Life Cycle of a Church



Please note that vision and relationship are the top two priorities in each stage of growth, and vision and relationship either disappear or “take a back seat” in the stages of decline. The implication is that to turn around the decline is to inject a new vision and prioritize vision and relationship again.

I call us back to the four friends, carrying their friend with paralysis, to Jesus for healing. Remember their names are Vision, Relationship, Program, and Management. They each had gifts and had their ways of moving through the world.

Vision was the friend who was always asking, “Where are we going?” and always having a destination in mind.

Relationship was the friend who was always asking “Who is going with us?”

Ministry Program was the most practical of friends. She was always asking “How do we get there?”

Structure Management was also practical. This friend was always asking, “What is in our control and if it is not in our control how do we manage it in the best way so that it is.

Imagine the conversation between the four friends as they carried their friend with paralysis.

Let’s take our friend to this guy I heard can heal people. How are we going to get there? Donkey? Wagon? Stretcher? Hey, we can do this. We can cut some costs by packing lunch and not having to feed a donkey if we use a stretcher. This is our friend and we can overcome any obstacles if we want to. That’s easy for you to say you got plenty of ideas but I don’t think you are always realistic. You know once we do this we will know how to do it and we can take a bunch of people to see the healer. Maybe, but I hear he doesn’t stay in one place. OMG! Look at the crowd! How are we supposed to get in there? We wasted our time, I knew this wasn’t practical. And too costly! I know what we can do. We can tear up the roof and lower him down right into the middle of the room where Jesus is. (Eye rolling commences.) How are we supposed to pay for the repair of the roof? All of your concerns are valid and I don’t have all the answers but we can do this. Yes, we can do this for our friend. I guess. It sounds risky. Isn’t risk management your job? Yes, but you don’t ever listen. You just bulldozer your way ahead with your vision. And

love. Don't forget love. Let's see if we can figure this out give me a minute to think.

Eventually, the four friends of Vision, Relationship, Ministry Program, and Structure Management do figure it out. Their friend's life is remade and all their lives are never the same again.

Please take down the slide.

You need all four friends to carry the stretcher. They are better together. No one can carry it alone. I also think the friends, Vision and Relationship, need to be in the lead because the friends, Program and Management, may feel discouraged as they look ahead and see the challenges, but the friends, Program and Management, get things done.

The obvious way that the Church causes trauma is through the issues we have talked about. Being judgemental and exclusive of human beings pushed to the edges of mainstream society through racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, and all the other usual suspects are traumatizing. The Church has caused severe emotional and moral injury by promoting a purity culture and fear-based theology. However, what is in front of our faces and harder to admit is that most church trauma happens because of the way we treat each other. I know this, I have seen this, I have been a part of this, and I am sorry. More people are traumatized in the Church, by the Church, than in any other way.

It is inevitable because we are a human institution but we have something in our organizational DNA that no other human institution has. We have the truth that to heal is to forgive, and to forgive is to heal. This is our superpower. This is our much-needed but underused superpower.

**Let us pray.**

**Spirit of Life and Love, sometimes we fall short and add to the trauma of people's lives and cause more injury to their bodies and souls. We confess this, not to wallow in guilt and shame but to take responsibility for our part in hurting members of our spiritual family. Help us to grow in our superpower to heal and forgive. Amen.**

## **The Pain and Effects of Trauma—Service and Volunteering Abuse**

- Not being given a fair wage if you are on staff; saying it's a service to God
- Guilting you into volunteering and that it's your moral obligation to the church
- Church staff only has a relationship with you to ensure you keep serving; if you stop serving, that's the only time they reach out relationally

## **Healing and Restoration of Trauma—Healthy Service and Volunteering**

- Pay a fair wage. Don't hide injustice behind God's will. We have made some progress on this, especially with the preschool staff. We are basing the wages of teachers and assistants on the Living Wage Calculator for Arizona developed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Instead of starting with the premise that this is what we can or will pay, we set a goal based on the cost of all the basic costs of living and look at what the wage is recommended for one adult with one child. For some we exceed and for others, we are still striving to get there but we are mostly there. This is an issue of economic justice and we voted as a congregation to be an economic justice congregation. This is putting vision and relationship in the lead of the trauma stretcher.
- Letting things go and asking what gives you joy. The program and money thing feel the hardest sometimes but equally difficult are letting go. We have strong feelings connected to memories and experiences. I feel it as well. I feel the loss of not having a church full of children and youth. I remember Jim Robbins asking one time when I was going to stop beating my head against the wall as I kept trying to pump life into our youth ministry. We are in a strong cash position and we are generous supporters of our congregation. We have a little bit of time to discern what we should let go of and what gives us joy. We have time to map out our future and discern what we should let go of and build our spiritual life together around what gives us our greatest joy. But will we do it? Will we let vision and relationship lead the way or will we hang on to programs, structures, buildings, and shrinking funds with tighter grips?
- Stop the manipulation. One of the defining things in our culture is mistrust of institutions and disdain of organized religion. Related to this is the mass trauma handed out by those institutions and this includes the church. Mass trauma has been experienced as we listen to preachers asking people on fixed incomes to

give more as they live in mansions and travel in private jets. Mass trauma has been experienced as financial and sexual abuse scandals unfold in the news. Stop the manipulation. Stop hiding behind God and some false human authority. Stop traumatizing people.

- The four components of congregational life and life cycle are Vision, Program, Management, and Relationship. Which components are in the front seat and which one is in the driver's seat? Sometimes this becomes a power struggle and a cause for trauma. We are encouraged to identify each other's strengths and not just appreciate, but celebrate each other's differences.