



## JOURNEY INWARD *to* JOURNEY OUTWARD

### Week 5: Broken and Beloved in Community —Introduction



Last week we talked about the both/and of our brokenness and belovedness as individuals. It is also true that the families, neighborhoods, churches, communities, and workplaces are both broken and beloved. Collective spaces carry hurt and pain as well as beauty and love just as we do as individuals. When we work with our inner worlds, we strive to move through our pain rather than transmit it to others. As we have journeyed inward these past few weeks, we hope to be transformed so that we can work to journey outward for the sake of our communities.

## Week 5: Broken and Beloved in Community — Scripture

### John 7:53—8:11 NRSV

<sup>53</sup>Then each of them went home, <sup>8</sup><sup>1</sup>while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. <sup>2</sup>Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and began to teach them. <sup>3</sup>The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and, making her stand before all of them, <sup>4</sup>they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. <sup>5</sup>Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” <sup>6</sup>They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. <sup>7</sup>When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” <sup>8</sup>And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup>When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. <sup>10</sup>Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” <sup>11</sup>She said, “No one, sir.”<sup>[a]</sup> And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

### Matthew 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard how he had bested the Sadducees, they gathered their forces for an assault. One of their religion scholars spoke for them, posing a question they hoped would show him up: “Teacher, which command in God’s Law is the most important?”

Jesus said, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.’ This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: ‘Love others as well as you love yourself.’ These two commands are pegs; everything in God’s Law and the Prophets hangs from them.”





## Week 5: Broken and Beloved in Community — Readings

“As you have often heard me say, if you do not transform your pain, you will most assuredly transmit it. Healthy religion on the practical level tells us what to do with our pain—because we will have pain. We can’t avoid it; it’s part of life. If we’re not trained in letting go of it, transforming it, turning crucifixion into resurrection, so to speak, we’ll hand it off to our family, to our children, to our neighborhood, to our nation.”

—Fr. Richard Rohr, Daily Meditation December 18, 2020 from The Center for Action and Contemplation, [cac.org](http://cac.org)

The ground of love. My sorrows are like seeds, pressed deep into the dark earth of my soul. I do not deny them. I do not forget them. But nor do I let them remain unchanged. Over time, I let their pain turn into wisdom, their grief into mercy, their anger into forgiveness. Hidden within me, I let the hurt they once carried become the compassion I now carry, compassion for all who have known what I have known, felt what I have felt, wept as I have wept. The ground of love transforms the seeds of sorrow to new life, new hope, new beginnings, through the mystery of soul-deep healing. I do not leave my faith fallow, but I use my brokenness like a garden until it turns loss to gain and tears to songs of joy.”

— Steven Charleston, *Ladder to the Light: An Indigenous Elder's Meditations on Hope and Courage*, Broadleaf, 2021

How good it is to center down!

To sit quietly and see one’s self pass by!

The streets of our minds seethe with endless traffic;

Our spirits resound with clashings, with noisy silences,

While something deep within hungers and thirsts for the still moment  
and the resting lull.

With full intensity we seek, ere the quiet passes, a fresh sense  
of order in our living;

A direction, a strong sure purpose that will structure our confusion  
and bring meaning in our chaos.

—Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart*, Beacon Press, 1999. He played a leading role in many social justice movements and organizations of the twentieth century. He was one of the principal architects of the modern, nonviolent civil rights movement and a key mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



## Week 5: Broken and Beloved in Community — Readings

*Bryan Stevenson is a lawyer, social justice activist, and founder of the Equal Justice Initiative and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama. In his book Just Mercy, Stevenson describes how being in touch with our own humanity and need for mercy helps give us the compassion needed for restorative justice:*

“My years of struggling against inequality, abusive power, poverty, oppression, and injustice had finally revealed something to me about myself. Being close to suffering, death, executions, and cruel punishments didn’t just illuminate the brokenness of others; in moments of anguish and heartbreak, it also exposed my own brokenness. You can’t effectively fight abusive power, poverty, inequality, illness, oppression, or injustice and not be broken by it. . . .

I guess I’d always known but never fully considered that being broken is what makes us human. We all have our reasons. Sometimes we’re fractured by the choices we make; sometimes we’re shattered by things we would never have chosen. But our brokenness is also the source of our common humanity, the basis for our shared search for comfort, meaning, and healing. Our shared vulnerability and imperfection nurtures and sustains our capacity for compassion.

We have a choice. We can embrace our humanness, which means embracing our broken natures and the compassion that remains our best hope for healing. Or we can deny our brokenness, forswear compassion, and, as a result, deny our own humanity. . . .

So many of us have become afraid and angry. We’ve become so fearful and vengeful that we’ve thrown away children, discarded the disabled, and sanctioned the imprisonment of the sick and the weak—not because they are a threat to public safety or beyond rehabilitation but because we think it makes us seem tough, less broken. I thought of the victims of violent crime and the survivors of murdered loved ones, and how we’ve pressured them to recycle their pain and anguish and give it back to the offenders we prosecute. I thought of the many ways we’ve legalized vengeful and cruel punishments, how we’ve allowed our victimization to justify the victimization of others. We’ve submitted to the harsh instinct to crush those among us whose brokenness is most visible.

But simply punishing the broken—walking away from them or hiding them from sight—only ensures that they remain broken and we do, too. There is no wholeness outside of our reciprocal humanity. . . .

Embracing our brokenness creates a need for mercy. . . . I began thinking about what would happen if we all just acknowledged our brokenness, if we owned up to our weaknesses, our deficits, our biases, our fears. Maybe if we did, we wouldn’t want to kill the broken among us who have killed others. Maybe we would look harder for solutions to caring for the disabled, the abused, the neglected, and the traumatized. . . . We could no longer take pride in mass incarceration, in executing people, in our deliberate indifference to the most vulnerable.”

- Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*, 2015, p. 289-291.



## Week 5: Broken and Beloved in Community — Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. The popular interpretations of John 8 usually go between it being a story about the sin of self-righteousness of the scribes or the sexual sin of the woman. Read the story together as a group and ask if there is another potential interpretation related to this statement from Richard Rohr? **“If we are not trained in letting go of it (our pain), transforming it, turning crucifixion into resurrection, so to speak, we’ll hand it off to our family, to our children, to our neighborhood, to our nation.”** As you read it, note that the woman is treated only as an object of unrighteousness in the story until she is actual addressed at the end. Do you see examples of this sort of objectification of individuals or groups in our world or in your own life today? Why does this happen? Share as you feel comfortable.

Spend a few moments discussing the role of Jesus in the story. Many interpreters note that Jesus refuses to engage the question that the religious authorities pose. If that’s not the correct question, discuss what the actual question could be? What is the significance of Jesus presence in the story? Does anyone else in Jesus spot keep the story the same or is the specific presence of Jesus important in changing the question?

2. Discuss the following statement from the article by Bryan Stevenson. **“So many of us have become afraid and angry. We’ve become so fearful and vengeful that we’ve thrown away children, discarded the disabled, and sanctioned the imprisonment of the sick and the weak- not because they are a threat to public safety or beyond rehabilitation but because we think it makes us seem tough, less broken.”** Is this true for our society? Is it true for you? Why or why not? Share examples as you are comfortable.

Now discuss this quote. **“We have a choice. We can embrace our humanness, which means embracing our broken natures and the compassion that remains our best hope for healing. Or we can deny our brokenness, forswear compassion, and, as a result deny our own humanity...”** Is this true for our society? Is it true for you? Why or why not? What difference will it make in our communities if the faith community fully embraces that we are both broken and beloved and so is everyone else? Share what about our faith empowers you to do this when you are at your best.



## Week 5: Broken and Beloved in Community — Questions for Reflection and Discussion

3. Life can be incredibly wounding. As quoted above Richard Rohr says, “those who don’t transform their pain will transmit it”. Name some examples you have seen or experienced of pain being transformed? How do these stories inspire you? What allowed for the transformation in the stories you recall? If comfortable, talk about a time pain was transformed in your life.

4. Howard Thurman was one of the authors of the non-violent movements in the 1960’s. He was well known for his contemplative prayer practices. Reflecting on his poem included above (How good it is to center down) - imagining the cultural settings of his day, what does this poem stir in you? Is there an invitation for you?



## Week 5: Broken and Beloved in Community — Prayer Practices

As we begin to focus on our internal lives and relationship with God you may find a need to process with someone about this. One ancient practice is meeting with a Spiritual Director. This is a person, bound by confidentiality, who will listen to your story and accompany you as you and the Director wonder together how the mystery of God is woven throughout it. If you're interested in this spiritual practice a couple of options are:

- Reach out to Anna Martinez at [amspiritualdirection@gmail.com](mailto:amspiritualdirection@gmail.com) Website: [amspiritualdirection.com](http://amspiritualdirection.com) OR
- Email Christos Center for Spiritual Formation at [info@christoscenter.org](mailto:info@christoscenter.org) and request a referral for a spiritual director

Try this exercise written by Sarah Bessey called,  
“Prayer for when you don’t even know what you want”:

*Settle down into the silence. Close your eyes.*

*Inhale.*

*Speak the name of God that rises to your lips:*

*Jesus, Mother, Abba, Yahweh, Father, God, Spirit, simply let it be what it is.*

*Exhale*

*Imagine God calling you by your name.*

*And hear God say to you, as Jesus said to the blind man who called out to him,*

*What do you want me to do for you?*

*Inhale. Exhale.*

*And answer honestly.*

- Sarah Bessey, “A Centering Practice for Prayer” *A Rhythm of Prayer: A Collection of Meditations for Renewal*, edited by Sarah Bessey, Amena Brown, et al.

