

March 26, 2017 - Journey Into Forgiveness: Naming the Hurt

John 20:24-30

Marysville United Methodist Church

Pastor Jenny Smith

Have person wear a white sheet over their head to represent a ghost – all the feelings in our life – they're holding a rope and I'm holding the other end

- We have big and small feelings in life. We're always deciding how to relate to these feelings. Sometimes they hook us, sometimes they pass. Sometimes we run as fast as we can in the other direction. Sometimes we check out and numb those feelings with a number of options - food, technology, alcohol, drugs, shopping, staying busy.
- But when we show up to the ghosts in our lives, our confusing feelings, with **awareness and acceptance**, even the worst demons usually back down. When we face the scary thing and name it, we often strip them of their power (Susan David).
- Works well with anxiety and fear.
 - "Fear, anxiety, I see you. Thanks for helping today. But I'm actually safe. I see that you're here but you don't get to drive today."
- Works well with shame. Shame cannot stand to be spoken. Talk about it.
 - "Shame, I see you. You're trying to tell me a story that I'm not loved or valued or worthy. And that's simply not true. I see what you're doing."
- I find that smiling at fear is a beautiful way to soften it a bit.
- We can end the tug-of-war by dropping the rope. That's some freedom, friends.

As we continue our journey into forgiveness, today is the importance of naming our hurt. Last week we told the story of what actually happened. The facts, the truth, as much as we can remember. Sometimes we've told so many stories on top of the facts, that it's hard to get back to the original truth. But we can try.

Today, we'll notice a time Jesus showed his scars and talk about naming our hurt, why we do this, when to do this, what happens when we don't, and what to do if the person doesn't care that we are hurt.

Jesus story

Two interesting things about this story today.

First, Jesus can enter locked rooms. What locked rooms in your life are off limits to exploring? There are 10 locks on that door, yellow "Caution tape" and some big signs you made as a little kid that say, "Keep out!"

What feelings rise up that you immediately push away? They're too painful or difficult. The good news today for you may be that **Jesus can enter locked rooms.**

Second, Jesus had some scars. He'd been deeply hurt, experienced trauma, he cried, he was in pain. The scars tell that story. And Jesus didn't keep those scars to himself. He showed his disciples and Thomas, even when he doubted. People may doubt your story, tell it anyways. Your pain is your pain. Don't minimize it to make others comfortable, friends. **Your scars tell stories.** And if you want to experience the freedom of forgiveness, that scar needs to see the light of day.

Desmond Tutu's book called "The Book of Forgiving" has guided much of our work on forgiveness. I share many of his thoughts today on naming our hurt.

Naming Our Hurt

Every one of us has a story to tell of when we were hurt. Once we are done telling our stories— the technical details of who, when, where, and what was done to us— we must name the hurt. Giving the emotion a name is the way we come to understand how what happened affected us. After we've told the facts of what happened, we must face our feelings. We are each hurt in our own unique ways, and **when we give voice to this pain, we begin to heal it.** As we begin to heal, our relationship to the story loosens and we can choose when and where to share it.

Until the healing begins, we may find ourselves stuck, rigidly repeating our story— or pieces of our story— to anyone and everyone, irrespective of the person or the situation. Many of us have seen people who mutter their story aloud to themselves over and over. They are stuck in their trauma, literally driven crazy by their inability to transcend what has happened to them. Healing memory requires the careful assembly of the puzzle pieces of experience, but once we know what has happened, we must move beyond the bare facts to the raw feelings. While we may be reluctant to face the truth of our feelings or the depth of our pain, it is the only way to heal and move forward. (Tutu).

I can't let go of what I refuse to name out loud.

We give voice to our hurts not to be victims or martyrs, but to find freedom from the resentment, anger, shame, or self-loathing that can fester and build inside us when we do not touch our pain and learn to forgive.

Why Must We Name the Harm?

Often it can seem easier to dismiss the hurt, stuff it down, push it away or pretend it didn't happen. But a hurt is a hurt. A loss is a loss. **And a harm felt but denied will always find a way to express itself.** When I bury my hurt in shame or silence, it begins to fester from the inside out. I feel the pain more acutely, and I suffer even more because of it (Tutu).

Sometimes it feels easier to forgive physical wounds because they're so obvious. A psychological wound is harder to name. Neuroscientists have shown that a psychological wound, such as being excluded, stimulates the same part of the brain that is stimulated when there is a physical wound. Our brains process and feel these injuries the same way. They don't distinguish one type of hurt from another. Which means the children's rhyme that "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me," is simply not true.

Never Naming the Hurt

Some of us have never named a hurt out loud from something in our past. Desmond Tutu tells the story of a woman named Clara who received word her older sister was killed in a car accident. Clara was 19 at the time and no one in her family would talk about what happened. They didn't cry together, talk about her, nobody told her how to act when somebody she loved died. There was no model for grieving or healing. Many tragic situations resulted in Clara's life because she didn't know it was okay to talk about how she felt.

Tutu walks through the important role of grief in forgiveness. We don't grieve only when someone dies. Grief happens whenever we lose something that is precious to us. It could be our trust in someone, our innocence, our faith, a change in our marriage, relationship with a child, a loss of a job, a change in our identity. Grief is how we **both cope with and release the pain we feel.**

For us to prepare to forgive someone, naming our hurts helps us move out of the **stage of denial.** We cannot honestly name our feelings and be in denial at the same time.

I cannot say to a friend, “I feel deeply hurt when you said those things about me to our friend” and be in denial that it happened.

The only way out of what hurts us is through it.

When we deny our feelings, when we choose not to name our hurts and instead reject the pain of our losses, we always end up seeking destruction. It may be numbing our unacknowledged pain or entering the cycle of revenge with a hope that hurting others will fix our pain. It does not. The only way to stop the pain is to accept it, name it, feel it fully.

Then you discover that your pain is part of what it means to be human, along with the rest of humanity. You realize you're not alone in your suffering, and that others have experienced and survived what you have experienced, and you can survive and know joy and happiness again. When you embrace your feelings, you embrace yourself and allow others to embrace you too.

One of the joys in ministry is I get to be a safe place for people to be themselves and share their story. It's an honor. As a healthy body of Christ, we each are invited to become a safe place for people to be themselves. Here are some things we can each keep in mind as we continue to become these places.

How to Acknowledge the Harm

- Listen.
- No feeling is wrong.
- Do not try to fix the pain.
- Do not minimize the loss.
- Do not offer advice.
- Do not respond with your own loss or grief.
- Keep confidentiality.
- Offer your love and your caring.
- Empathize and offer comfort.

My friend, Erin, is a safe space for me. Last weekend, we spent a couple days together and my soul was able to breathe as I shared parts of my story with her. She listened, didn't try to fix it, didn't tell me I was fine, simply held the space for me to get some pain and feelings out of my body and into the world. What a gift that was!

In the step of naming our hurt, we **move from denial of the pain to acceptance of the harm**. We can't bear the pain alone. When we share the burden of our brokenness, we find we are less broken. Our hearts get lighter and our wounds begin to heal. Find someone who will listen and acknowledge the harm you feel, and pour out your sorrow until you are utterly empty (Tutu).

What if the person who hurt you doesn't care that they hurt you?

What if the one who hurts is a group, a government or an institution? The path of forgiveness is still possible to walk. Yes, there are still consequences. And we're called to speak truth to power. But in time, we can release the pain of the harm. When it's time to tell your story and name the hurt, consider writing a letter or journaling about it. It doesn't need to be sent to the group or individual, you can share it with a trusted friend or loved one (Tutu).

This all seems like a lot of work sometimes. But the beauty of the first two steps is that they make room for a new story to be written. But first, you must have the courage to speak.

Jesus walked through death. And came out the other side. And Jesus had some scars. We all have the possibility of freedom, wholeness and salvation because of those scars. Don't hide your scars, friends. They are powerful teachers on this journey.

Closing Prayer & Guided Meditation

Meet me here

Speak my name

I am not your enemy

I am your teacher

I may even be your friend

Let us tell our truth together, you and I

My name is anger: I say you have been wronged

My name is shame: my story is your hidden pain

My name is fear: my story is vulnerability

My name is resentment: I say things should have been different

My name is grief

My name is depression

My name is heartache

My name is anxiety

I have many names

And many lessons

I am not your enemy

I am your teacher