

This month our theme is Healing. We'll be looking at it from the view of the individual the community and on a systemic level. It's a big topic and it deserves several Sundays of attention.

Healing is a process - our theme is not Healed, or whole, or perfection. Our theme is Healing - that process of becoming healed.

And like with all processes it is never done quite and there are different ways to get there.

But where do we begin?

I think we begin with kindness. And here I would like to point out that I am speaking from a place of absurd privilege. I am white, healthy, educated with few money worries. All my children have enough to eat; I do not fear for my life, I can walk through the streets with the confidence that I will not be randomly stopped harassed or killed.

Yes I have experienced systemic sexism - I have been told to smile more - or less. I have had folks question my ability to minister given that I am female. I have had male colleagues and congregation member - not here - speak over me and interrupt me repeatedly and without thought. But in the large picture of the world at this time the micro-aggressions I experience are minimal - way more often I am part of the privileged not the marginalized.

And I recognize that in saying healing begins with kindness I am speaking in that very moment out of my privilege. If my child had been gunned down in the streets by a police officer, I don't know that I would be saying that healing begins with kindness.

If I had been followed for the umpteenth time in a store because of my skin color I don't know that I would say that healing begins with healing.

If the grocery store cashier yet again asked for my ID when using a credit card but clearly had not done that for the three white customers in front of me - I don't know that I would say that healing begins with kindness.

This is also to say that there may be different paths to healing. Someone else's path may start in a different place and follow a different trajectory. And that is OK if there is one thing we UU's know it is that there are multiple truths.

But what I can do is speak from my own experience and if that experience speaks to your heart wonderful. And if it does not hopefully you will hear something that touches you this morning and always, always I invite you to stay in conversation with me. So perhaps I should amend the beginning of this sermon and say one place to start the healing process is with kindness.

I want to be clear kindness is not sweet - it is in fact hard - difficult. My mother used to say if you don't have anything nice to say don't say anything at all - that is not kind, it is not even sweet - really it is just conflict avoidant.

When I was in high school I remember one of my advisors was asked what trait, what characteristic, would she want to be known for. And her answer was kindness. This was many years ago and I remember internally rolling my eyes - remember what my mother taught me? - and thinking to myself - really kindness that's all it seems kind of like under achieving. But she knew something I did not. I was raised with a pretty waspy sense of kindness - it meant not risking embarrassing someone which meant not asking folks directly how they were doing. Because of course one could not admit difficulties. It meant keeping conversations on a very shallow level which really was not about kindness at all but instead was about protecting oneself. Because after all if I truly ask you how you are doing I might have to deal with your feelings and then even worse I might have to deal with my feelings.

Fast forward eight years or so I was in seminary an educational process where you soak up all this learning but at the same time it kind of wrings out a lot of old learnings too. There is both an excitement of discovery and existential panic - at least for me. And at one point I was in that moment of existential wondering and panic and a friend of mine, who had been a minister for a while, asked me how I was doing, really. And like an hour and a half later I said I am so sorry you just asked me how I was doing and I completely unloaded on you. He said to me in all kindness "I've been in

ministry long enough to know the question how are you doing really - often has a very long answer. His kindness was a turning point for me in a way. I was on the receiving in of true kindness - not the "niceness" I had been trained in. I think he saw someone who needed to be heard and he asked the question in a kind way but in a way that allowed me to really talk and he was there for 90 minutes listening and holding all of what was my mess.

This world is broken - most of us, if not all of us, are broken. I think I have been a Unitarian universalist long enough that as I was writing this sermon I even began to argue with myself about what I mean here. We buck and bristle against any kind of sense of sin or being wrong or negative judgment. And the reality is if we are all broken - as I truly believe - then is it right to call that broken? I mean isn't that just the way everyone isn't that the standard? And we UUs sometimes have a sort of twitchy reaction to Christianity and the words, like sin or brokenness, that are often connected to that tradition. Because if Jesus was perfect and was in fact the only human who could be perfect then the game is rigged and then we are off on the old and well worn humanist/theist debate.

But that is not what I think of when I say the world is broken.

Because what if the statement this world is broken, I am broken and you are broken is not a theological statement. What if it is not a statement of how valuable or not valuable we are what if it is not a statement about how come we are not perfect. What if none of those ideas matters? What if you could wash them away. Maybe then we could see that saying the world is broken is a feeling statement.

What if saying the world is broken is an expression of what it feels like to be in this world. There is pain in this world that is unmanageable. The racism in this country is soul crushing, the bombing of Syria is beyond understanding. We live in one of the poorest cities in America. Broken doesn't even begin to express my feelings about all of this. Babies die and evil people seem to prosper. Broken just barely begins to describe this world.

And I simply cannot leave the brokenness be. I believe that we as

Unitarian Universalists are called to work to heal the brokenness of this world. That means I and you must work to heal the brokenness within each of us, and then reach out and work to heal the brokenness of the world around us as we find it.

But how to do that

When my mother died - the first of my husband's or my parents to die, a wise, wise, person said to me - Now is the time for you to be gentle with each other. And perhaps that is what I really mean by kindness — being treated gently, with care and compassion.

Sometimes broken means something is not working - a car is broken when it will not run, a light bulb is broken when it will not turn on. But something can also be broken when it is broken into pieces - like a plate that is dropped on the floor. And this is how I think of this brokenness of this world - it is broken when we are separated from each other

Rumi said, "Grief is the garden of compassion". Compassion is the quality of being connected. Grief is negative emotions around being separate. So how do we transform our sense of separation? Into a lived experience of being connected. That is one way to heal the world and one of the first steps is this deeply profound sense of kindness.

And if you are in your head, like me when I was heard my advisor rolling you eyes and thinking this is too naive too little hear this story

Kim Crawford Harvey is the senior pastor at Arlington Street Church in Boston. She is a kind of rock star in our movement, a queer woman who has been the senior pastor there for like 27 years. But that was not her first church. Her first church was the Provincetown UU congregation. She began her pastorate there just as the AIDS epidemic began in this country. Her four years there was essentially hospice work. Being with people as they got the news that they had AIDS, Visiting the dying, comforting them, leading funerals, comforting the bereaved. Every Sunday wondering if this was the last time she would see her congregation, wondering if all of them were going to die.

She tells a story of going out on a boat with a man named Paul, who was dying of AIDS. One of the last things he wanted to do in his life was go on a boat ride. She said "The temptation to drown in sorrow threatened to undo me. It was Paul who separated the pain from the suffering. He said "Even if it kills every single one of us, even if there is no one left to tell the stories it matters that we care for each other in all this madness it matters that even in the face of death."

In this time in this place with all we hear on the news or in social media. There is a temptation to drown in sorrow to be undone. But the good news is what we do matters - a lot. It matters that we are kind, compassionate and care for one another, it matters that we are kind and compassionate and care for those who are not part of this community - it matters. It is a clear path to healing.

In a world without end may this be so.