

August 11, 2019
Rev. Linda *100 Silences*

I am finding that we are growing more silent here on the liberal end of the spectrum. In the beginning of the erosion of the rights of women, the environment, of the rights and freedoms people of color and differing gender identities, of the separating of children from parents at the border: we were audible. We talked and marched and rallied; we wrote and listened and conferred. I too spoke more about the losses that confronted us, and mined my soul for ideas that were hopeful reminders that we could not see the whole picture and had yet much to do, each one of us, to live into the best people we could be.

We are growing more silent. We are losing our sense that we can make a difference, feeling that if we talk too much, see too much, ask too much- we'll be swallowed up.

I check in with a lot of people and ask how they are, and there are so many of us who are experiencing small or large illnesses, aches, pains, sleeplessness, a breaking down of relationships and conversations.

As a chaplain, I have learned so much about grief in the past years. I sit with people who are hurting, hurting in ways so human, so mortal, and I witness while listening, as carefully as I know how, to the medicine they have in them, the voice that knows what is needed right now and now and now.

We all have one of these voices. It comes in little ways, someone who just lost his best friend and cannot get out of bed or eat, is moved to tell me a story of swimming in the ocean every summer, floating with arms open to the sky, the sea carrying him and how he feels part of everything then, everything.

And so, when I am blessed by hearing well, and I was so blessed that day, I said, "How about a swim tomorrow? How about when you float you open your soul to your friend, his love, his presence, his laughter and sorrow and you reside there, held by what holds us all?"

His medicine. He had it all along.

What is our medicine now? So many we love are suffering and so many more we do not know but when we listen deep, the roar of their suffering echoes in each of us. The roar of inadequate gun laws; the roar of the earth; the roar of mothers and fathers on our borders as their children are taken from their clenched arms.

The roar of Muslims and Jews and Latinx and African American and transgendered people as they are held up by human feet and pushed down by inhumane acts.

And this roar, this roar we turn the music up on in our earphones, this roar we sleep and eat and drink and remain silent or talk too much through- this roar, hushed or turned all the way up, is taking a toll. Where and how are you feeling it?

I cannot watch the news on TV. I am afraid that if I look and listen too closely, I'll fall through the portal of fear and rage and sorrow and not know my way back. How close can one get to such tragedy and grief and survive?

And then I wonder too, is survival, or remaining who we are as we are, the highest good? What if we were to allow this all to break us until some new, freed bird flew from our breasts, until the voice we keep quiet woke up and started singing in languages we are not yet fluent in? What in us, that is worthy of us, has been too long silent? How can we know if now is the right time? If these new voices and creativities and despair and longings are ready to be vulnerable, to be seen?

When is the last time we have asked one another: Are you despairing? How does it show up in your life? Do you have hope in your life too? How does that show up? How does your despair and your hope find expression? What is your medicine in your grief? What do you need to give voice to now?

Sometimes I am afraid to reach in that deep: too private, too intimate, too complicated to risk this kind of conversation. Sometimes it feels like our hands and our minds are too full, too full of hunger. Will it be too much to give wings to these words? There is an Inuit word, *qurrsiluni* it means "sitting together in the dark."

I wonder, if we could sit here, in our grief and joy, in our mourning and knowing that there is still beauty too, I wonder, might be the words rise up?

I was moved by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and other New Zealanders after a gunman attacked two mosques, killing 50 people.

Many people gathered, from many faith traditions and no traditions at all, to join a call to prayer. That ancient sound that gives voice to the silence within us. All the women: Catholic, atheist, agnostic, Jewish: covered their heads in respect. The Prime Minister covered her head in a black scarf. The call to prayer was broadcast nationwide and was followed by two minutes of silence.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said, "New Zealand mourns with you, we are one."

Can you imagine us giving into this level of solidarity and vulnerability? Putting on a yarmulke or a head scarf or learning to say we are all one in Spanish, *todos somos uno* after the shooting of 22 people at the Walmart in El Paso which was colloquially known as the Mexican Walmart? This is the largest mass shooting of Latinx people in the modern history of the United States.

And how do we give voice to it all now? Can these hands full of hunger find ways to open, to come as they are, to receive, to give, to caress our ears to listen for more than we know how to hear?

Because when we can find the voice nurtured by light and dark, born in community, tested and refined in relationship. Things change.

The imam of the Al Noor mosque, Gamal Fouda, said in thanking New Zealanders for their support and compassion since the attacks "This terrorist sought to tear our nation apart with an evil ideology ... but we have shown that New Zealand is unbreakable. We are brokenhearted, but we are not broken."¹

I know our hearts are breaking here my friends and I say to us all: We also have some medicine for the brokenhearted and we can only find it right inside our own brokenness- the humanity and sorrow and loss and grief- inside of it all there is the medicine we seek.

As we give voice to our despair, our anger, or rage, our helplessness, let's add new questions, let's listen in new ways. How does it show up, this feeling of helplessness in your body and relationships?

Listening, listening for the medicine, for the balance, for the hope, for the voices left unspoken, relegated to the land of the silent because we have forgotten how to shine a light there to rouse them.

Take my hand, take one another's hands, remember that there is more grace between us than within any of us. Remember who we are.

And that is what Prime Minister Ardern did. She worked tirelessly to coordinate a government effort to overhaul New Zealand's gun laws.

"In the span of five days, her coalition government...formulated a ban on all the semi-automatic weapons that were used in the Christchurch attack."²

I wonder, what can we learn from the darkness now? How can it inform us when it is our turn to bring joy and love? And it is always our turn. What can the seeds of the darkness teach us now if we but learn to ask them for their medicine? Can this nurturing, this caring, this honesty and authenticity still call cherry blossoms from their stems to rain down in pink clusters of rain?

I work to cultivate silence. I meditate in the mornings. I run at Sanford Farm and give thanks that these old bones can still make it for the few miles I tread very slowly. I have learned, from all of you, to use listening to increase my sense of being in grace, which I'll tell you more about next week when we gather on Sunday to celebrate 6 years of our ministry together.

¹ <https://www.npr.org/2019/03/21/705679944/new-zealand-listens-to-muslim-prayers-a-week-after-mosque-shootings>

² Ibid.

Sometimes, I think if I were more evolved, less rooted in ego, more present; I would stay silent more often. And sometimes this is the truth as many committee member can assure you! And other times I use this same logic to keep from speaking out. It's not my place; it's not my turn; not everyone agrees; I might offend someone I care about.

The work of Pope Francis is instructive to me. Pope Francis has been trying to make inroads into the unhealthy clericalism of Catholicism, or the idea that one person has absolute authority over another. James Carroll, former Catholic priest, in his article in the Atlantic writes that when being ordained into the priesthood, one pledges obedience and allegiance to a bishop, not to the ideal of selfless love that Jesus is known for teaching. This breeds a twisted allegiance to power, secrecy, and lack of responsibility for one's actions.

Pope Francis wrote a book called, The Name of God is Mercy. I do not know if there is a god or not. Science seems to be touching a mystery it cannot define. But I do know there is mercy. Mercy, or radical kindness as Anne Lamont calls it. Mercy, the quality of being present and humble enough to see oneself in another.

If the Pope ever calls upon me to discuss theology, I would tell him that I believe that the name of covenanted community is mercy. Community that comes together with a mission to bless the world, none of its members more important than another, none with ultimate authority, none who demand silence as a means to power. When blessing the world is the only goal, then who we are and who we become lives in relation, not to authority, but to actions of compassion and care.

We are a covenanted community whose purpose it is to bless the world. We who know salvation as love, we who must sit with the consequences of our own humanity here and now, we promise one another to show up and sit in the light and the darkness and not run away, mining the caverns of goodness, justice, and love. The Name of Mercy is covenanted community.

When we risk both silence and voice in community, both the bearing of the winter and the spring in our hearts, when we bring both of them imperfectly into these gatherings and risk being seen as not always sure or strong or even capable, when we risk bring human together- there will be more room for more humanity among us and more strength to participate in building the scaffolding of humanity for others.

Wondering what mercy or radical kindness is to those we can see and those we cannot, to those in the room and those not here, to our dreams and the dreams of those whose voices are being maimed. When we refuse to let the medicine of intimacy stay on the shelf, we are part of a the arc of history that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said bends toward justice and I say, that we must roll up our sleeves, strengthen our backs and bend toward justice ourselves. And then, our voices can rise, rise like a morning's sun that does not rise at all but only becomes visible because we are falling toward it.

We will teach one another to hear. We will teach one another to recognize the medicine in each of us. We will teach one another to weep and to protest; to say no and to say yes; to dream the dreams of peace as the shots ring out, to live into the actions of radical kindness one day at a time. How else can we stay here my dear ones? How else can we stay here?

The world needs our love. Stay a while longer sweet ones, stay in this radical act of seeking to bless the world. Take my hand. Take one another's hands.

Stay and bless and be blessed. There is always more time for love.

Amen