

Thanksgiving Sunday

November 22, 2020

La Verne Church of the Brethren

Prayer Practice of Forgiveness: Ho'oponopono - Dawna Welch

There is such a beautiful intentionality in the scripture Sarah just read - before you can offer your gifts you have to make things right with anyone who has a something against you, and I would add, even if that someone is you.

Traditionally, before one could participate in Love Feast, Brethren practiced a time of examination to address what needs to be forgiven or made right. This practice of forgiveness was and is a very powerful way of freeing up our capacity to live more fully and offer our gifts abundantly. And, of course, it can be quite difficult to do.

So, I want to introduce you to a deeply healing age-old practice that comes from Hawai'i. The beautiful Hawaiian Prayer for Forgiveness is called "Ho'oponopono" (pronounced [HO-oh-Po-no-Po-no](#)), and it really is lovely! When attempting to forgive either others or themselves, we can sometimes make the mistake of thinking that forgiveness equals forgetting, or an erasing of the wrongdoing. That is not even really possible since it ignores hurt feelings, which inevitably bubble back up later if they are not addressed. To put things back in balance with the Ho'oponopono, prayer one first needs to:

- Acknowledge that a wrong exists,
- Then have the desire to forgive
- And when ready, make a conscious choice to move on.

The prayer goes like this: "I'm sorry, Please forgive me, Thank you, I love you". That's it. It sounds simple and it is - these words are simple and universal and something we all want or need to hear from time to time. This mediation functions as both a concept for reconciliation and a tool for restoring self-love and balance. Or, if you are someone who is very hard on themselves or carry's around guilt it's also a way to offer yourself some comfort and love.

I invite you now to sample this practice by planting your feet firmly on the ground, now close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. While you continue to breath I invite you to examine within yourself:

- "Where do you still need forgiveness?"
- "Where are you still seeking forgiveness?"
- "What are you thankful for?"
- "Where do you want to feel more love?"

After a few more breaths we will repeat the mantra 3-times. First for those with whom you are seeking forgiveness: I'm sorry, please forgive me, thank you, I love you. Then for those with whom you wish to forgive: I'm sorry, please forgive me, thank you, I love you. And finally for yourself: I'm sorry, please forgive me, thank you, I love you.

As you chose to make this practice your own I encourage you repeat the mantra at least 10 times and end with a period of silence to pay attention to what may - may not have come up for you. Forgiveness requires attention and intention. It is a practice handed down from Jesus through scripture and is vital for each of us as individuals and as communities of faith. I pray it will be a meaningful and transformative practice for you.

Children's Time – Handwashing; An Act of Service - Amanda Bennett

One part of Love Feast is foot washing. See at Love Feast we would take turns washing each others feet. Why? Because Jesus set an example of service. A long time ago, he washed his friends' feet to show love, helpfulness, service. And back when Jesus was alive, people didn't wear special light-up tennis shoes. Not they wore sandals or no shoes and there was dirty everywhere. So when Jesus washed his friend's feet, it was truly an act of love and service.

While we can't wash each other's feet today, we can still serve each other and help each other and love each other. It even involves washing. Can you guess what it is?

Well, if you have been here, in the Aqua Room, at church, you know exactly what I'm talking about. Hand washing! Kids in the Aqua Room wash their hands first thing (well, after taking off their shoes anyway).

How can washing our hands be an act of service? It removes germs from our hands so we don't spread them to things we touch and can that can help others to stay healthy. And when help stop the spread of germs, we are serving others.

Take a look at this! (Video of pepper/soap experiment)

Wasn't that cool?

We saw Wesley's hand in the pepper, which represents the germs. Without the soap, the pepper, or germs, got stuck on his finger. But on the other hand, he put soap on his finger and then put it in the pepper (germs). The soap pushed the pepper away. That is what hand washing does for us. It can push the germs away, helping to keep germs from spreading.

So When can you wash your hands?

Maybe before you eat.

After you go to the bathroom.

After you cough or sneeze. And especially if you...pick your nose!

And each time you wash your hands you are serving others.

So I hope you'll join Wesley today, as he serves others through hand washing.

Reflection: The Gift of the Table - Susan Boyer

A year ago, my sister and I took a dream trip to South Africa. When I told my son, who has his own business in Vegas making bread and pastries, that I would be in Cape Town he said, "Cape Town is alive with world renowned restaurants right now. You absolutely have to try some." So, we let our travel agent get us reservations at one called Reverie Social Table, with no understanding of what it was. Our travel agent simply warned us to pace ourselves.

Reverie is based on the idea that friendship and respect are created around a table. The restaurant is in a small store front with one long table down the middle. The maximum number they seat a night is 18 people and you must have a reservation. They only serve one meal a night and it lasts hours. What they serve each night is different because they use only locally sourced food. We were served five courses over four hours...and we were the first to leave. The chef said she sometimes shoos people out of her restaurant around two in the morning.

At our table was a family of four from Mauritius; three women from Germany who had met a couple years ago on a sailing adventure and now travel together all the time; a journalist from Nairobi who was about to quit her job to walk the Pacific Crest Trail in the US; a woman from New York who was in Cape Town for a sexual harassment conference; a couple from Cape Town who had always wanted to eat at this restaurant; a man who spoke little but couldn't stop staring at the women from Germany; and two sisters from the US on their dream trip to South Africa. You are encouraged to move around the table between entrees and get to know others. With each new course I felt more connected to the people at this table of the world. At the end of the meal, the chef and her staff sat down to enjoy these new-found friends.

At one point in the meal, the woman from Nairobi was talking about bread and I told her about my son, Brett, and his business in Vegas and I proudly showed her a picture of his product. She said, "I'm going to Vegas for a friend's wedding next month. I want some of that bread." She immediately found his business on Instagram and sent him a message saying, "You don't know me, but I am in South Africa and one of your mother's new besties." I got a worried text from Brett.

There was something magical that happened at that table. I didn't exchange phone numbers with anyone I met that night, but I fell in love with each of them...even the man who hardly spoke. They became my family of the world. Our differences were shed, and our commonalities were highlighted.

A couple days later my sister and I rented a car and drove along the coast to a town called Hermanus. The trip turned out to be a bit more harrowing than we had anticipated, but that is a story for another time. When we arrived in Hermanus, it was pouring rain. We walked into the lobby of the little boutique hotel trying to shed our tension and

standing there were the three women from Germany with whom we had shared that meal. We astounded them by literally falling into their arms with relief as if they were lifelong friends.

The table is a gift. It is where strangers become friends; where families become whole; where churches become relevant; where food that is lovingly prepared becomes sustenance, both physically and spiritually. It is no wonder to me that on the last night of Jesus' life he said, "I have eagerly anticipated sharing this meal with you."

One of the things I miss most in this pandemic time is physically sharing a meal with others – a birthday meal with friends; the extended family around a big Thanksgiving table; our meal of Agape Love at Love Feast. There is something sacred and miraculous that happens around the table.

Because we cannot be physically together around the Love Feast table today, I invite you to close your eyes for just a minute. Imagine yourself with your church family sitting around the table, sharing the true stories from each of your lives, tasting the goodness of the food, falling in love with each person present. The table is a gift. It is where we meet Christ in each other. Thank God for the gift of the physical and virtual table. Amen.

Eucharist Means Thanksgiving - Tom Hostetler

I know I've told this story before: In San Francisco, there is a church named St. Gregory's, known as the Church of The Dancing Saints. A mural wraps around the entire church rotunda, showing ninety larger-than life saints, four animals, stars, moons, suns and a twelve-foot tall dancing Christ. Imagine that in this room.

The saints—ranging from traditional figures like King David, Frances of Assisi, and Mother Teresa to unorthodox and non-Christian people like Malcolm X, Anne Frank, and Margaret Mead—represent musicians, artists, mathematicians, martyrs, scholars, mystics, lovers, prophets and sinners from all times, from many faiths and backgrounds, couples gay and straight, of many continents, races, classes and eras.

But the thing I like about St. Gregory's is that you dance there. You dance into worship, and after the benediction, you dance into the adjoining room to the round communion table, to share with each other the Eucharist. As the congregation dances around the altar, the saints are dancing above. Even for a guy like me, with 2 left feet, I was loving the freedom and spontaneity of that 3 steps forward, one step back shuffle.

Once you get around the table, you put your offering there. Some of it is money, but people also bring an offering of canned and boxed food – all of it mixed up, cans of peas and peanut butter, boxes of macaroni and cheese, dollars, quarters, nickels, bread, wine. Some of the bread and wine is taken right then and there as communion. You serve it to the person next to you; they serve it to someone else. The rest of it,

along with everything else, is given away on Tuesdays when people from the community who need it, come for assistance.

I don't know whether they know it or not (they probably do), but that was exactly the way the early church did communion. Not necessarily with the dancing – that was an addition by St. Gregory of Nyssa in 350 A.D. But the bread and cup in the early church was given along with the offering; at the same time. As in Acts Chapter 2, people were sharing what they had with each other – money, food, clothing, “they gave to anyone who had need.” And at the same time, they were taking the bread and cup communion. And so, they began to call it “The Eucharist.” We are used to thinking that word means the bread and cup. But the literal meaning is “thanksgiving.”

Jesus gave thanks, and broke the bread, and shared it with his disciples. In re-enacting that moment, we are to remember Christ, and be thankful for the love of God. And, we may be thankful for what God has given us in abundance, and what God has enabled us to give to others, by God's gracious hand. It is all a “eucharist.”

Words of Institution 1 Corinthians 11:23b-24

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

Prayer of Blessing

For your blessing on this bread we pray, O God, our Creator and Sustainer. With it we pray for your presence, that we might be your healed and healing body in the world.

We meet you, O God, in the breaking of this bread. Sisters and brothers, let us take the bread.

Cup

Words of Institution 1 Corinthians 11:25

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

Prayer of Blessing

For your blessing on this cup we pray, O God, our Refuge and Redeemer . With it we pray for your forgiveness and strength, that we might also be poured out for the sake of the world. Let us say together:

We choose you, O God, in the drinking of this cup. Brothers and sisters, let us drink the cup.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

O Christ, the Lamb of God, we have been guests at your table. We know the wholeness that comes when we accept your life and make it ours. We give you thanks for all the blessings that come our way. We thank you even more that we are called to be citizens of the everlasting city; so let us take this servant love we have known tonight into the world, that your kingdom may come. Bind us together, that in one beloved community, we may find our blessing. Amen.