

My sharing today is going to get into some issues of sexuality. I encourage adults to read or listen to what is here before sharing with children or youth.

I will add that I am working on organizing an open discussion around sexuality once we are able to be together face to face again- I am looking to plan something for the summer, that would take place after the service, and where we can find child care if that is needed. Watch for details in the coming months. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

“And then you will know...”

What is important in life? That is- What really matters?

In this time of covid-19-induced-isolation, we have had to ask ourselves some hard questions and make some difficult decisions about how we live, who we interact with, how we love one another in this world.

What is really important, as humans on this earth? How do we live life abundantly and fully, when we daily feel like the walking wounded?

I've been thinking a lot lately of what we need as human beings.

What do we need to be healthy? Happy? Whole? Free from shame and fear? To function in the world in ways that we cause little harm to others or ourselves.

And I think it is captured in this exchange between Pooh and Piglet from The House at Pooh Corner.

“Piglet sidled up to Pooh from behind.

‘Pooh!’ he whispered.

‘Yes, Piglet?’

‘Nothing,’ said Piglet, taking Pooh’s paw. ‘I just wanted to be sure of you.’

“I just wanted to be sure of you,” Piglet tells Pooh as he reaches out to touch him.

We need to be sure of ourselves and of one another. And we need to be touched sometimes to ensure our certainty that we are okay.

Somehow it seems this is the point God is getting at in our story from Ezekiel.

Ezekiel was a prophet. He spoke the word of God to God’s people in the late 500’s BC. The people of Israel had been exiled to Babylon in 597 BC, and there was great confusion and fear among them. Much of Ezekiel’s message was one of restoration- a promise of healing for the people, who had turned their back on God. He called on the people to see God’s glory and return to God. Ezekiel often used language- of moving away from sin and toward holiness.

One of the recurring messages from Ezekiel throughout the book is that **God will be known**. “They will know that I am God” is the refrain.

God wants us to be sure of who God is.

How does the story go?

In a vision - God takes Ezekiel to a valley and sits him down. There Ezekiel realizes he is surrounded by bones- dry, dead bones.

God asks Ezekiel, can these bones live?

Ezekiel responds, "Only you know, God."

So God tells Ezekiel to prophesy over the bones – to breathe life into what is dead.

Ezekiel does as he is told- and calls on the four winds. The winds come and breathe life into the bones and they come alive.

The Bones, God explains, represent the house of Israel, which were dead and hopeless. But God promises, in this vision, to bring life to God's people.

"I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD."

Or perhaps God said- "And then you will be sure of me."

At our simplest, at our most naked, it seems to me, we mostly just want to be sure of ourselves and others in the world. We want to be known and loved by God and by each other. We even want to know and love others.

You are known and loved by God is our CMCL mantra, right? In our story today, God wants us to know God is God- "They will know that I am God," the text says.

But how? How can we be sure of God?

I can't tell you how this works for you- but I can tell you how it works in my mind.

To know God is God, is to know that I am created in God's image- that all human beings are created in God's image- and that each of us is known by God because of that bit of God that is in each of us assures that knowledge. It is a beautiful and comforting and all-inclusive message to all living things. God is God- God is in me- God is in all living things. I can see God in myself. I can see God in all of creation.

And yet, we find ourselves in the uncertainty of piglet.

We need assurance. And those around us need assurance.

God knew that in our story. God knew the people needed a vision of resurrection.

They needed to know the breath of God could enter dry bones and bring life.

What happens, though, when we sidle up to someone to seek that assurance, and they reject us?

What happens when we are told we aren't allowed to sidle up to the people we want to sidle up against? Shame and fear start to grow.

In our humanity each of us carries so much. We are spiritual, emotional, intellectual, physical, sexual, beings- and so much more.

And life is really difficult.

In our seeking to be reassured in this world- our desire to be known and loved, our desire to know and love, one of the areas in which we get confused, get mixed

messages, get rejected and hurt and paralyzed by brokenness and pain is around our sexuality.

I am going to suggest, when it comes to our sexuality and sex in general, many of us have allowed a Christian interpretation of our forefathers to sow the seeds of shame in our bodies, and in our minds around sex. A shame that God did not create.

I wonder what you have been taught about sex from the church in your lifetime? Messages around sex that have come out of the church so often create feelings of shame and fear.

What is the basis of our fear?

We fear knowing too much about sex, more than others think we should. Or for some of us, we fear not knowing enough. We may fear being too sexy, or not being sexy enough.

Fear of loneliness. Fear of being free in our own sexuality, because somehow we have been taught that sex is bad, or wrong, or only okay with very narrowly defined parameters. We fear that we will be labeled as whores, or sluts, or players, that we will use our sexuality in the wrong way- and we all could name a variety of those wrong ways.

Then there is shame. We feel shame because we didn't wait for marriage to have sex. Shame because even though we waited, we didn't want to. Shame that we want to have sex more often than our partners, or shame because we want it less. Shame because we want to have sex with people the church has told us we aren't allowed to have sex with.

We fear we will be judged, we won't be loved, we aren't adequate, we aren't beautiful, we aren't enough—perhaps in life in general- but for some reason the shame increases around issues of sexuality particularly.

I mean seriously? How do we find sexual freedom in a Christian world of judgment and bigotry and fear and hate?

How can we be sure of ourselves?

"Piglet sidled up to Pooh from behind.

'Pooh!' he whispered.

'Yes, Piglet?'

'Nothing,' said Piglet, taking Pooh's paw. 'I just wanted to be sure of you.'

"Can these bones live?" God asked Ezekiel?

"Only you know Lord."

"Prophecy to the breath, prophecy mortal and say to the breath, Breathe upon these slain, and they will live."

"I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD."

We can get through life with the broken parts of ourselves continuing to hurt and seek healing- and most of us probably will do just that- walk in the world as skeletons. But could these bones live?

I wonder how our lives could be different if we allowed the breath of God to enter us with life & empower us to live life more fully- to embrace all of who we are- as unique and beautiful and sexual creatures.

Each of us has a different story around our feelings regarding our sexual selves. Each of us has our embarrassments and fears and shames. I wonder how healing might come to us if we spent some time naming them- remembering them- calling the shame and fears to mind- and the cause of that shame and fear to mind- and imagining them as dry skeletons thrown about on the dirt in a valley.

And I wonder if we could envision those bones transforming – that shame transforming into a sense of acceptance. If judgment could pass away with the movement of the four winds, through which God brings flesh and life- even life abundantly- to our beings, so that we might become more whole.

And I wonder if we could sidle up to our sexual partners- not wanting anything in particular- but tell them that we just want to be sure of them. And how their assurance might peel off a layer of shame and fear.

I am not naïve enough to think that healing from years of shaming and fear around sexuality is so easily found.

But I also won't underestimate the power of sacred stories, like the resurrection of the bones in Ezekiel's valley, and how these stories can transform us from inside, with the power of God's breath and presence.

I believe in God's power to assure us of God's presence in us- and God's healing presence in us. We can come to be assured that God is God, and that God is God in us. And that who we are as sexual beings is also pleasing to God.

Be assured, my friends- you are known and loved by God. Each of you. And every part of each of you is known and loved by God.
So be it.