

We are continuing today with the sermon series “On Being the Church” by exploring another passage of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. In the part of the letter that Stan read, the challenge is not in understanding it, but in living it. When we read it, there is the risk that we will skip over it because of its ‘common sense’ feel. It is pretty easy to agree with most of it. We shouldn’t lie, steal and we should be kind to one another. General societal morals easily agree with this. Across cultures, socio economic status and religions most people will be able to state agreement with the principles of not lying, stealing and being kind to one another. So why then is there so much lying, stealing and hatred? How is there such a significant incongruence between our stated values and our actions? In order to reconcile this incongruence we can easily go to the place of saying to ourselves, ‘that is THEM’, not us, or ‘that is them’, not me; particularly if we use this text as sort of a simple moral checklist to weigh our good deeds and our shortcomings. When we look through the lens of the dualistic mind, the mind that can only understand black and white, good and bad, right and wrong, we risk losing the transformative potential of this text by simply skimming the surface. In the absence of deep self reflection and true honesty with oneself, we will skip over our true growing edges.

Our shadow side is much more comfortable in the dark of our unconscious, than in the exposing light of our conscious mind. If you hear this scripture and feel that you are living up to it, know that there is always a deeper level you can sink to in order to hear your call in each moment. On the other hand, if you hear this scripture and allow yourself to be swept into a sea of guilt and use it as a club to beat up on yourself, know that this pattern will not serve you or our community. There is a sweet spot between ignorant oblivion and self-blaming guilt which holds the vibration of neither. It is a place where clarity and grace, honesty and forgiveness, release and recharge coexist. A place where we truly understand that the highest good of one is the highest good of all. A place where non-dual thinking can hold it all.

This passage begins saying, “Therefore, let’s have no more lies. Speak truthfully to each other, for we are all members of one body”. To begin exploring this more deeply, I will offer a lens to understand the body that may be new to some of you, and may be familiar to others. Lets start with the questions: What does it mean for a hand to lie to a foot? An ear to lie to an eye? A heart to lie to a hip? This can sound like nonsense until we begin to really understand the interconnection of our bodies. Our bodies hold the stories of our lives. You may have heard the phrase “we hold our issues in the tissues”.

This is something I see frequently when I teach yoga, and do healing work with people. Many people experience restriction in their bodies as a result of past experiences or emotions have not yet released. When I was at Naramata Centre a

couple of weeks ago teaching yoga, I was teaching the class about this. The next day, a woman in the class with chronic hip pain came to me and said, "I was in bed last night worrying, and I noticed my hip pain begin to increase. Instead of doing what I usually do, which is massage it, I focused on breathing, relaxing and calming my worrying mind. I was amazed to find that my hip pain dissipated". What this simple story highlights is the connection between our mental body and our physical body. For my student, it would have been easy for her mind to lie to her hip saying, "I'm not worrying, the pain you have is your problem. There is something wrong with you". What this does it make it impossible for the body to heal and transform as it is unable to know clearly what needs healing and transformation.

This is the same principle in our communities. When we lie to each other, either knowingly, or we state untruths as a result of our own lack of self awareness, we make it much more difficult to heal and transform as individuals and as a community. We create confusion and mistrust of our own intuition and insight. This can happen in something as simply as a person saying, "I don't feel like I am welcome here" and others saying, "Of course you are welcome, everyone is welcome", but not truly meaning this deep in their hearts. When we want to feel or believe something, or we want others to think we feel or believe something but we don't take the time to really acknowledge the truth to ourselves, this can prevent us from transforming. As Christians, I must say we can be the worst culprits of this. We have been told the "right" way to act, but sometimes we miss the steps of acknowledging to ourselves how we actually think or feel and opening ourselves up to have our thoughts and feelings changed through spiritual practice.

We find the incongruence of what we have been told we 'should' think or feel with how we actually do think or feel to be so uncomfortable that we unconsciously lie to ourselves. The false smile, the kind words through pursed lips, followed by gossip about how so and so is doing such and such, this may seem harmless, but I tell you, on a deep level, this hurts our community. Every time we lie to our brothers or sisters, we are lying to our highest self, our community and to God. Although we can't really lie to God, because it just doesn't work like that. What is beautiful about this is that the simple step of acknowledgment of incongruence to oneself can initiate a whole sequence of events that lead to deep personal and spiritual growth. Every moment of clarity that we allow ourselves to see when we have stepped off the path, moves us a step closer to returning to the path.

I would like to invite you to take a moment to think about when you have experienced this incongruence in your life. Perhaps a person or situation where you wished you felt differently than you actually did. Perhaps a person living on the street who you saw and felt disgust when you wished you felt compassion. Perhaps another member of the congregation that you felt annoyance when you wished you felt respect. Perhaps your partner where you felt irritation when you wish you felt love. Allow this memory to come into your mind sit with it for a moment. See it as clearly as you can, without fogging your lens with guilt or blame. Feel it. Move into it. See this incongruence for what it is. An incongruence. Notice the discomfort that

arises with feeling differently than you think you 'should'. Know that this feeling, this discomfort, is fertile ground for growth.

A second piece of this passage I will lift out is "do not let your anger become a sin". What does it mean for anger to become a sin? Sometimes we can think that feeling angry in and of itself is a sin, but this passage guides us to thinking otherwise as it indicates that one can feel angry without it being a sin. Let's take a look at the word sin for a moment. This is a word that has caused a lot of road blocks in our understanding as it is often used in a pejorative, guilt inducing way. It is a word that has been used to yield its power by judging, othering and pointing fingers. Often, in the current United Church context we simply avoid using the word sin. However, I will offer that there is real value in a clear understanding of the concept of sin. The definition that I use to frame my understanding of 'sin' is 'to miss the mark'. And the mark I think about is often described biblically as the kingdom of heaven. This is not the kingdom of heaven that is up in the sky floating around with all your favorite worldly pleasures. This is the kingdom of heaven that is the here and now realization of God made manifest. What does that even mean? The challenge is that words are not enough to describe something that is so slippery, so fleeting, so magical and at the same time so completely normative that we no longer see it for what it is. We must listen more deeply than our ears can hear, more deeply than our minds can understand. We must listen to the whisper of God in between our words.

The kingdom of heaven is the vibration of the great yes, the feeling of an open heart, the twinkle in a lovers eye, the silence of the moonlight. It is the moment when the flow of the spirit is free to move and sway and swirl within, among and beyond us, the moment we know we are not separate. So when I think of sin, I think of that which is not the great yes, the feeling of a closed heart, the glare of separation, the noise of a chattering mind, all the moments when I feel separate. I don't use the word sin a lot in my practice, because as I have just described it ends up being mental gymnastics to move around the negative conditioning of this word to find a resting place where it can be beneficial for spiritual growth. So we can think of this passage as "don't let anger cause you to miss the mark", "don't allow your anger to move you further from the great yes", "don't let anger close your heart".

It is also important to acknowledge that anger can be great fuel for action against injustice, if we are able to stay connected to God, if we are able to stay in alignment as we allow this feeling to initiate action. However, if we allow ourselves to be overcome with this feeling so it throws us off center, then we will certainly miss the mark. We all do this. What we can do is prepare ourselves for these moments by strengthening our connection to Divine presence. Strengthen our alignment. And what we can offer to our community is to maintain a clear and centered presence for others when they are thrown off center, knowing that soon enough we will need them to offer us this gift of presence and alignment. Sometimes it only takes one person holding the line to create space to invite others back into presence. You may be able to think of a moment when you were in a group and something one member said or did, or simply the presence of this person enabled the group to shift from a

challenging and disconnected place to a more easeful and understanding place. The greatest peacemakers have been able to hold this line. Mother Teresa, Ghandi, Jesus, they were all able to maintain a clear, centered presence, inviting others to see clearly and move into deeper connection. This is why these teachers are so compelling, their gift of presence was and is so strong that it ignites the light within us in moments when we are shadowed in darkness. We all have the power to do this for each other. Step by step we are transforming, as individuals and as a community. Open your eyes so you can see it happening.