

“Make me to hear joy and gladness, that my bones which have been broken may rejoice (Psalm 51:8).” These words, taken from Psalm 51, are believed to have come from King David. This is after he has been called out by his prophet and advisor Nathan at having committed adultery with the married Bathsheba and having her husband Uriah killed.

Born a shepherd, David, through courage, political cunning, luck, and one might say his love for God, became the most celebrated King of Israel. Yet all this had not come without a price, for he had his bones broken many times along the way. He was pursued to no end by King Saul, his predecessor. To escape he hid out amongst his Philistine enemies for a time. Jonathan, his best friend and perhaps his only true love and confidant, was killed in battle. His relationship with Bathsheba led to conflict and misery. David was then humiliated as his son Absalom tried to overthrow him. Absalom’s coup failed however and he was killed in the process.

Through all this, David was always loyal to God and attributed all he had, all he had achieved to God.

Since they were written, the Book of Psalms has been a source of solace for many in western civilization. Last year, when I visited a detainee in ICE’s Stewart Detention Center, a teenage detainee who had been in the center for a year without ever having a visitor, he said that his primary source of hope and inspiration was the Book of Psalms. Many years ago, when I was struggling as a young parent, a Methodist minister who was counseling me turned me to the book of Psalms. It is a book of solace and comfort; yet it can also be a troubling book of revenge and requests for divine retribution. Personally, I had to look elsewhere solace and comfort.

“Make me to hear joy and gladness, that my bones which have been broken may rejoice (Psalm 51:8).” Who has broken my bones? And who may have broken your bones during the course of your life? And there is no denying that we are all broken in some way. You can’t live a life...a life worth living...without encountering and embodying brokenness. There could be many culprits. Sadly, one’s own family can be the wellspring of dysfunction and brokenness. Or, it

could be society, circumstance, nature, structural systems of oppression...and of course, it could be one another...you and me.

Yes. We all bear some responsibility. We have the power to hurt others. We can hurt people when we try to bend them to our will. We tell them to “clean up” which, at times can be a lot to ask of some people considering their circumstances. Yet, more often than not, one’s insistence that others “clean up” is simply a demand for others to live by our own petty and often misguided rules; rules that we think are “right.”

Why might we do this? Why might we continually wish to bend people to our will? Why might we always want people to “clean up” according to our rules and standards? Might it be some kind of twisted sense of injustice that we feel inside ourselves? Some injustice we ourselves experienced long ago? Something that actually has nothing whatsoever to do with the person in front of us that we are bending to our will?

Maybe we have some unresolved issues that have to do with others who’ve tried to bend us to their will long ago. And, in a way, unknowingly, we perpetuate this bending, this hurt, onto others. Hurt people hurt people. It’s paying it forward...paying the hurt and pain forward...a karmic wheel of cause and effect punishment...breaking bones.

According to Buddhist thought, the consequences of every action, good or bad, reverberate back upon the doer. Therefore, when we hurt others we also hurt ourselves...and the hurt that we initially felt remains with us. It never goes away and we never feel any better. It ultimately provides no healing, no joy to our broken bones. They still cry out.

Truly wise people can see the hurtful, painful actions of someone as being rooted in the hurt and pain of that person...and instead of responding with more hurt and pain, paying forward more hurt and pain to others, they try to turn the karmic wheel in a new direction by responding with lovingkindness. This is the root of non-violent resistance. Non-violent resistance wasn’t a ploy, a tactic to be used shame the bad behavior of others. Non-violence is rooted in love; it is rooted in

the idea that I can't have a future healthy relationship with you if I'm responding to your violence with more violence.

This is also the root of Jesus' talk of turning the other cheek. This is difficult to do. And a humorous expression of this difficulty was articulated in our service a few weeks back in the quote, "Turning the other cheek is all well and good, but Jesus was neither married nor a parent (Molly Maslin Arborgast, The Sun, January 2015, p48)." It's hard! Responding to hate with lovingkindness and turning the other cheek is hard because asks us to ignore our hurt, our pain, our broken bones.

I heard a story on the radio last week about some immigration activists who were protesting outside the home of an ICE official who has had a history of making life difficult for the immigrant community. One of the activists said something to the effect, "He has been terrorizing us, now we're going to terrorize him." Well, although I sympathize with their cause, that's not anything I will be doing. As much as I seek to be an ally to the immigrant community, a community that truly is being terrorized right now in this country; perpetuating terror, shame and humiliation – dehumanizing a human being , making it personal, is not anything I wish to be party to. It doesn't break the karmic cycle of pain and brokenness.

I'm more than happy to protest against and deride government institutions, political parties, corporations because despite what the Supreme Court says in its Citizens United decision, corporations and institutions aren't people.

I was at immigration court a couple of months ago in Atlanta. There are occasional clergy calls to immigration court because the appearance of clergy can sometimes help a detainee get out on bond, a situation preferable to simply languishing in detention for months and sometimes years. Anyway, I've been to immigration court several times and the judges have been generally been very respectful yet on this particular day I was observing a particular judge for the first time.

From the start, he was inflicting microaggressions on just about anyone; not just the immigrant and asylum-seeking defendants, but lawyers and even people who happened to be in the courtroom...even me. Afterwards, an idea was floated by

somebody that we should go and protest outside this guy's house. He deserves it. Again, I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to personally dehumanize him.

I obviously don't know this particular judge's personal history, but I believe that based upon his behavior he is hurting deeply. I remember a quotation from the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh: "When another person makes you suffer, it is because he suffers deeply within himself, and his suffering is spilling over. He does not need punishment; he needs help (Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of Buddha's Teaching*, p196)."

We are all beautifully broken, imperfect and wrecked. Yet we are all worthy of love. We are all imbued with inherent worth and dignity. We are perfectly imperfect. And we can't fix one another. We have scars that won't come off. But we can, out of love, clean each other up a bit. I think of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples.

I know it's not easy. It's not easy for me. If you are willing to expose your brokenness to the other members of this congregation, to the newest members of this congregation. If you are willing to be vulnerable. If you are willing to commit yourself to the cleansing of the other members of this congregation, of the newest members of this congregation, then this congregation may possibly begin to fulfill its vision of being a sanctuary for all. And that is a beautiful, beautiful thing.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my faults....

Create in me a clean heart...  
and put a new and right spirit within me

Make me to hear joy and gladness, that my bones which have been  
broken may rejoice (Psalm 51)