

***Easter Sermon Series: Resurrection Healing; Sermon Title: Recovering
Psalm 148; John 8:1-11; Acts 11:1-18; John 13:31-35
Salem United Methodist Church; May 19, 2019
Rev. Dr. Sue Shorb-Sterling***

During this Easter Season we are examining the healing power of the Resurrection. Today we are talking about how this power can assist us in recovering from being shamed or blamed; or being the one who shames or blames others. The two books beside the Bible that I am using are *A Resurrection Shaped Life: Dying and Rising on Planet Earth* by Jake Owensby and *The Universal Christ* by Richard Rohr.

We can pick up any media on any screen and we will hear or read someone blaming another or shaming another. Blame and shame are universal. Young children soon learn to blame others and say things like, “She made me do it, or “He deserved it.” They also soon learn to shame others with words that hurt, such as: “You are ugly. If I looked that ugly, I would stay home.” Can you think of other phrases we use to blame or shame others? We blame or shame another because we recognize our own part in a situation, but rather than owning up to it, we will blame another by thinking or saying, “They are the problem. They are evil. They are guilty.” Owensby writes, “We’ve grown accustomed to dividing the world into people like me and people not like me: black and white, winner, and loser, gay and straight, rural and urban, rich and poor.” We repress our role in the situation into our subconsciousness and single out another. We intentionally choose to harm and hurt another with both undeserved, harsh, negative words and actions. We do this in our private lives as well as in our global lives. Using an analogy of Jesus, we refuse to see the log in our own eye, but will magnify the splinter we see in another. We could call shaming and blaming *the* sin of the world. Globally speaking: wars, company takeovers, political stalemates, and religious schisms occur when we blame and shame another. In our private lives: sibling rivalries, divorces, and neighborhood quarrels happen when we shame and blame another. Our human nature seems to blame, shame, and even punish another as we refuse to own up to the part that we play in the situation.

The ancient Israelites had an effective religious ritual for blaming and shaming. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would take a goat in which he would lay the sins of the people on the goat symbolically. Then the innocent animal would be beaten until it ran off into the desert. The term, scape goat, comes from this custom. Rather than owning their sins, they could lay their blame and shame on an unfortunate goat to export their sins far, far away. Every year they would repeat this same ritual. In today’s world, scapegoating describes much of our personal, political, and public way of speaking and treating each other.

While we will blame and shame another without even thinking about the consequences, we can forget how damaging being on the receiving end can be. What happens when we are blamed for something we didn’t do? We become either defensive and fight back, or we run off into our secluded desert to lick our wounds. Blaming another can ruin lives. Have you ever been wrongfully blamed for something? How did you feel? What did you do? Also, think about ways you may have been shamed, perhaps as a child. Usually we are shamed because we don’t fit in somehow. We may be too tall, too small, too fat, too skinny, too this, too that. Owensby talks about a time when he was a child, an adult shamed him because his family moved back to their less affluent neighborhood. His parents had bought a house and lived in a more affluent side of town and lived there until his mother left his abusive father. Owensby and his mother could only afford to live in the poorer side of town. The adult neighbor tried to shame Owensby by saying that she guessed they couldn’t make it in the wealthier neighborhood. This unkind neighbor had no conception of the terror Owensby and his mother experienced at the hands of his father. In addition, the neighborhood children also shamed him because his mother spoke broken English. Being shamed hurts. People have committed suicide because of being shamed horribly or blamed for something they didn’t do.

Both shame and blame occur in our Gospel lesson. Jesus is doing his thing, teaching at the Temple. When the Pharisees bring a woman, who has committed adultery to him. They are the legal experts who were always trying to trip up Jesus on his interpretation of the Law. Can you imagine the shame she has as she is being drug through the crowds and publicly accused of a private, intimate act? One of my grandmother’s sayings was, “It takes two to tango.” Well, it takes two to commit adultery. Where was her partner in crime? Could he have been in the crowd of men accusing her, blaming her for the sin he also committed? Was she his scapegoat? We also don’t know from the text if she was a willing participant, or if she was forced to participate? If she was forced, her

shame is doubled. What the text does tell us is what Jesus does. The execution of this woman by stoning would have been the ultimate shame and Jesus without saying the law is wrong, turns the law on its head. He says, “Yes, you accuse her of this crime, but which one of you doesn’t sin? If you are blameless, and sinless, go ahead and be the first one to throw that first stone.” Even after everyone leaves, he still doesn’t punish her, but restores her dignity and tells her to get on with her life, but stop doing what was wrong. Jesus never blames, shames, or punishes. Jesus always restores and heals.

This theme of restoration and healing continues in our story in the Acts of the Apostles. The Jewish tradition was not to mingle with non-Jews or Gentiles. It was a protection measure. The thought was if we hang out with them, we might become like them. Eating with non-Jews was forbidden because of the strict dietary laws. So here is Peter, a good Jewish follower of Jesus and one of the leaders in this new movement. He has just spent the last few days staying at the home of Gentiles, eating their food. His colleagues, all followers of Jesus, criticize him, accuse him, blame him and try to shame him for what he did. How did Peter respond? Did Peter let them get to him? No, he used this moment to show them what God was doing in their midst. He took the time to describe step by step how the Resurrection power of Jesus through the Holy Spirit was doing a new thing among them. Not only were the Jews being restored, but so were others.

This is what the healing power of the Resurrection is all about. Our salvation is not a one-time thing, but an ongoing transformational lesson for not only us, but for all humanity. Jesus’ mission was to not only heal and restore all humanity, but all of creation. He freely chose to be executed at the hands of both the state and church authorities so he could reveal to us God’s love by reaching out to us in the outpouring of his human blood. This is our healing balm. Richard Rohr writes: “It is not God who is violent. We are. It is not God that demands suffering of humans. We do. God does not need or want suffering, neither in Jesus nor in us.” Jesus does not shame or blame or punish us. Jesus said in the Gospel of John that he “did not come to condemn the world, but to save it” (John 12:47). Jesus came to restore our human condition to be as God first intended it to be: people who love and care. In Jesus’ death and Resurrection, he is able to transform all human suffering as he identifies with us and stands in solidarity with us. In Christ we become one, one with him, and one with each other. In Christ we are drawn toward unity with each other. This is how we can be in recovery from the blaming and shaming game we play so well. Just like recovering from an alcohol or drug addition, recovering from the shame and blame game cannot be done alone. First, we need to surrender to God who will then begin the transformation process of removing the hate. Second, we need others who are living into this new creation to both be our models and mentors. Here is an example of a young man who is in recovery from playing the shame and blame game and how the church is walking with him in his recovery.

Last May the student body and staff at Glenelg High School came to school and found racial slurs and symbols spray painted on the walls. One of those arrested was Tyler Curtiss. He posted on his Facebook page that he was ashamed of his behavior and how it dishonored the school and disrespected the student body and staff, especially minorities. He wrote, “No words of apology could ever make up for that, but I am truly sorry and humiliated.” Rev. Gayle Annis-Forder, pastor of Linden-Lithicum UM Church in Clarksville, felt a nudge to contact Tyler. She said, “If someone wants to do better, isn’t that what Christians are all about?” Gayle was able to introduce him to people who were different from him: a Jewish rabbi and African-American pastors. He began to assist them with their ministries such as Toys for Tots and homeless shelters. He became a part of Howard County’s Courageous Conversation Circles which addresses race, culture, faith, and bias. Gayle said, “Tyler is not blaming anyone else or dodging responsibility for what he did. He is willing to take on the anger and pain of those who have been hurt by his actions. He is willing to put himself in uncomfortable and challenging situations in order to forge new relationships with communities and people previously unknown to him. He does not hide his own sin, but lets it be a catalyst for change, not only for himself, but anyone who will listen to what he will share about what he has learned.” Tyler is recovering from shaming others by owning his actions. And the church is helping him on his journey of resurrection healing. The church is teaching him how to love people he never thought he could love. Creation is being restored in this one person and that is something in which we can give praise to God who creates, redeems, and sustains all of us.

Reflection Questions: How do you blame and/or shame others? How can the church assist you in recovery from this sin of the world?

Resources: *A Resurrection Shaped Life: Dying and Rising on Planet Earth* by Jake Owensby; *The Universal Christ* by Richard Rohr; “From Hate Crime to Church: A Redemption Story” by Melissa Lauber, BWC UM Connection, May 2019