

Native American writer Hyemeyohsts Storm in his book *Seven Arrows* writes:

To Touch and Feel is to Experience. Many people live out their entire lives without ever really Touching or being Touched by anything. These people live within a world of mind and imagination that may move them sometimes to joy, tears, happiness or sorrow. But these people never really Touch. They do not live and become one with life (Hyemeyohsts Storm, *Seven Arrows*, p7).

It is interesting that he says that many people who don't touch and don't truly live, "live within a world of mind and imagination." Although it may or may not be true, it has always been a criticism of UUs – that we are always in our heads – possibly afraid to reveal what's in our hearts. And for this reason, we've often been called what many mainline protestant denominations call themselves: "God's frozen people." (I'll probably be corrected afterwards that we're not "God's frozen people," we're simply the "frozen people" ....like that's a good thing.) 😊

Why do people not wish to be vulnerable? Why do we fear exposing ourselves – our hearts - to others? Do we fear disrupting this façade we've created – this façade that says "I've got it together, I know what I'm doing"? Does being invulnerably frozen commit us to lead lives of quiet desperation as Thoreau might say?

Or, are you willing to say "I love you" first?

In the same way the Hyemeyohsts Storm says that those who don't truly touch, don't truly live; I believe that Brene Brown would say, on the basis of our reading this morning, that those who don't take the risk of being vulnerable, also don't truly live. She says, "[In my life,] vulnerability pushed, I pushed back. I lost the

fight but probably won my life back. (Brene Brown, *The Power of Vulnerability*, Ted Talk).”

A wonderful conversation about weakness and imperfection takes place in the movie *Good Will Hunting* where a brilliant but confused young man, unwilling to be vulnerable to anyone, is being counseled by his therapist. The therapist says:

My wife used to fart when she was nervous....She used to fart in her sleep...One night it was so loud she woke the dog up. She woke up and said, "Was that you?" I said, "Yeah." I didn't have the heart to tell her.

She's been dead two years but that's the stuff I remember....Those are the things that I miss the most. The little idiosyncrasies that only I know about. That's what made her my wife....People call these things imperfections but they're not. Ahh, that's the good stuff (*Good Will Hunting*).

To our newest members...I'm here to tell you that you've joined a most imperfect congregation. I know you may think we're perfect. You may think we have no weaknesses. I know you may think we're what you've been looking for your entire life....but we're not. Yes, we have the potential to be that what you now think we are, we have the potential to be that congregation, those seeds are here...but I'm afraid to say that we have faults. As individuals, we have hurts and pains and flaws that we bring with us each Sunday...and each day. Those seeds are here too. And because we sometimes lack the courage to be vulnerable with one another, because we lack the courage to share our weakness with one another, (being vulnerable and sharing weakness is no easy thing) we bring our unexposed pain with us. And in our pain we sometimes end up causing pain to others here. It may happen to you. It happens from time to time. Sometimes it manifests itself when we are insensitive with one another – we don't show grace with one another.

I don't think we've done a good enough job at UUMAN creating safe spaces for people to share and express their vulnerabilities and weaknesses - to express themselves emotionally. I believe this is best done through small group ministry and although we have a few wonderful small groups here at UUMAN, we don't have nearly enough; and we have nothing comprehensive. It is badly needed and I think we need help in this regard. (We will be starting a monthly theme sharing circle on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month at 9AM in Discovery Hall.)

Here is a weakness of mine. I don't think I do this. I can't create this. I'm not an expert at creating a comprehensive small group ministry program. Yes, I'm the minister but I'm not even remotely knowledgeable about it. I don't even really know where to begin; and I know I don't have the bandwidth to create something out of scratch therefore if I tried, I know I couldn't do it justice. I need help with this.

But we don't need someone to take the lead on this, UUMAN needs a team of people willing to dive into the richness of this and begin to create something.

A word of caution however: creating something new will require you to be vulnerable, stepping forward to be a leader will shine a light on you and people will come to see your vulnerability and weakness – and, I hate to say – you may not be shown grace all the time. By stepping forward and being vulnerable, you may expose yourself to criticism. I've seen it here.

But I will also say, there will be many people here who will love you for your leadership and will behave magnificently. There will be many people here who will have your back. There will be many people who will affirm you; many who will affirm that you are worthy of love and belonging.

So, are you willing to step forward and be vulnerable enough to admit that you just might be the worst kind of horse? Keep in mind that the worst kind of horse

is the one that finds the most meaning. It's the horse that finds the Way. It's the horse that touches. It's the horse that lives and loves most fully.

The type of congregation that we become hangs in the balance. It always hangs in the balance.

Just as it is within each and every one of us, this congregation has both good seeds and bad seeds. The congregation we become will depend upon which seeds we water.