

-I want to think deeply about a word for a moment. When I say the word “vulnerable”, what comes to mind? **Congregation response.**

-It refers to something that brings up negative feelings, right? You know when I first started as pastor here at Our Savior’s and we read this text on Maundy Thursday (where it is traditionally read every year), I remember thinking to myself: “Well, how does the foot washing work here?” I will never forget the response I got from the worship committee: “We don’t do footwashing here. Haven’t done it for a while. It makes people feel really uncomfortable and vulnerable.”

-So, why do think “being vulnerable” or “vulnerability” is seen as negative?

Congregation response

-The word “vulnerable” comes from the Latin word *vulnerabilis* which means “to wound” or simply from the Latin word *vulnus* which means “wound”. Who wants to be wounded?! That sounds awful.

-Here’s another question for ya: “Do you think human beings are created to be vulnerable?” **Congregation response.**

-I was hearing from some in the Pfister family about hearing the rotors of a helicopter overhead and watching a big bucket being dropped in the river and then the helicopter flying off somewhere. Where was the fire? Was it coming for their home? Infact, I think, Linda even said to me: “We felt really vulnerable and afraid.” Turns out, hours later, they found out this was a helicopter being used for training and no one was in danger. I know I would feel vulnerable and afraid too in this situation. When one is in the state of feeling vulnerable, I don’t think anyone believes, “well, this is a state that God wants me to be in.”

-I know I have been really anxious this week and I think it’s been because of the smoke. When I feel that burning sensation in my nostrils and throat, it makes it feel like I can’t breath and there have been a couple times where I have had to catch myself in a little bit of panic. The smoke has made me feel a little vulnerable and afraid, how about any of you?

-So when we talk about being vulnerable, a lot of times it goes hand in hand with being afraid, and again, that makes sense in some ways because no one wants to be wounded.

-But when I ask: “are human beings created by God to be vulnerable”, I’m not asking “does God want us to be hurt and/or wounded”. I don’t believe it makes sense for God wanting us to be “hurt or wounded” (either physically or mentally) knowing what we know about God in Jesus Christ. (Christ reached out to heal many wounded people!) But, maybe what I am trying to explore here is if there is still a piece of being vulnerable that is meant by God? Not the fearful vulnerable or the harmful vulnerable, but something else.

-”Then Jesus poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.” One of the most powerful moments of my teenage faith journey was going on several service trips with my church’s youth

group. At the end of the week, our youth pastor got out a basin and would wash all of our feet. It was such a powerful experience that I remember almost all of the youth, including myself, began to cry as our feet were being dried. The only way I can describe this experience was “sheer intensity”. All of the emotions tied up within us, all of the feelings of loss, fear, of joy, of excitement, they all seemed to rush out of us through our tears. It was the act of feeling our feet touched and washed that seemed to allow this door to open. It was by being vulnerable we could feel the emotions that in many cases we didn’t even know were there.

-“When we talk about being vulnerable, we’re talking about living without defense, or with minimal defense, that is, taking a chance, going after everything we believe in, feeling your emotions honestly and faithfully. Living the fullness of our existence and taking our lives seriously.” -Dr. Robert Firestone

-What Jesus is showing in this story of washing is about being humble and servanthood, yes. But it’s also about being human. Being human fully means being vulnerable and open to our emotions and life’s circumstances, even if it means the chance of not turning out. Being vulnerable means taking a risk, trusting in yourself and in your God that you will be OK even if something doesn’t pan out.

-If you think about it, that’s what human beings need to exist: vulnerability and risk. Relationship doesn’t exist without some kind of vulnerability or risk. The church doesn’t exist without some kind of vulnerability and risk.

-“Peter said to Jesus, ‘You will never wash my feet.’ Jesus answered, ‘Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.’ Here’s another final question for you: “Is denying to be vulnerable in any way shape or form in life maybe a sin?” **Congregation response.**

-This is maybe where we can take Charlottesville as an extreme example. I think it’s an easy way out to condemn the evil white supremacist individuals who carried tiki torches and who allegedly killed an innocent woman. What is the harder thing to do is to condemn and face *white supremacy* which, in itself, is denying vulnerability to an extreme. When you ultimately wall yourself off from any emotion, bond, or relationship to anyone or anything you deem “different or underneath” you, you are purposefully and intentionally limiting your own humanity. That is wrong and a sin before God, absolutely.

-But, pivoting from that, here is where I think the calling and good news lies within this text. How are we called to be more vulnerable with one another and in doing so more deeply human? This is harder than it sounds, I think, especially in a culture that sees vulnerability as a liability. But that’s not the world God intends.

-Coffee hour at OSLC. The question I hear most commonly: “How are you?” Not “what are you up to?” The church knows vulnerability much more than we may think it does. May we have the courage to be open as much as possible to each other, to take some risks, and be able to radically rely on one another in our walk with God. Amen.