**USG SGM ~ Beloved Community ~ February, 2021**

**Intro: What does it mean to be a people of beloved community?**

Henri Nouwen . . . once described beloved community as “the place where the person you least want to live with always lives.” On its surface it seems to be a straightforward reminder . . . not to expect perfection from others. But Nouwen doesn’t stop there: the whole quote:  *“Community is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives…That person is always in your community somewhere; in the eyes of others, you might be that person.”* By adding us to the mix of the unwanted, he’s pointing out that beloved community requires us to believe not only that others are worth our effort but also that we will be worth the effort in the eyes of others!

**Spiritual Exercises**

**Option 1**

The poet Ross Gay offers us one of the most beautiful stories about everyday Beloved Community with his poem *To the Fig Tree on 9th and Christian*. For your spiritual exercise, simply listen to him read it (maybe a couple of times) and let it take you back to your own “fig tree story.” Come to your group ready to share your fig tree story, as well as why it has such a special place in your heart. (Maybe even write a poem about it!) Here’s Gay reading his poem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aT0A28IW7E>

**Option 2**This spiritual exercise is for the white people among us.
In her widely honored essay, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,* Peggy McIntosh writes, “I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. [So] I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life.” McIntosh’s self-examination led to her sharing a long list of all the ways white privilege shows up in her life.

So, for your spiritual exercise this month, take up McIntosh’s work and apply it to yourself.

* First, read her article: <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf>
* Second, go through her list and spend some time thinking about how the items in her backpack also show up in yours.
* Then, and most importantly, identify and commit to removing 2-3 of the items from your own backpack/list. Awareness is a big part of the work, but it’s obviously not enough.
* Finally, come to your group ready to share your journey.

**Chalice Lighting**

To be fully seen by somebody, and then loved anyhow—that is a human offering that can border on miraculous. *Elizabeth Gilbert*

**Check-in** *Share your highs and lows since we last met focusing on what drains you and what lifts you up. We give each other the gift of listening without asking questions or offering advice to allow people the safety to share what’s in their hearts.*

 **Quotes for Inspiration/Readings**

The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community. Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The goal [of Beloved Community] is reconciliation, not to destroy your opponent, nor cast them out, but to stay in the struggle till love wins. [Rev. Victoria Safford](https://whitebearunitarian.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/01-19-2020-sermon.pdf)

Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world.

*bell hooks, Killing Rage: Ending Racism*

If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.

*Mother Teresa*

**Questions**  *Pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what being a part of a people of Beloved Community means for you and your daily living.*

1. What was your first experience of Beloved Community?
2. What do you think is the most unrecognized impediment/threat to Beloved Community?
3. It’s said that Beloved Community isn’t about the absence of conflict, but the willingness to stay at the table and work through it. What has been your best strategy for staying at the table? What practice or wise words keep you from running (or attacking) when things get hard?
4. What does “loving your enemy” mean for your right now?

**Sitting in Silence** *Take a few moments to sit quietly and reflect upon your thoughts.*

**Sharing/Deep Listening** *Respond with your thoughts and experiences with the topic. We create a safe space by listening deeply and not responding. When sharing, connect with what is true for you. When listening, give the speaker your full attention rather than thinking about what you will share.***Reflection and Gratitude** *This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared. Consider lifting up one comment or experience for which you are particularly grateful.***Music**
We Won’t Move, Arlissa
<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=APQx0Mt1LIQ&list=PLvXOKgOQVYP4X1rlBAPoYr49-EhKcvtMz>

I Can’t Breather, H.E.R.
<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=E-1Bf_XWaPE&list=PLvXOKgOQVYP4X1rlBAPoYr49-EhKcvtMz>

**Extinguishing the Chalice**

We have before us the glorious opportunity to inject a new dimension of love into the veins of our civilization. The type of love that I stress here is not eros, a sort of esthetic or romantic love; not philia, a sort of reciprocal love between personal friends; but it is agape which is understanding goodwill for all… It begins by loving others for their sakes and makes no distinction between a friend and enemy; it is directed toward both. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposers into friends.” Martin Luther King, Jr.