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Series Title: Keeping it Real: The Power of Vulnerability

Sermon Title: Vulnerability with Others

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Text: [Matthew 5:23-24 and Galatians 6:1-2](#)

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You may have played the team-building, group-building activity called a trust fall. The idea is that a member of the team or group climbs up on a picnic table or something like that, and the rest of the group gets below and reaches out their arms and hands, ready to catch the person. The person crosses their arms and falls back, trusting that the group below will catch them and keep them safe.

I don't know if we do this activity in this way anymore, but in another way, we do it all the time, without even realizing it. Being vulnerable with others is precisely like this. We go out on a limb with others, and when we feel like we are falling, we trust others to catch us.

In a way, life together is one, ongoing trust fall. We are in the middle of a series called *Keeping It Real: The Power of Vulnerability*, looking at how vulnerability is a strength and a key to unlocking our authentic selves. Being real leads to the best experiences in life

Today we are focusing on vulnerability with others. Vulnerability with others is a bit of a dance. On one hand, when we become defined by what people think, we lose our willingness to be vulnerable; however, when we stop caring about others, we lose our capacity for connection.

We are constantly engaged in this dance. One of the unique things about the Christian faith among all the world religions is that Christians relate to God through the life of another—through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. From the very beginning, the Christian faith is relational. Jesus didn't do ministry alone; he called others to follow him. The earliest carriers of the Gospel did not do ministry alone; they did it with others.

Yes, we need time for solitude and silence, but often that time serves as renewal for being in community, for doing ministry and life together

Both Jesus and the early church recognized this relational dance we do with each other. One of the most recognizable teachings of Jesus, not only by Christians but other religions as well, is the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew.

Early on in this section of teachings, Jesus addresses relationships among believers:

So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24)

Before you bring your offering, your gift to God, seek reconciliation. Be vulnerable with one another. Right relationship takes precedence over everything else. Jesus is giving an ethic for your life and for our lives together. Seek reconciliation.

Let's acknowledge that it can be easier to live by a set of laws and rules than it is to live in authentic, vulnerable, and redemptive relationships with others. Laws can also be static and arbitrary. In terms of the laws of the Torah practiced in Jesus' day, he reaches past the law to put their intent forward: The valuing and protecting of others.

A few years later, Paul wrote to the church at Galatia, building upon this teaching of how to relate and be vulnerable with others. This is from the Message version from the book of Galatians:

Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. *You* might be needing forgiveness before the day's out. Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law. If you think you are too good for that, you are badly deceived.

There is something vulnerable in forgiving another.

There is something vulnerable about accepting forgiveness.

There is something vulnerable about reaching out to those who are oppressed

There is something vulnerable about sharing one another's burdens.

Completing Christ's law, which is back at the Sermon Mount, the intent of this is to value and protect others.

None of this is easy.

And all of it is necessary.

Like many others in the congregation, my oldest daughter is highly involved in the music program at her high school. We went to a concert last weekend for all of the jazz band ensembles. Five different ensembles of high school students playing music are truly impressive and amazing.

What was truly amazing to me was that the director would start the ensemble on a song and then often step to the side. And they would all manage to play in concert and in step with one another.

I can only imagine the hours of practice, the attention to the craft, the willingness to mess up, the desire to forgive others when they mess up, the desire to ask for help when needed, the vulnerability to say, "I don't know this and need help."

It reminded me of the Christian community and our relationship with others.

This is a dance, but the great preacher Fred Craddock puts it this way: "The effort to live a Christian life is not a solo performance but is playing in a symphony."

Playing in a symphony requires a willingness to be vulnerable.

What does being vulnerable with others and building a Christian community look like? What can we start or stop doing today?

Martin Buber is an Austrian philosopher, writes about the difference between an I-it relationship and an I-you relationship:

An I-it relationship is a relationship we create with others that is transactional in nature with people we treat like objects. People who are there to serve us or complete a task

An I-you relationship is a relationship we create with others that is characterized by human connection, empathy, and vulnerability.

Buber says this about I-you relationships, "When two people relate to one another authentically and humanly, God is the electricity that surges between them."

I suspect that if you think about every community or group of people of which you have been a part, including religious communities, you can remember which category, I-it or I-you, the relationships in that community fell into.

There are plenty of places where we can experience I-it, transactional relationships. The church should not be one of them.

Share burdens.

Forgive.

Receive one another as you are.

That is how we fulfill Jesus' ethic to value and protect others.

This is easier said than done, but to get to where Jesus calls us, we must practice and model vulnerability with others.

It requires trust—in God, in others, in what God can do among any group of people.

This kind of life and relationship with others is worth the risk.

Our family was a little behind the times, but we just finished watching *The Big Bang Theory*, which concluded in 2019 after 12 seasons on the air. The show is about an unlikely group of friends who really become family to one another.

In the final episodes of the series, two of the friends, husband and wife, Sheldon and Amy, receive a Noble Prize for their work in science. Now Sheldon is smart, but he can be a bit hard to tolerate. Much of the series is about his friends putting up with him, often to the brink of them thinking of cutting him out of their lives.

As Sheldon prepares to give his acceptance speech, he has managed to alienate his friends who have traveled to be with him and Amy, and he has even alienated his wife Amy. He gets up to give this speech, and instead of the 246-page speech he has prepared, he addresses his friends, with words that are anything but his egotistical and selfish personality.

"I have a very long and somewhat self-centered speech here, but I'd like to set it aside. Because this honor doesn't just belong to me; I wouldn't be up here if it weren't for some very important people in my life," he says, and thanks his family and his "other family." "I was under a misapprehension that my accomplishments were mine alone. Nothing could be further from the truth. I have been encouraged, sustained, inspired, and tolerated, not only by my wife but by the greatest group of friends anyone ever had."

He then introduces his friends and asks them to stand

"I apologize if I haven't been the friend that you deserve. But I want you to know, in my way, I love you all."

Friends, the work of vulnerability among one another is not easy. It is long. It is messy. It's not linear. But when a church community reflects the desires of Jesus, when our relationships reflect the desires of Jesus, that is the most beautiful and the most real symphony we can play with our lives.

Let us pray.