

“Vulnerable”

Sermon by Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull and Sharlene Kerelejza
Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden
New Member Sunday
April 13, 2014

Jan

Vulnerable is...

Being born, screaming our lungs out, because that is the only way we can take in enough oxygen to sustain us in this shocking world into which we emerge. How totally dependent we are upon the care and kindness of those who greet us, trusting with every fiber of our little bodies, because that is what we must do to survive. And then...

Sharlene

Vulnerable is...

Being five, learning “respect” at my father’s knee, or silence at my grandfather’s touch. It is being helpless. It is feeling weak. It is hovering close to defeat. Yet somehow, if we end there, we tragically miss the point. Yet, somehow, it seems we always end there. As we clam up, defended, we never learn what else it can mean to be vulnerable. Yet Vulnerability carries on...

Jan

Vulnerable is...

Being five now or a few thousand years ago. Your mother takes care of you and your brothers and sisters; your father makes things with wood. A story is told about your birth that you almost didn’t make it, all because your parents had to travel so far to pay taxes and there was no place for them to rest when your mother was ready to give birth to you. Sometimes you dream about the smell of farm animals and then being carried by your parents even farther from home, as if you were fleeing for your life. Feeling confused by memories and dreams is being vulnerable.

Sharlene

Vulnerable is...

being thirteen, watching my mother, who has MS, fall in a restaurant. I am not strong enough to lift her to her feet. I am not savvy enough to wash her of her shame. Vulnerability is raw and uncomfortable exposure.

Jan

Vulnerable is...

being who we are, doing what we can do and not doing what we can’t do. Vulnerable is when your parents take you to the city for a holiday, and something draws you to talk for a long time with teachers you’ve just met, knowing your parents are looking for you, knowing that they must be worried, then having them find you and seeing the fear in their eyes before the relief kicks in.

Vulnerable is carrying the knowledge that to be who you are, you probably will cause even more pain to those you love.

Sharlene

Vulnerable is...

being 17 years old and on the streets, wondering if I can be honest with my friend's mom and ask if I could sleep there... just one more night. Soon, it'll be warm enough for my car again. Vulnerability is risk.

Vulnerable is being 19, confiding in the ears and heart of a stranger. In a moment of utter desperation, I chose to ask for help. And then I went back again. Vulnerability is courage.

Vulnerable is being 26, falling instantly in love. That smile. Her grace under the strobe lights. Vulnerability is letting my heart be touched once more. Vulnerability is hope.

Jan

Vulnerable is what you are when you risk, when you ask for help, when you love, when you open your heart—even when you hope. Vulnerable is sensing that many years hence no one will have a clue about what much of your life was like, but your birth and a story from your adolescence and your last three or four years will be magnified by stories told and retold.

Sharlene

Vulnerable is being 34 and pregnant, though I had been warned that might not be in the cards for me; learning to live in my own body, perhaps for the first time, as it grows this little person. Vulnerability is the pain of the contractions and the trust of the hands I'm in. Vulnerability is the birth of my son and the rebirth of living in the moment. Vulnerability births life.

Vulnerable is being 35, holding my 2 ½ pound preemie as my very sick wife is disoriented and barely responsive two floors above and my 15 month old waits unknowing at home. Vulnerability is being terrified and knowing that I can't fix this. Vulnerability is surrender.

Jan

Vulnerable is being in your early 30s and knowing that your purpose in life is to teach what is filling your heart so much that if you don't let it out, you'll go crazy. Vulnerable is connecting with a cousin who dedicates you to a risky life, a cousin whom many call crazy but you know he isn't; he's just intense with a spirit that mirrors your own.

Vulnerable is choosing friends and inviting them to go on a pilgrimage with you. It's risky; it takes courage; it takes hope beyond hope. You live in an occupied land. You're Jewish. Those in power look down on you. You're downwind of an empire whose leaders you know are threatened by what you're teaching and the pilgrimage you're on.

Vulnerable is sensing, knowing, that your love is your fate. It's knowing that your people are expecting some kind of super-hero to come like a warrior king and rescue them. Vulnerable is knowing that your people think that person might be you. Vulnerability is trying to show them otherwise, even calling their bluff by daring to come with your friends into the city where you will celebrate Passover, but in a way that mocks the powers that be. You enter on the backside of a donkey; people wave palms and cry Hosanna. They don't get it yet.

You know that on the same day the imperial powers of Rome are also processing into the city, but on elegant steeds and through another gate. Others are singing their praises, knowing their lives depend on staying in the good graces of the Empire. Vulnerable is moving in an opposite direction from the powers of your day.

Sharlene

Vulnerable is being 40, daring to apply for a new project that I desperately believe in, losing precious hours of sleep designing a program, writing a grant, and throwing it into the universe. Vulnerability is being creative and holding more hope.

Vulnerable is in every day, in the giggle of son, in the communication of my daughter, in the way the sunlight energizes them or walks turn into adventures. Vulnerability is sinking in.

Vulnerable is being here and now, standing before you and wondering if I shared too much, if I am safe in your company, if I can say all this to you, who may know me, my family, forever.

Jan

Vulnerable is being 33, daring to speak truth to power, agonizing over what you know will happen unless you change your tune. Vulnerable is still seeing the beauty of flowers in a garden late at night. Vulnerable is still hoping your friends will be there for you when you need them most. Vulnerable is wondering why you're here, why you're facing what you are. Vulnerable is moving through the story of your life, wondering if you've shared too much, if you will ever be safe in the company of humankind, wondering if what you have taught will be misconstrued, wondering if people who live after you will take your message and shape it to their own ends in the same way that the rich and powerful tend to do century after century to mask their own vulnerability.

Sharlene

Vulnerability is uncertainty, risk, exposure, and knowingly choosing to walk right in.

Jan

Vulnerability is what Sharlene has lived and continues to live and wonder about. Vulnerability is what a long ago rabbi lived and God knows what he is or isn't wondering about in some mystery beyond our knowing. Vulnerability is what you and I know when we are born, when we trust, when we ask for help, when we fall in love, when we give birth to or adopting a child, when we hear the cry and laughter of our child or any child, when we unleash other dreams, when we let loose with our creativity, when we see the sun come up and wonder what kind of day it will be, when we know sorrow and when we know joy.

Sharlene

Vulnerability is to dare greatly.

Jan

Vulnerability is being who we are, whether we live here and now or whether we lived ages ago and the story of our lives has taken shape beyond our imagining and not always to our liking if we could have known what the future would bring.

Sharlene

Vulnerability is drawing courage from the depths of who we are and being grateful for who we have been, because of our daring.

Jan

Vulnerability is Yes, when No shouts from our comfort zone. Vulnerability is being wholly alive.

Sharlene

Vulnerability is exposure. Vulnerability is being awake. Vulnerability is daring to be seen as who we are and daring to look into the eyes and see into the hearts of our fellow creatures.

As we witness and hold each other, and dare to be vulnerable in each other's company, I share the words of Jeff Brown, words that have lent courage and hope when I dare to be vulnerable:

“If there is any need that is perpetually unmet on this planet, it is the need to **feel seen**. To feel seen in our humanity, in our **vulnerability**, in our beautiful **imperfection**. When we are held safe in that, a key turns inside of our hearts, freeing us from our isolation, **transforming** our inner world. If there is anything we can **offer each other**, it is the gift of sight. “I see you”—perhaps the most important words we can utter to another.
“I see you...”

May we see each other not just with our eyes, but with our hearts broken open, receptive, saying “Yes” to you, to each other, and to Life.

Jan

May it be so. Amen.

Sources

Jeff Brown, “Love it Forward!” – <http://soulshaping.com/loveitforward>