

## I. Advanced Organizer

### A. Katie Imborek.

1. **Doctor, who had recently visited the church a couple of times, asking to meet with our staff team.** Unusual. Not just any doctor. Katie had visited with her wife the last couple Sundays. They liked the music, they were moms to two young sons who had a great time in our kids department. But they needed to know: were they safe here?
2. Katie had come in that first Sunday, seen young woman with tall leather boots and purple hair on stage. Was pleasantly surprised. And then she heard the earnest love songs to Jesus she was singing and thought, "Crap. This is an evangelical church." Alarm bells went off.
3. In Katie's experience evangelicals were the Christians who picketed at pride. They were the ones who used theology to describe her relationship with her wife as "unnatural". In her work as a doctor leading the LGBTQ clinic at the University of Iowa, the folks from evangelical backgrounds were the ones whose families often made coming out the most painful. Growing up Evangelical Lutheran Missouri Synod, a conservative evangelical brand of Lutheranism, Katie had experienced the pain of rejection personally.
4. And so she asked for a meeting with the pastors. She needed to have the conversation. Sure there was friendly welcome from people, great music, kids program...but are we really safe here? Or are we gonna get attached and one week here from the pulpit that I'm an abomination for making a "sinful choice". What are the Sunday school teachers gonna tell my kids in the other room about their moms? Katie's past had taught her church, particularly a church like ours, was not a safe place to be.

### B. Continuing the Series on Vision

1. Pitched the venn diagram a few weeks ago. 3 core values we hold in tension at Haven: Jesus-centered, diverse, and safe. We've been looking at each of the three in recent weeks.

### C. Safe - what do we mean?

#### 1. Does Jesus value safety?

- a) Doesn't Jesus ask his followers to do hard things?
  - (1) told the rich young ruler, "sell everything and give it the poor"
  - (2) didn't he say his followers needed to "pick up their cross and follow"? How is that "safe"?
  - (3) By "safe" we don't mean "easy" or even "comfortable"
  - (4) so what do we mean?
2. Hard to know where to go on this. No one passage that I thought really demonstrates and explains Jesus creating safety, but more a pattern of relating. Gonna take a brief look at 3 short stories of Jesus interacting with people and explaining what he's doing in Luke. All of these stories involve folks that wouldn't not have felt safe in the religious communities and institutions of their own day, for various reasons. My hope is that these three stories will provide insight into what Jesus understood to be his mission, how he executed it, and what that teaches us about valuing safety in our interactions with others.

## II. First Encounter. Calling of Levi. Luke 5:27-32

**A. Later, as Jesus left the town, he saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. 28 So Levi got up, left everything, and followed him.**

**29 Later, Levi held a banquet in his home with Jesus as the guest of honor. Many of Levi's fellow tax collectors and other guests also ate with them. 30 But the Pharisees and their teachers of religious law complained bitterly to Jesus' disciples, "Why do you**

***eat and drink with such scum?”***

***31 Jesus answered them, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do.32 I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners and need to repent.”***

**B. Jesus comes to Levi where he’s at.**

1. Meets him in his tax booth
  - a) Tax collectors - their work was considered inherently sinful and controversial. They worked for “the man”, the group that was oppressing all their neighbors. They collected taxes to pay their Roman occupiers. Romans cultivated their favor by allowing them to keep whatever they could extort over and above the tax burden from folks. Often this was done through violence and intimidation.
  - b) Jesus enters the place of “scandal”. Comes to him at his booth. Doesn’t confront him about it. Simply invites him to follow. No request to renounce anything. No promise to leave his career, get everything cleaned up and then talk to him. He sees him as he is, all that he is, and invites him to journey with Jesus.
2. Parties with Levi and his friends.
  - a) happy to connect with him in the settings that made Levi feel at home, safe, comfortable

**C. Where there is challenge, it’s for those who are more religiously powerful and want to critique the safety Jesus wants to provide Levi and his friends. It’s for the people who think creating safety for Levi and his friends is not necessary, maybe not even appropriate.**

1. How does he challenge them?

**D. Jesus uses metaphor to explain himself: he’s a doctor.**

1. “Healthy people don’t need a doctor - sick people do.”
  - a) Jesus recognizes that the people he is called to have legitimate conditions that he is equipped to treat. Wants to help them. Wants to bring freedom from ailments.
  - b) Jesus can only help folks who know they need it.
  - c) Jesus challenge is to those who think they’re not sick. They think they’ve got everything figured out because they perform religion really well. But they don’t recognize the ways they also could use help, healing, and change. They have their own reasons they could use safety, but they won’t see it.
  - d) In the recovery world, treatment starts with acknowledging you have a problem. Need to be able to say, “I’m an alcoholic” before you can deal with the control alcohol has on your life. Jesus is interested in helping folks who know their only way to connection to God is with help. And they trust Jesus to be a good, safe source of help.

**III. Second Encounter. Anointing at Simon’s Dinner. Luke 7:36-50**

***A. One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. 37 When a certain immoral woman from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. 38 Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them.***

***39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She’s a sinner!”***

***40 Then Jesus answered his thoughts. “Simon,” he said to the Pharisee, “I have something to say to you.”***

***“Go ahead, Teacher,” Simon replied.***

***41 Then Jesus told him this story: “A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. 42 But neither of them could repay him, so he***

*kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?"*

*43 Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt."*

*"That's right," Jesus said. 44 Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume.*

*47 "I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." 48 Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven."*

*49 The men at the table said among themselves, "Who is this man, that he goes around forgiving sins?"*

*50 And Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."*

- B. Here we have Jesus at another dinner, interacting with someone who offends the sensibilities of others. The unnamed woman anoints Jesus' feet with tears and perfume; it's a loving, intimate act. The story calls her an "immoral woman", code likely for prostitute. But Jesus isn't not put off by her profession or what it might signal to others like his host, Simon.
  - C. Again, Jesus challenges the powerful who are concerned with appearances, and religious performance.
    - 1. calls Simon out on his judgement of her.
  - D. **Jesus uses another metaphor to describe himself: a forgiving debtor.** One who is not going to hold the vulnerable to account but release them from their debts. Bring safety and security to the insecure
    - 1. and once again, Jesus recognizes that both Simon and the woman stand to receive from him. Both are debtors whom he's happy to forgive.
    - 2. Jesus sees the woman, her devotion, He affirms and protects the vulnerable. Defends her right to be there. Celebrated her as the heroin of his story.
  - E. **She had already experienced safety, acceptance, and forgiveness from him,** and it's why she was overwhelmed with love and came to perform that act, even into an unsafe space.  
**Jesus gave her the safety she needed to expose herself to others judgments.**
- IV. Third Encounter. On Hanging out with Sinners. Luke 15:1-7
- A. **Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. 2 This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!**  
**3 So Jesus told them this story: 4 "If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. 6 When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.' 7 In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!**
  - B. Again, religious people scandalized by Jesus "safety" to those they saw as unworthy. Why does he keep eating and hanging out with these messy people?
  - C. Jesus reaches for a third metaphor. This time, **he is a caring shepherd.**

1. Jesus is not content just to take care of the 99 who are happily following him. His heart is moved by those who are lost and alone. In fact, if forced to choose, he chooses the isolated, the lonely, the outsiders, over the crowd.
2. The religious people that are critiquing Jesus think they are the one's following. And if a few others wander off the path, well, that's too bad for them. They shouldn't have gotten lost. Take care of yourself and your own.
3. Jesus is invested in safety for the vulnerable, the displaced, the excluded
4. For him, **it's not ok to let that one sheep just wander off and go it alone. Jesus wants to rescue those who've been left behind.**
5. Jesus is a protector. Elsewhere, described himself as Good Shepherd who wants to **bring all of his sheep into green pasture where they can experience "life to the full"**. So he goes after the one who is unsafe, and rejoices in bringing them into safety.

**V. What do these three stories have in common? And how do they help us understand what it means to value safety in a Jesus-centered community?**

- A. **Martin Buber, a 20th century Austrian-born Israeli Jewish philosopher.** Developed theory that has had a lot of influence in fields of philosophy and psychology. Theorizes that there are 2 modes in which people generally relate to others - whether they be other people, or other creatures or items in their life.
1. **I-It. Ultimately the other is an object.** Others become people or things we use for our satisfaction, gratification, meet our needs. I can use friend as "it" if I'm constantly just asking her to be a sounding board without thinking about how the things I'm saying affect her. My children can become "it"s to me when I'm primarily focused on getting their frustrating behavior in line, needing them to be quiet so I can work, and so on. But there are other ways of relating.
  2. **I-Thou. Spiritual connection.** Encounter. Seeing fulness and wholeness of another; relating to the other as a spiritual being. I-Thou relationship we have with others that can point to the ultimate I-Thou - our experience of being fully seen and known by God.
    - a) affirm that each of us is not an object but a human being created in the image of God. See people for all of who they are.
  3. Conversation between two people who are engaging in I-It relating is ultimately like two overlapping monologues. They're not really hearing one another. Their communication is only focused on their own needs. But I-Thou relating calls people into real dialogue where they actually share what's in them, listen deeply to what is in their partner, and respond.
- B. **I heard about Martin Buber's work recently on a podcast from Hillary McBride.** Hillary McBride is a registered clinical counsellor in Vancouver BC, and is a PhD candidate in Counseling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. She has her own private practice specializing in trauma and trauma therapies, both single incident traumas and complex developmental traumas. She's also a Jesus follower, active in a faith community.
1. Hillary explains trauma as **significant injury or wounding that causes us to become confused, overwhelmed and powerless.** She explains the the biochemistry of trauma, and essentially how when we are under extreme stress, **we respond first from more evolved parts of our brains, the places we tend to make social connections from.** But when those responses aren't enough to stop the pain or protect us in it, we go to a **more primal brain structure: the "fight or flight response"**. Usually our body just tries to either fight back or just get us out of whatever the stressful situation is. And finally, **if that doesn't work third portion of our body causes us simply to shut down.** For some, this may even mean passing out.

2. Hillary also explains how in these traumatic events, **our brain encodes all the sensory information and binds it up with the experience of the painful event**, as a way evolutionarily of protecting us. But in the future, it means when people experience in the present something that has similar sensory experience, that activates memory not only of this kind of event, but of the trauma, generally the same stress response of the body will be activated. **This is what it means to be triggered.** You may not even consciously remember what actually happened in the trauma, but your body can still store memory, and so responses to certain stimuli can produce an experience of trauma just being in circumstances that have similar experiences for your senses.
3. **Valuing safety has become really contentious politically in the last year.** There are some conservatives who love to lampoon liberals for being fragile “snowflakes” that, as they see it, can’t deal with anything unpleasant. They chastise the defenders of “safe spaces” for being against free speech. And while they may have some valid critique that’s worth consideration about how we navigate relating to those who have differing points of view, even points of view that deeply offend us in the public sector, often with the critique comes a dismissal, or at least a devaluing of the impact of trauma. And as anyone who has experienced trauma knows, to try to minimize the impact of trauma or ridicule someone for experiencing it, only compounds the trauma.
4. **Hilary also points out how often in relationships, trauma often comes from being treated as I-it.**
  - a) Survivors of rape have become objects to others, who have used them to make themselves feel powerful.
  - b) People who have been a part of spiritual communities in which they are only accepted or included if they assent to a certain set of prescribed beliefs or behavioral expectations, if they deny their sexuality, if they suppress their doubt and questions, are being related to as “it”s in a sense. For some, this leads to rejection when they can’t perform according to expectations, which produces spiritual injury and trauma that makes it hard to pursue connection with God in spiritual communities going forward.
5. **“Hurt people hurt people.”** People who’ve been treated as “it”s by others, tend to treat others as I-it. When you’re in the trauma, it can be hard to see others as I-Thou. But it doesn’t have to be that way.
6. Hilary believes there’s an opportunity for growth and healing if communities of faith can model I-Thou relating. Compassionately modeling this way of connecting, has the capacity for healing the I-It traumatic experience.
  - a) inconvenient. Takes time, takes presence, authenticity, vulnerability and being with people.
7. When Katie came to meet with our staff team, I think on some level she was ultimately wondering which way our church would relate to her. Would we relate to her as an I-it and reduce her to a category (“gay”) that needed to be dealt with in a certain way, without entering into her story, her wife’s story, her family’s story, or would we see them as “Thous” whose stories and responses had immeasurable value, whose desire for spiritual connection needed to be respected and honored, and who could be embrace authentically for all of who they are.
8. **This is what I believe we saw Jesus doing in each of the stories we looked at.** He was connecting to the Thou in those around him, where others only saw the It.
9. **It was I-Thou with the tax collector.** No he’s not just a sinner, he’s sick and he needs a good physician who can see the places of injury and bring healing.

10. **I-Thou with the “sinful woman”**. No she’s not an i-it to be discarded because she doesn’t serve our community in demonstrating what it means to be holy. She is a woman who has being seen for all of who she is and forgiven for the places she’s messed up in life, and she loves out of the knowledge of that. Sex trafficking survivors spend their life treated as sex objects but they are people with hopes, dreams, needs for real I-Thou connection.

11. **I-Thou in the parable of the lost sheep**. Not just a creature we can shrug and say, “whatever, that one got away. at least we got 99 who will pay the bills, tithe, not question the theology, make our community look good.” No, these are each unique image-bearers of the image of God, and their i-thou-ness must be celebrated and centered.

VI. So what is our call in creating safety at Haven? What are some of the ways we might embody safety here?

- A. Be aware of our own wounds and our own need for healing. Take responsibility for getting help we need to grow in health, so that we can be available to partnering in others journeys of healing, without compounding trauma with trauma.
- B. Regularly be examining our own motives in relating to others. When are we relating to others as I-Its rather than I-Thous, even in the work of ministry? How can we lean more into I-Thou experiences? What barriers do we each face to I-Thou relating?
- C. Consider how we can make space to honor the ones who have been left behind by the 99. Where is Jesus inviting us to leave the broader flock to create safety for them?