

I. Advanced Organizer

A. Anyone who was a part of our **summer camping trip** a couple of months ago knows that it **didn't exactly go according to plan.**

1. As those of you who were a part of it, or heard the play by play afterwards, know: our camping trip **ended abruptly** an evening before it was intended to after a number of medical incidences in a row took place back to back. Within ninety minutes or so, one of our elders fell out of her wheelchair, sustaining significant injuries that required an ambulance and a trip to the hospital, one of our youth had an allergic reaction to something they ate, and another youth started vomiting from what later turned out to be heat exhaustion. I won't relive the whole dramatic experience for you, but I will say that for those of us who were there...it was a lot. After the third incident, with more and more folks needing to depart to manage the various crises, and daylight quickly slipping away, and the mood understandably shifted, I made the challenging decision to **call the whole thing. Just call it. Pack it in.** We used the last bit of daylight and people available to quickly pack everything up and head home. It was not the way any of us foresaw that day ending, and by the time we made it home, I think it left all of us who went through it pretty shaken up.
2. But as the challenging night turned to the next day, as we received news that all of the injuries or illnesses were being tended or had resolved, **conversations started happening in the community.** Folks were processing the experience together through emails or calls or texts. And as these conversations continued, they helped notice not just what felt frightening in the moment, but also **what felt encouraging.** Yes, we had been through something kinda rough - I think all of us hope not to go through that same series of events again. But **we had also gone through it together.** We had seen folks show up for one another in the midst of challenge. We had watched people willing to jump in to help in whatever ways they could. We had seen in action the **power of collaborative care, and frankly, it was beautiful.**
3. One of the words that has come up in the processing of this event speaks to the heart of what I think we were trying to embody that day in July and continue to want to embody in all that we seek to do. Over the last couple of months, I've been teaching on one of the priorities I have named for Haven this year; **growing in collaboration.** We've been talking about how we might grow in not just collaborating on an event or a Sunday service but living more collaboratively, and this word that came up I think is the goal towards which growing in collaboration is moving towards. The word is "interdependence". How can we cultivate community that is interdependent?

B. I spent most of yesterday with a few other Haven folks at a kind of conference in Marin on the Bible and Spirituality. This gathering was put on by a group called the Faith and Justice Network. And one word they used a lot in talking about how we think about the Bible and about our formation spiritually is another big keyword. **"Multivocal"**. Multivocal- more than one voice. It's important to recognize the Bible itself has dialogue and debate within it. **The Bible is multivocal.** The gospels, the stories about Jesus - there are four of them. Multivocal. And this is a good thing and something, as a community that cares about **honoring diversity**, that believes that more voices more accurately point us to the Divine, we benefit from considering concepts in our faith by **listening to a variety of voices.**

1. So today as we close this series on collaboration, considering this concept of "interdependence" I want to do it in a **multivocal way** - listening to two different streams

of communication from very different contexts and voices, but both of whom I think have wisdom to teach us about living into interdependence as people of Jesus-centered faith.

- C. So the first comes to us from a **contemporary justice movement**. A priority on interdependence is a core principal in the **disability justice movement**. Writer, educator and community organizer for disability justice Mia Mingus explains: “With disability justice, we want to move away from the ‘myth of independence,’ that everyone can and should be able to do everything on their own. I am not fighting for independence, as much of the disability rights movement rallies behind. I am fighting for an interdependence that embraces need and tells the truth: no one does it on their own and the myth of independence is just that, a myth.”
1. This isn’t the first time our community has been trying to learn from disability justice principals, **this has been an important thread in our learning for a while**. Particular voices in our community have been leading us in the conversation, sharing their own experiences and knowledge - I think of Ginny, and Connie, and Izek. Many of us read a book awhile back called *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* that put the leadership and insights of the disability justice community front and center. We are now including that book in a list of recommended resources we recently put together on justice themes, so we could share it at Pride last week. But the journey of living into interdependence, of consistently seeking to embody a culture of interdependence, this is something that’s still very much a journey. We need to keep thinking about it, focusing on it, processing what it means. **It takes time, intentionality and practice**.
  2. **Sins Invalid is a leading organization in the contemporary disability justice movement**. In their work, they describe 10 principals of disability justice. If you attended last year’s Haven retreat, you may remember seeing these. I’m just going to read the names of them very briefly, and you’ll see them in a graphic on the screen. We won’t be discussing all of them at length, but we will draw from a number of them in our multivocal learning.
    - a) **Intersectionality**
    - b) **Leadership of the most impacted**
    - c) **Anti-capitalist politic**
    - d) **Commitment to cross-movement organizing**
    - e) **Recognizing wholeness**
    - f) **Sustainability**
    - g) **Commitment to cross-disability solidarity**
    - h) **Interdependence**
    - i) **Collective access**
    - j) **Collective liberation**
- D. As a Jesus-Centered spiritual community, our call to live interdependently doesn’t come from our justice commitments alone. Those justice commitments are **grounded in our faith**, in our understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. So we also want to look at the texts that are at the heart of our own spiritual tradition. **How might the wisdom of our tradition compliment the wisdom that comes from the disability justice movement?**
1. The earliest Jesus’ centered communities were committed to interdependence. They met in one another’s homes. Folks provided for one another financially. There seemed to be a spirit of collective care. The stories in places like Acts, tell us that these things happened in the early church, **but if we want to understand the thinking around this collective care, we have to look beyond the narrative report**. The letters that first century community leaders wrote to one another bring some color and texture to the story. They

show us how some of these earliest Jesus followers actually thought about this collective care. The Apostle Paul was one who thought about this and wrote about this a lot.

2. A couple weeks ago we looked at one of these passages he had written on this theme. Today I want to look briefly at another passage from his writings. This one is part of his longest letter - the letter to the church in Rome. The book of Romans is a big letter with a lot of big ideas we won't get into now, but at a core level, the questions I think Paul was wrestling with are similar to our own.
3. **It's helpful to know a bit about what was happening in Rome when Paul wrote this big letter to the Jesus-centered spiritual community there.** This Jesus movement was a couple decades old at this point, with spiritual communities beginning in many cities throughout the ancient world that were largely Jewish, because Jesus himself, along with all of his followers, was Jewish. But early on, non-Jewish people, also known as Gentiles, were coming into the faith. However, in Rome the situation got extra complicated, because in that city, that was the heart of the Empire, at some point the Emperor Claudius thought the Jews were making trouble, and **he expelled them for several years from the city.** That meant that the church in Rome, which had begun like most other churches as a little subset of Jewish faith that was beginning to include Gentiles, had now **spent several years with all the Jewish people missing.** At the time that Paul was writing them, these Jewish people were being allowed back into Rome. The Jewish community en masse were coming back into the capital city, and that meant Jewish followers of Jesus were returning to the Roman Jesus-centered communities, which made things complicated, because these folks practiced faith differently, ate differently, and so on.
4. So even though the cultural context was very different than our own, the questions Paul and his peers were wrestling with, still might resonate for us. **How can diverse community, different people with different cultural backgrounds, different sets of needs, different traditions, be a part of the same spiritual family?** How might that be exactly the heart of the Divine, to be working that out among us? For Paul, this is what Jesus was all about, bringing all kinds of people, Jewish and non-Jewish alike into spiritual community together, a divine family of God. He spends eleven chapters fleshing out theological ideas about this bringing together of humans with one another and with God that he sees Jesus accomplishing. And then he speaks to the particular community gathered in Rome about how they might uniquely live out the impact of this Divine activity. This is where we pick things up in Romans 12, verse 1.

***E. Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. 2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.***

***3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. 4 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving,***

*then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*

*9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

*14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

*17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

F. We're not going to dig into every point here. But as we end this series and consider this concept of interdependence, I do want to draw out a few points of guidance I find helpful in thinking about living interdependently and reflect on them alongside our disability justice principals.

#### 1. Resist the pull of a toxic culture.

- a) The passage begins with a call to live counter-culturally. Paul has spent a long time speaking to his readers about the lengths God has gone to open up connection to God and inclusion in the Divine family to everyone. And he thinks that comprehending that should mean that followers of Jesus **live differently than those around them.**
- b) *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."*
- c) To live into interdependence, all of us must be renewed in our minds. **We need to resist conforming to cultural ideas that put too much value on individual strength, autonomy and power.** We are meant to follow the example of Jesus instead, recognizing the universality of human vulnerability, and leaning into it - living sacrificially and cooperatively.
- d) Jesus lived sacrificially and cooperatively, and he expected his followers to do the same. For him, leadership was serving others, not simply being served. He modeled this leadership by scrubbing the muck and grime off his followers feet, and then imploring them to do the same thing for one another. He used his immense gifts to restore folks into community rather than build his brand. **He resisted the cultural pull to consolidate power and exert control over others.**
- e) As you saw earlier, one of the disability Justice principals named by Sins Invalid is interdependence. **"We meet each others' needs as we build toward liberation"** they say. Another one is **"anti-capitalist politic"**. They describe that this way: **"In an economy that sees land and humans as components of profit, we are anti-capitalist by the nature of having non-conforming body/minds."** We are not conforming to the pattern of this capitalistic world they say. **We do not conform and we do not want to conform.**
- f) For Paul, when we are empowered by the Spirit to resist cultural conformity and our mind is renewed, we become in touch with the mind of the Divine. We come to know God's good, pleasing, and perfect will.

- g) I think this is the kind of movement at work in the disability justice community that comes forward when capitalism is resisted. **That principal against capitalism is complimented by another one: “Recognizing wholeness”.** They define that this way: **“People have inherent worth outside of commodity relations and capitalist notions of productivity. Each person is full of history and life experience.”** In other words, we have value because we are people, regardless of what we produce. Recognizing and honoring the wholeness of each human being seems like the good, pleasing and perfect will of God to me. It sounds like **seeing the Image of God in each precious person to me.**
- h) So we begin by resisting conformity to toxic culture, to the culture that idolizes productivity and independence.
2. This brings me to the next bit of guidance **Serve with your strengths. (And your spoons.)**
- a) In the second part of our passage, Paul moves to discussing how each of us is invited to show up in an interdependent community. The beauty of interdependence is that **no-one can or should do all of the things.** Each of us is uniquely gifted in particular ways. We each have real strengths to offer one another. Teachers should teach. Givers should give. When we’re released and empowered to serve from our places of strength, we benefit because it feels good to exercise our gifts, and the whole collective benefits.
- b) Earlier this week I was on a call with a small group of Haven leaders we call our Vision team, who work with me regularly to try to discern the mind of the Divine for Haven. After a time of listening prayer, **one of our members, Mari, was sharing how she sensed God inviting her,** when she felt discouraged or overwhelmed by all the tasks, all the “to dos” associated with building spiritual community, **to tap into the things that give her life rather than drain her,** and focus on those. This wasn’t about whether or not to work hard for that which you believe in; she was committed to that sacrificial call of Jesus we spoke of earlier, but I think Mari was right in identifying that **there is kind of hard work that brings satisfaction and contentment, and there is a kind of hard work that simply drains us and leaves us feeling depleted.** This of course wasn’t just a word of encouragement from the Divine for Mari, but for all of us - that as we open ourselves to serve God and one another, we should also attend to where that service can bring contentment and connection, and where it simply brings depletion. **How can we serve from our strengths?**
- c) We also need to **notice the spoons.** In the disability community, some people use the language of “spoons” to describe **units of energy and capacity one might have to spend on a task.** Particularly for those who are disabled or chronically ill, the amount of energy it can take to do everyday tasks that others who are able-bodied may take for granted can be quite limited, it may feel like measuring how much can be expended on a task in spoonfuls.
- d) In the same way that we do not all share the same gifts, we do not have the same spoons. **All of us have limits on our time, our energy, our capacity in any given season,** and those limits can change throughout our life based on any number of factors, physical, social, and so on.
- e) But just as we are invited to each serve from our strengths, from the places that bring life and don’t deplete us, I believe **Jesus also wants us to serve from our spoons.** We need to cultivate a culture that allows each of us to identify what we can

realistically expend in our energy and to honor one another spoon levels. The point is not that we all have the same number of spoons, the point is **we all can bring what we have and allow the Divine to use those things together toward something bigger.**

- f) That may mean it takes longer to accomplish something. **Perhaps we have to go slower than we'd prefer.** The good news is the Divine has been working on this project of connecting with humans and bringing them into safe spaces of belonging and healing for a long time. I don't think God's in a rush, even when we are. We can take the time we need to go at the pace we need to go at so that everyone can serve from their strengths and their spoons and find the wholistic care they need as we go.
  - g) The principals of disability justice highlight this idea too, when they talk about **sustainability** as a principal. **"We pace ourselves, individually and collectively,"** they say, **"to be sustained long term."**
  - h) I recently had a kind of epiphany on this front myself, where I realized an **area that I've been feeling depleted and drained by the work of community building.** As many of you know, for the last nine years we've been doing some version of this Haven project, I've been not only the primary teaching voice, but also the primary musical worship leader, in addition to the other hats I wear on any given Sunday. I have experience with doing both of these things - teaching and leading musical worship. I enjoy each of these things on their own - I think they are strengths of mine. But I recently acknowledged to myself that **the practice of doing them both most Sundays we gather for worship services feels really taxing, and overtime it has taken joy from both of them.** I may have both strengths, but **I don't have enough spoons** to do them both the way I'd want to. I'm now naming to myself, to God, and to all of you that this is something I think needs to shift. **What that shift may look like on any given Sunday, we'll have to see.** At times I may continue to do both while we move towards other solutions. At times other folks may join us in leading. Kat is leading today; our friend Keith will be returning to lead a couple of Sundays and our worship night in November. And there may be times we experiment with doing something different than musical worship. Or maybe we'll worship to videos like they did at the conference we attended yesterday. It might feel strange and uncomfortable, but that doesn't make it wrong. I think what matters more is **the way we're attending to the needs of our selves and one another.**
3. This brings me to my last insight from Paul's writing: **Practice proximity.**
- a) Get close. The last part of this passage has Paul encourage the community in Rome to live into a radical closeness that isn't just practical but is emotional, as well.
  - b) Again Paul is speaking into a community where **this is really live and challenging.** They don't eat the same stuff, and their spiritual gatherings usually take place at the dinner table. And it's not just about taste. Some folks think what the others are eating isn't just unappetizing, it's actually participating in idolatry. **That's a legit conflict;** very naturally the community could want to hold one another at arms length. And yet, Paul is inviting them to get close to one another, **not just physically but emotionally.** Get heart invested in each other.
    - (1) "Be devoted to one another in love."
    - (2) "Live in harmony with one another."
    - (3) "Practice hospitality"
    - (4) "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."

- (5) When we embody this way of showing up for each other, our hearts inevitably get involved. And that's the point. We jump in and help at the campout because we've been building life alongside these folks and we care about those who are hurting. We celebrate when someone recovers because their healing is connected to our own.
4. Last weekend a number of us in this community had an opportunity to practice proximity together - **proximity not just to one another but also to a part of our broader community that unfortunately too often the church has been unwilling to draw close too**, sadly at times expelling from their presence rather than welcoming them in. Last weekend many of us were at **Oakland Pride**. We marched in the parade, many of our kids and youth passing out candy along the way. We hosted a booth, handing out stickers, tattoos, and info about our community to those who visited. It was an opportunity to meet some new folks, potentially make some new friends. Perhaps connect with folks who might appreciate a spiritual community like we're building at Haven.
  5. But I think at a deeper level, **our presence at Pride means more than that**. It's one thing to say we care about including our LGBTQ siblings. It's another to *show up* in the places our queer siblings are proclaiming their own freedom and right to celebrate their true selves with agreement and affirmation and blessing. It's one thing to proclaim *in theory* we care about creating safe, accessible spaces; it's another to **comfort the disabled person** who has fallen and keep them calm and stable until help arrives, and then pack up their things for them, and accompany them to the hospital, and pray for healing and wholeness.
  6. **Interdependence doesn't let us stay in the area of the theoretical**. It calls us to embody our ethics. To rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. It means living into the disability justice principal of **COLLECTIVE LIBERATION** that says, **"No body or mind can be left behind – only moving together can we accomplish the revolution we require."**
- G. And so, as we finish today, as we wrap this series on growing in collaboration, I want to invite us into a moment of contemplation. A moment of sacred reflection.
1. And in that reflection, I invite you to take a moment to acknowledge your body, your beautiful, powerful, sacred body. Take a deep breath. Feel your weight in your seat. Feel your feet on the ground. Put a hand on your chest if you like. Perhaps feel your heart beating against your palm. And I want to speak to you this blessing and affirmation. Your body is precious. Your body matters. The needs of your body matter. The needs of your heart and mind matter. They matter to the heart of God. They matter to our community.
  2. Now I invite you to take a moment to reflect on this question. What do I need in this season to be present? What do I need to be connected? What do I need to collaborate with others here? What do I need to get proximate? What do I need to open proximity to me?
  3. *Prayer from this place...*

**Questions (name, pronouns, access needs)**

1. *What cultural practices or expectations might you need to resist to live more interdependently?*
2. *What strengths do you have that feel satisfying to bring to service?*
3. *What does practicing proximity mean to you?*