

- I. Advanced Organizer
 - A. Good morning. Thanks to Jeanne...
 - B. As Jeanne was alluding to in her conversation with the kids, we're beginning a new summer teaching series today: "Recovering the Sacred"
 1. As we collectively build the life that comes after Covid, **what is it we personally recognize that we value and want to bring forward into whatever comes next?** What collectively do we want to bring with us after the pandemic? What role does faith and spirituality have to play in that? What role does a spiritual community like Haven have to play? After a year plus of surviving without meeting - a group of people in a shared space - why do this again? And what is the most meaningful way to do it?
 2. Through this series we'll be looking at a part of the Bible I personally haven't heard preached on much - what happens after the exile. Last summer, in the midst of covid we took a look at the exile story. **We studied the part of our Biblical narrative that deals with a time of great collective trauma and displacement; something most of us could resonate with a few months into lockdowns.** We looked at what happened to the people of Israel when they were overtaken by the Babylonians, their sacred temple was destroyed, their capital city was overrun, and their people were taken from the place they had believed for centuries was their promised land, given to them by God. As the people were taken to live separated from their home, their temple, stripped of the wealth, power and autonomy they had once possessed to live in Babylon, a place they had never been where they were now a displaced minority of foreigners, how did they survive? We considered what lessons from those fifty to seventy years in exile might speak to us in our own time of desolation and separation from so much of what we took for granted. They spoke to us in helpful ways.
 3. Now, a year later after our exile series, **we're in a different place.** We're here, meeting in person again, albeit differently than we did before. The conversations Jeanne and I are having with each other and with our other leaders and volunteers are less about "How do we keep going in the midst of all of these challenges? And more about "Now that more is possible, what do we want?" "How do we rebuild?" In this season we thought it might be helpful to look at the few short books of the Bible that deal with the return from exile and the rebuilding of the temple and the city of Jerusalem; the reestablishing of life there. While the story of the Jewish people who returned from exile is certainly very different from our story, **there may be insights from this part of our sacred texts that we could benefit from in this season.**
 4. Today will be a very general introduction to what we'll be exploring throughout the series. Over the next couple of months we'll take a look at a few obscure texts: the books that are written to be somewhat historical Ezra and Nehemiah, meant to tell the story of the return and rebuilding, and we'll also likely draw on the books of a couple of prophets who prophesied during that era; Haggai and Zechariah.
 5. But before we turn to any of these stories, I wanted to take a little time to frame the conversation for us a bit more.
- II. Jeanne and I have both been **re-reading Father Richard Rohr** recently, which is part of why we're suggesting one of his books for our next Haven book discussion. And in books like *The Universal Christ*, he often **explores the general trajectory of people's growth and development** - the development of our personal and collective consciousness. I find his framing for people and communities developing helpful, and also resonant with the moment we're in.
 - A. In his writings, Father Rohr describes movement that might be generalized by looking at three phases

1. Order
2. Disorder
3. Reorder

B. What does he mean by each of these?

1. First, **there's order**. Rohr describes that stage this way: *At this first stage, if we are granted it (and not all are), we feel innocent and safe. Everything is basically good, it all means something, and we feel a part of what looks normal and deserved. It is our "first naïveté"; it explains everything, and thus feels like it is straight from God, solid, and forever. Those who try to stay in this first satisfying explanation of how things are and should be will tend to refuse and avoid any confusion, conflict, inconsistencies, suffering, or darkness. They do not like disorder in any form.*
2. But as Rohr, points out, all you have to do is live and **inevitably, disorder will come**. Rohr says it this way: *Your wife dies, your father loses his job, you were rejected on the playground as a child, you find out you are needy and sexual, you fail an exam for a coveted certification, or you finally realize that many people are excluded from your own well-deserved "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This is the disorder stage, or what we call from the Adam and Eve story the "fall."*
 - a) Let's be honest, **the fall sucks**. Disorder is not an enjoyable experience. It hurts. It messes with us. And though Rohr believes disorder is completely necessary for any real growth to take place, we often don't respond well to it.
 - b) **Some people try to flee back to the first stage, scraping together any semblance of order, even if it's artificial and killing us in some way**. These people or groups, often those we might consider "conservative", can become hyper-controlling, trying to keep the disorder at bay, which makes it hard for them to respond with compassion and care to themselves or others when disorder inevitably makes itself known.
 - c) Others, he believes, often folks we might call progressives, **can go the way of giving up when confronted with disorder - they decide "there is no universal order" anyway**. All grand narratives, all bigger stories, all ultimate ethics are looked at with suspicion and cynicism. This is the postmodern way, and when taken to an extreme it can lead to a new form of grief and pain. As Rohr says: *Permanent residence in this stage tends to make people rather negative and cynical, usually angry, and quite opinionated and dogmatic about one form of political correctness or another, as they search for some solid ground.*
 - d) The truth is that **the process of growth happens in the movement forward**. Disorder is an opportunity to grow, but we don't usually see it that way. Disorder is painful. We tend to resist it, though it is at the heart of Jesus-centered faith. "Take up your cross and follow me" is not an invitation to wear a bit of silver around your neck or a logo on your t-shirt. It's an invitation to disorder.
 - e) When folks try to live in the first stage of order, they tend to look to the future with fear. Those who live in disorder think there's nothing more. But what if disorder is not the despairing end in and of itself but an entry way to see more clearly? To understand more truth? To have a wider consciousness? In the way of Jesus, the path of the cross is not an end in itself. **Perhaps the most radical claim of the Christian faith is that there is life after death. There is resurrection**. Disorder is not the end.
3. This brings us to the third stage: **Reorder**. Rohr believes that this is ultimately the goal of every religion or faith - to help you reach some version of reordering. There are different names for it in different traditions: "enlightenment", "nirvana", "heaven", "salvation", "shalom", "springtime", or even "resurrection". All of them point to the beauty that comes

after the experience of disorder - the joy of new life after the pains of childbirth. As Rohr asserts, *"It is an insistence on going through—not under, over, or around. There is no nonstop flight to reorder."* **When we reorder we recognize the value of much of what we had in order, but also the limitations that disorder has revealed.** We can hold sincerely to our traditions even as we honestly critique them. We can critique them, because we know they have value and are worth improving. We can find true joy, abundant life, when we can carry with us the best of order, marked by the wisdom of coming through disorder.

- III. I share all of this as we begin this new series, because it strikes me that **we all have experienced a lot of disordering** over the last year plus, and we are now in a time of reordering - many of us both personally and collectively.
- A. I would argue that **many of us have hit some version of disorder before Covid** - reasons we left the churches we may have attended, perhaps reasons we vote differently than our parents, perhaps reasons we settled in a different part of the country. But Covid took many of those individual journeys of disorder and layered with them this collective experience. Everything shut down. Everything was up for grabs.
- B. And now, we have a new question before us. Do we, as individuals and communities, just try and revert to some old version of order that wasn't really working just because it's less distressing than disorder? Do we give up on meaning and community altogether and just stay in the place of disorder? **Or can we reclaim that which might still hold beauty and meaning for us, but in a new, more integrated fashion?** Can we cultivate a way to be together, a spirituality, a sense of communion that doesn't live under the fear or threat of disorder but that has been enriched and deepened by its encounter with it? Can we recover something sacred?
- C. This of course brings us to the question Jeanne introduced with the kids - **what do we even mean by "sacred"?** There are different definitions for this.
1. Merriam-Webster offers ones like this:
 - a) "dedicated or set apart for the service or worship of a deity"
 - b) "worthy of religious veneration"
 - c) But also - "entitled to reverence and respect" - the Grand Canyon is experienced by many as a Sacred space. As is our Nation's Capitol, which is why many across the political spectrum found the January 6th insurrection to be so shocking and violating.
 2. Perhaps a working definition for us during this series is that **the sacred is simply that which connects us to Ultimate Reality, connects us to the Divine, connects us to God.**
 3. And when you think of it that way, you can see how **this process of order, disorder, reorder might impact our experience of the sacred.**
 - a) In the order phase, **the sacred might feel very contained.** Certain places, certain Scriptures, certain observances, certain rules to follow, perhaps certain stories of our national identity - these are sacred. The rest, as many have said throughout the ages, is "profane". Not sacred, but profane.
 - b) But **then we hit disorder and all that was sacred was called into question.** Perhaps it felt as if nothing was sacred at all. Everything was profane.
 - c) But I believe reorder is an opportunity to enter into the mysterious journey that Jeanne was inviting our kids into - to **recognize that sacredness is much wider and more expansive than we ever realized.** The categories of "sacred" and "profane" feel unhelpful. It isn't that nothing is sacred, it is that every thing carries with it the

possibility of connecting us to something truer, deeper, more real than what we can see, and touch and taste. Sacredness is all around us; the question is, can we engage the journey of discovering it and recovering it and recognizing that even the experience of disorder itself is sacred, for it too ultimately can connect us to God.

d) This is what I want to invite us to explore together over the next couple of months.

IV. We'll begin that exploration today with a very brief look at a short story from the beginning of the rebuilding narrative, a story that is found in Ezra 3.

- A. First let me give you a bit of context. **The empire of Babylon, the political authority who took Israel into exile, has been conquered by Persia.** And the emperor of Persia, after taking over Babylon, issues an edict allowing the people who'd been exiled from Judah, the Jewish people, to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their city, reestablish life there, rebuild their temple, and worship Yahweh from their sacred mountain once again. **So somewhere between 50 to 70 years after they left Jerusalem a group of about 50,000 Jewish people headed from Babylon back to their former sacred city to re-establish life there.** Now just to be clear, 50,000 was much less than the number of Jewish people who stayed in Babylon, as well as those who had once inhabited the city, but it was the beginning of building a life there again.
- B. So the people have returned and found their former glorious city in shambles, and their temple has been completely demolished. So one of the first acts they take on is to restore the foundations of the temple so they can begin to worship there again. And this is where we pick up the story.

1. 10 When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments were stationed to praise the Lord with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, according to the directions of King David of Israel; 11 and they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord,

***“For he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.”***

And all the people responded with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. 12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, though many shouted aloud for joy, 13 so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people's weeping, for the people shouted so loudly that the sound was heard far away.

- C. What an interesting moment, isn't it? After decades of separation from their homeland and from the place they revered more than any on the planet, the place that was most sacred, that connected their people to the Divine most powerfully, the group of people have their first worship gathering in that sacred space and it is very emotional. But the emotions being felt are not all the same. In fact, they're very different. And this is the point I want us to hold onto as we embark on this exploration together: **we respond to experiences of the sacred in different ways, based on where we are in our life's journey.**

1. In that assembly in Jerusalem that day roughly 2500 years ago, there were at least two groups of people. Most of them were probably born in Babylon. They had spent their whole lives hearing about Jerusalem. Their parents and grandparents were intent on “never forgetting”, on keeping their identity as the people of Israel alive by telling the

stories to these young people. They wrote down most of their scriptures in that era as an attempt to keep the traditions and the Jewish identity alive. You might say these people had been raised in disorder. For them, **the trip to Jerusalem was not a personal kind of “coming home” it was an adventure taken to fulfill the dreams of their parents, their grandparents, their great grandparents; dreams which had now become their own.** This first worship service in the place that they had only heard about and imagined as mythical their whole childhood, adolescence, perhaps adulthood; the place they had now brought their own children to see with their own eyes - this was a tremendous cause of joy and celebration. **You might say they are experiencing the joy and beauty of order for the first time - that first taste of “at long last we are where we’re meant to be”.** It’s powerful.

2. But there’s another group in the assembly: the elders. These are the grandparents and great grandparents who’ve worshiped here before. They were just little children the last time they attended a festival in the Jerusalem temple. They remember the majesty of the building, the huge throngs of people that gathered there, the joy they felt being a part of those masses. They also still hold in their bodies the trauma of the invasions - many of their family members killed. The precious sacred space burned to the ground. They remember the longing of their parents and grandparents who died in Babylon never again getting to see the place they had once called home. For them, this humble foundation was a bitter reminder of how much has been lost. **Worshipping in this space brings immense grief because it reminds these elders of all of the pain that disorder has wrought.**
3. This little illustration of different folks experiencing the sacred in different ways makes me think about our little community here at Haven. Here at Haven we talk a lot about the vision of cultivating safe, diverse, Jesus-centered community. We value the diversity within our little collective - diversity not just racially, ethnically, or in terms of gender, sexuality, ability, disability, or age, but also diversity of experience in connection to the sacred. Some of us were raised in church, or had significant experiences in religious communities as teenagers or young adults; and others of us were not - Haven is the first spiritual community we’ve connected with in a meaningful way. **Those of us who are newer to faith or spiritual community may feel like the younger folk in our story who’ve returned from exile.** Perhaps you’re grateful for what you’re discovering here; you recognize the value and beauty of what you’re encountering - the best parts of order that participation here is bringing to you.
4. **Others of us have had a lot of disorder in our faith journeys.** You’ve experienced the glory but also the pain of church trauma, the pain of exclusion, the grief of exile. An encounter with the sacred can bring that trauma back quickly, putting you in touch again with how much you’ve lost.
5. But here’s what I think is powerful about our story, and is an invitation to us as we engage this work of reordering ourselves and our community. In the story, the cries of joy and the cries of sorrow, blend together into one cry. As Ezra puts it “the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people’s weeping”. **All of it blends together into a sound that connects with the Divine heart. All of it becomes worship.** All of it belongs. The joy, the relief, the grief, the longing - all of it is held together. **All of it is sacred.**
6. Friends, I believe that we too have an opportunity to work together and build a community in which all of our responses to the sacred, however different they may be, can belong. To live into “reorder” we need the best of “order” along with the helpful lessons of “disorder”.

We need to hold it all within us. We need space to celebrate with those who celebrate and grieve with those who grieve. Because there's something beautiful about getting caught up in the bigger sacred story. There's something you might call transcendent about recognizing that your cry of joy or cry of pain is a part of a larger symphony of sacred song. There's something profound about having our voices and stories blend together so that we can no longer hear what is ours alone and what is the larger whole we are a part of.

7. **This is my prayer for us as a community in this new season we are in.** I pray that as we continue to rebuild this Haven together, we will encounter the Divine in ways we never could have imagined, in that space of holding all of our experiences of the sacred together. May we experience God saying yes, "your grief belongs. Your anger belongs. Your longing belongs." And also "your joy, your new discoveries, your hope, your sense of calling, your peace, these belong too". All of these are sacred. All of them reveal the Divine. All of them are held and are part of what it means to become more whole. So may we each experience the freedom, the hope, and the joy of being reordered again. Amen.

Lead Prayer as there's time

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How does Richard Rohr's description of growth happening through the pattern of "order, disorder and reorder" connect with you and your own journey?
2. What does experiencing the sacred mean to you?
3. Which group in the story do you connect with and why?