



Greetings!

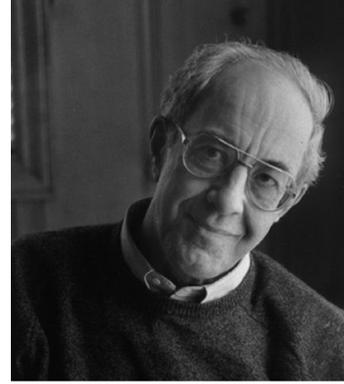
*Many voices ask for our attention. There is a voice that says, "Prove that you are a good person." Another voice says, "You'd better be ashamed of yourself." There also is a voice that says, "Nobody really cares about you," and one that says, "Be sure to become successful, popular, and powerful." But underneath all these often very noisy voices is a still, small voice that says, "You are my Beloved, my favor rests on you." That's the voice we need most of all to hear. To hear that voice, however, requires special effort; it requires solitude, silence, and a strong determination to listen. That's what prayer is. It is listening to the voice that calls us "my Beloved."*

-Henri Nouwen

We live in a liminal time. The word "liminal" comes from the Latin root word "limen," which means "threshold." The door is open, and we have new spaces to step into. There are a number of themes that are offering an invitation. We are bid by culture, reformations, disease and healing, individualism and the whole of human experience. Will you respond to the invitation and enter? Let me offer a short meditation that I hope ties them together.

Currently, we are living in the midst of a worldwide pandemic, but a new normal awaits. What will it be? The pandemic has sped up some reformations in our world impacting institutions, social movements, society, personality and many other areas of life. In the midst of this we cannot escape our humanness and this quote from celebrated theologian, humanitarian and Roman Catholic priest, the Rev. Henri Nouwen, offers us this gift. Please read it again and pause.

One of the lectionary passages for this coming Sunday is [1 Corinthians 12: 12-31](#). Let it expand Nouwen's passage as you take a moment and reflect upon it. Now re-read the Bible passage again. The Apostle Paul says in Corinthians that we need for all "gifts" to function together. Through incredible imagery of the human body comes inspiration and a call to action of embracing our individualism as it relates to the whole.



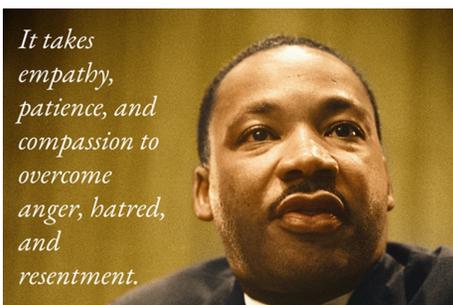
Henri Nouwen, 1932-1996

We live in a season of individualism. There are many images that celebrate these notions. Paul was no stranger to individualism and the personal way that he used an athletic metaphor to describe spiritual accomplishment. However, he comes back around and embraces his place in the body of Christ. An individual in the whole.

Culturally, we are struggling with keeping the whole. This is the season of tribalism. Tribalism can lead to intractable demonization of the other. This myopic world view keeps us from seeing the whole and from seeing God's creative power. Individualism is important – no two of us are alike - though we share similarities. And yet, you and I are encouraged by the scripture to avoid unnecessary focus on self and bring our individuality into the whole body. This is how we become beloved community.

But Nouwen brings us more. If I embrace my belovedness, the possibility of treating others equitably is greater. To embrace my belovedness raises the possibility of making incremental or substantial changes in my cultural competency. This is hard personal work and I must pay attention to my social location and ask questions of myself such as *Why I am here? What do I notice? and even answer, Who is my neighbor?* I need to deal with my fears and the lies I believe about myself. The tempter never tells the truth. The tempter only tells you stories you will believe.

When I embrace my belovedness, I have the chance to live the platinum rule, of treating others as they would like to be treated. Often I am too busy for this – I treat others as I would like them to treat me. See how self-centered it is? We're right back to individualism again!



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 1929-1968

As we enter this Martin Luther King weekend Nouwen and King speak into our lives in this liminal time. For we are not the only people who have ever been invited to walk through a threshold. To do so takes great courage. Both of them walked in. Others famous and not so famous have, too.

It has been said that Dr. Martin Luther King carried with him a copy of the book [Jesus and the Disinherited](#) by the Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman, a work that along with his Bible, brought King great comfort on difficult days. The book is a compilation of lectures from Sam Houston College in Austin Texas. In its pages Thurman exegetes the power of Jesus' life and preaching concerning oppression in the Gospels. Nouwen, Thurman and Paul in Corinthians all offer

imagery useful in considering if you or I will walk across the threshold of time.

If you are going to step in and make the decision to live by the platinum rule, consider how someone other than you might *like to be treated* as a way towards transformation from self-centeredness to engage the whole. If you step in, you will begin the adventure of engagement in cultural, racial, economic and gender competency. In other words – The Beloved Community – The Body of Christ.

**Prayer**

Perfect Light of revelation,  
as you shone in the life of Jesus,  
whose epiphany we celebrate,  
so shine in us and through us,  
that we may become beacons of truth and compassion,  
enlightening all creation with deeds of justice and mercy. Amen.

([Vanderbilt Lectionary Library](#))

Peace,



Rev. Dr. Todd D. Anderson, West Ohio Superintendent  
Ohio River Valley District, United Methodist Church

