

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Seventh Sunday of Easter – May 8, 2016 – Mothers' Day
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Acts 16:16-34

For Reflection

**"Motherhood is tough.
If you just want a wonderful little creature to love, you can get a puppy."**

- Barbara Walters, American Journalist (b.1929)

"No one wins when the truth gets beaten up."

"The Truth About Emotional Honesty" BY KEN SOLIN
<http://mariashriver.com/blog/2012/04/truth-about-emotional-honesty/>

Emotional Honesty

In most families, there is a truth teller. They may not always SPEAK the truth – in fact they may speak in riddles or lies. But their emotions and behaviors reflect what is actually going on in the family. They act out the emotions that others would rather suppress or ignore – or are honestly unaware of.

The family truth teller is usually highly sensitive and reactive – much like a taut violin string – vibrating with the undercurrent of everyone else's emotional content. They may not even understand the extent or complexity of their response to others around them – unless they've had a lot of therapy or happen to be deeply self-aware. And like a violin in the hands of a beginner – they can be extremely annoying.

Many family truth tellers are considered to be loose cannons on board a ship at sea – rolling across the deck injuring anyone who gets in the way. They are often dismissed as "over-reactive" and "obstacles" to the forward movement of the family project. Which, of course, intensifies the emotional response and raises the tension level.

Sometimes truth tellers are accepted, even respected within the family system. Others take their cues from the emotional honesty being expressed – and adjust accordingly. There are healthy versions of this that are wonders to behold – rare and valuable to their communities. Keep an eye out for these families – they make good role models.

In our family, my mom was the emotional truth teller. Verbally she could rearrange reality and spin stories like a pro. But she was incapable to being anything but emotionally honest – and she was definitely of the "loose cannon" variety – often

causing us to scatter to save our lives. My dad usually had an excellent grip on external reality and could articulate a situation so we could understand it. But he was not particularly emotionally transparent – at least not during those child-rearing days. We had to rely on mom to understand the emotional implications of a situation.

In some ways I have recreated that dynamic in my current family. I am an emotional voter – straight Democrat ticket. John takes each candidate and issue on their own merits and reasons out his voting choices. But as honest as I am emotionally – Peter is the real truth teller in the family. He’s been known to tell a few lies and stories – enough to make his Nana proud. But when it comes to slamming us with an emotional interpretation of the facts – he’s got us hands down.

On Friday my brother, Pete, and I attended a care conference for our mom out at Pilgrim Place in Claremont. She’d had a stroke about 2 weeks ago and we were made aware of the extent of the brain damage and other health consequences of that event. It meant she would not return to assisted living and would be in the Memory Care wing of the Health Center for the duration of her life. We spent the rest of the day and evening functioning well as a team, packing up her life, setting aside a few treasured items for her new room, and distributing the rest to appropriate locations. I had to arrange for after school care for my son Peter because I couldn’t pick him up at the usual time. And for some reason those folks chose to tell Peter that his Nana had had a stroke – causing this change in plans. He spent two hours that rainy afternoon wondering if his Nana was dead and what this all meant.

That night Peter had a small disappointment – and chose to react with big anger and tear his bedroom apart. He trashed it good – an impressive piece of work. And that, my friends, was the truth of the family dynamic on Friday. Emotional honesty. It has its place in the family conversation. Let’s pay attention or pay the price.

In case you’re wondering, the part of this morning’s text that brought forth this reflection was the story of the slave girl. She apparently had a gift for intuiting the truth about people’s lives – perhaps predicting their futures – and made money for her owners (family by default) speaking these truths. But in this case, she figured out the truth of what Paul and his gang were doing and couldn’t contain her herself. She proclaimed that they were truly bringers of salvation – and acted out the truth of their message and her passion about that message – loudly and repeatedly. She annoyed Paul to the point he shut her up and sat her down – not the most sensitive of men or reactions – certainly not what Jesus would have done. But he did it. And that is what got me thinking about emotional honesty.

Much of the ensuing Roman Christian conversation focused on theology and canon, distancing itself from the emotions that the Jesus Movement was built on. For some celibacy and asceticism were valued above familial relationships. Proper thinking was valued above proper feeling. And we have ended up with an institution that is (or was until Pope Francis) out of touch with human reality. I wouldn't put it all on Paul and his reaction to the slave girl – but it is a case in point.

If we were to look at the larger picture – we might notice the tendency of at least Western Civilization (if not America specifically) – to dismiss or ignore or abhor that which has high emotional content – especially if it is too close to the truth of what is going on. Some of the histrionics in Congress can be dismissed as theatrical and manipulative – loose cannon behavior that threatens to damage anyone who gets in the way. But as far as they communicate honest emotions – this country is having a tantrum over issues that have to be dealt with or our entire House will be torn apart for good.

And then there is our human response to Mother Earth as a family truth teller. The planet is G-d's direct line of communication with all of us. She's been unhappy for a while now and is having a conniption fit which we have labelled "Climate Change" - which we might want to re-label "Emotional Honesty." This draws a response that often parallels our responses to the truth tellers in our families. We shun her, push her to the edge of the conversation, dismiss her as irrelevant. Meanwhile, her glaciers are melting, seas are rising and there are consequences. And unless we can respect her – and adjust our behavior accordingly – we will pay the price.

Today we honor her – and thank G-d she is speaking up before it's too late.
Today we honor the mothers who are truth tellers – showing us where the boundaries and the danger zones are.
We honor the mothers who can recognize emotional honesty in their children and other family members – and help them express it appropriately.
We take up the challenge to become more emotionally honest in our relationships, in our politics, in our conversations with G-d and our neighbors and ourselves.
And we make a commitment to listen to Mother Earth – adjust our behavior accordingly – and offer a healthy planet to the next generations.

Acts 16:16-34

16 One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. 17 While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation." 18 She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

19 But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. 20 When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews 21 and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe." 22 The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. 23 After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. 24 Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. 27 When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." 29 The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

33 At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. 34 He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

"Most of us feel that others will not tolerate emotional honesty. We would rather defend our dishonesty on the grounds that it might hurt others; and having rationalized our phoniness into nobility, we settle for superficial relationships."

- from Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am? by John Powell

"He who dares not offend cannot be honest."

-Thomas Paine