

God of the Broken

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. – Psalm 34:18

Dearest Friends and Family,

A few months back I (Christian) was physically assaulted by one of the men to whom we've worked to offer healthy community here at MCD. That probably sounds too severe but I don't know another way to put it. Basically I received a couple open-handed slugs to the head and then was dragged down the street by the scruff of my jacket. OK – so that sounds bad too, but it really wasn't that bad, really. Anyway, I haven't written about it yet because I've been in process and haven't quite known what to say. I'm getting closer to making some sense out of it (if there really is any sense to be made), so I thought I'd use this month's prayer letter share a little bit of my journey.

As my flesh repels and reacts, my soul seems to utter the word "Unlovely". To my surprise, and immediately like an unexpected puncture straight to the heart, I receive the twin-side of that double-edged sword. This time, even clearer than before, my soul echoes in reply "Unlovely".

Unfortunately, this event wasn't an isolated one. Over the last year we as a community have had our fair share of pain and sorrow common with serving and including within community many individuals who are in a state of severe brokenness. From substance abuse, to oppressive delusions, to having to bar and ban individuals from programs, to severed relationships, to verbal and physical assault, to imprisonment, to even some passing on from this life - the weight of the pain of those we care for seems forever heavy on our shoulders and hearts.

In the attempt to find some bearing in these stormy winds, our staff community has participated in an ongoing conversation regarding the building blocks of healthy community. In his book *From Community to Growth*, Jean Vanier has offered us a helpful framework for building community. Over the decades of ministering among the mentally disabled within the LeArche communities, Vanier has concluded that healthy community must consist of three main components: 1) consciousness of being bonded together as a single body, 2) connectedness to the Father through Jesus, and 3) the presence and service of the poor.

As a staff community we have found that the first two components came and went without much discussion. It seemed reasonable to us that a Christian community desiring health would consist of people who have a sense that they're connected together and connected to God. However, the third component, the presence and service of the poor, has been more difficult for us to grasp (particularly since Vanier is not only addressing communities called vocationally to serve the poor but all communities of all types). Why would this author consider this component to be a *necessary* component of *all* communities desiring health?

Interestingly enough, it's been in the midst of all these struggles of the past year that God has given us glimpses of clarity on this issue. ***As we have developed relationships with the severely broken and have experienced the depths of their brokenness with them, we too have discovered our own brokenness to a greatly magnified degree.***

A great internal shouting exchange commences. As I insist the far greater "unloveliness" is held by the other, the same persistent rebuttal presses my shoulders to the mat: "Unlovely".

In this journey, Sonya and I have found that it's fairly easy to extend forgiveness or compassion to someone relatively homogeneous to us – usually offences are minimal and chances are that we'll require the same extension from the other person at a later date. Because of our "successes" in this context with forgiveness and compassion, we've deemed ourselves forgiving and passionate people. However, we've found the true test of our forgiveness and compassion comes following a blow to the head or a word of betrayal behind the back. Only sharing community with the severely broken have we been converted to this truth about ourselves.

Of course conversion to truth is always coupled with good news! It's in this deeper discovery of our unloveliness, the depth of our sin and inner-poverty, that we more deeply realize we are not at all like God. And it is in this place of a proper perspective of our self and a full perspective of God where we experience the good news of the gospel – for Jesus came to bring the good news to *the poor*, not to those who *serve* the poor!" (Vanier, *FBC*) The good news is that He is not the God of the healthy but the broken (Luke 5:32).

Finally succumbing to the truth of my "unloveliness" like a drowning man struggling against a strong tide, a new utterance takes its place. Emerging with the stillness of a gentle whisper but as convincing as a lion's roar, this new phrase not only do I hear but become: "Beloved."

Thank you so much for the ways you journey down this path of discovery with us. We cannot express in words our appreciation and gratitude for each of you. Please pray with us that we might be a community that recognizes its own brokenness deep enough to plead daily for His healing hand and, in response, offer ourselves as an agent of wholeness to those in brokenness around us.

Kingdom Come,

Christian & Sonya Gray

- 1 . For our support needs: we continue to receive over \$200/mo below our needs
- 2 . For SupportWorks (our mentorship ministry between the poor and the church lay community): that this ministry might continue to grow in being an active and effective agent of God in bringing wholeness to the broken.
- 3 . For our Park Avenue Collaboration (our partnership with approx one dozen local churches and organizations in the struggling Park Ave Neighborhood): we launch a weekly relational meal ministry, similar to our Life on the Brick ministry, on Sep 13.

PLEASE PRAY...