

“Where There Is Smoke, There is Fire”

Rev Laura Shennum

Just out of curiosity, even though I know there were many reasons people were unable to join in and all of them valid, I would like to invite all the people of all ages to stand or raise your hand if you participated in the Women's March yesterday. Thank you for all who were present both physically and spiritually. What a day not only for our community, but also around the world. (over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of people in sanctuary raised their hand). Over 660 marches took place globally and over 2.5 million people participated. There is hope.

There is hope we are not alone in creating goodness, beauty, and love in this world. It is important not to feel alone.

When I was in the second grade, I had just moved to a new school and I was tired of being the new kid. It was a lonely place. I thought by singling out another student and picking on her would make my situation better. It felt better in the sense that I was able to get out some of the sadness and anger I was carrying around. However, I was still lonely. Because even those who may have participated with me or stood by, really didn't become my friends.

When I was in the fourth grade, I had a teacher who decided it was her job to pick on me, hide my homework, and treat me like a dog. It got so bad, my mom went into the school, which was in a tiny little town, smaller than Wenatchee. My mom demanded the school either hire me a tutor or put me in another class. There was no other class. So, I was moved into the 5<sup>th</sup> grade class. Again, the feeling of loneliness was heavy.

When I was in High School, I watched as some of my classmates picked on another student, calling him stupid, tripping him up, pushing him around. I watched and was silent. Even though I was part of a crowd that watched, I was still lonely in that crowd.

Bullying is a lonely place, whether you are the bully, the bullied, or the bystander. Our first principle calls us to promote the inherent worth and dignity of each person. However, if we do that only by ourselves and only in our minds, then it has no meaning. If we combine it with our other principles that promote compassion and equity in human relations; accepting all on their spiritual journey; using the democratic process; striving for a world community of peace, liberty, and justice for all; and respecting then interdependent web of life...if those are combined then we are not alone.

Because we can stand alone in our promotion of worth and dignity, we can grant or not, we can believe in it or not; it is the other principles that call us into action to make sure we actually promote that worth and dignity.

When there is a situation with a bully involved, whether it be at your school, at your work place, at your church, or even at the White House, we have to ask ourselves how do I enter into this space knowing we all have worth and dignity and act to promote compassion, equity, peace, and knowing we are all connected. By finding ways to communicate to people they are not alone, we can start breaking this cycle.

At Lee Elementary School, right up the street, and I think a few of the others schools in the area, they created a buddy bench. If someone feels they are lonely and has no one to play with, then they sit on the bench and then another child comes along to play with them. We need places like this all over our world. There are so many people who feel lonely and left out. Let's make it our mission to step up, to reach out, to show up, to speak up, to love wherever we see a person struggling or alone.

In order to do this though, we have to understand we have worth and dignity ourselves. We have to put down the negative labels or names people have assigned to us. We have to set aside the negative names we have given ourselves. So, you were given an index card when you entered today. I would like you to think of a label or name you have heard about yourself that made you sad.

You can write or draw a picture to illustrate that on your card.

Now, turn your card over and think of a name or label you have heard about yourself that made you happy. Write or draw a picture to illustrate that on your card.

My card has stupid on one side, and loving on the other.

Now, switch cards with someone. This allows you to let it go and not let it have power over you. Hold onto that card as a reminder that what effects one of us effects all of us. These are the ripples in our interconnected web that affect us all. Let us take that truth with us and help it fuel our fire of commitment to make this world a little less lonely and way more loving.