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United church of Christ  
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May 12, 2019

**“THE WEARY TRAVELER”**

*Psalm 23*

Christine Sine, a blogger and progressive Christian writer posted the following prayer by Deborah Hirt this week on her website in recognition of March 8th: International Women’s Day.

Lord, make me an instrument of peace:

Bless all women who daily strive to bring peace to their communities, their homes and their hearts. Give them strength to continue to turn swords into plowshares.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love:

We pray for all women who face prejudice, inequality and gender disparities. Help us see and to face the discrimination against women in all the many forms it may take.

Where there is injury, pardon:

Comfort all women who suffer from the pain of war, violence, and abuse. Help them to become instruments of their own reconciliation and peace.

Where there is division, unity:

Forgive all women and men who let differences breed hate and discrimination. Let your example of valuing all of creation help us to see that we are equal partners in the stewardship of your world.

Where there is darkness, light; where there is untruth, truth:

Comfort all women who struggle in the darkness of abuse, poverty, and loneliness. May we stand with them in light to acknowledge their suffering and strive to remove the burdens of shame or embarrassment.

Where there is doubt, true faith:

We pray for all women who live in fear of their husbands, fathers, and forces that control their

lives. Help them to be empowered to be their true selves through your everlasting love and faith.

Where there is despair, hope:

We pray for all women who live in the despair of poverty, violence, trafficking, slavery, and abuse. May the light of your love bring them hope.

Where there is sadness, new joy:

Help us to see the strength and goodness in all women and men.

Transform our hearts to celebrate the love and grace of all people.

And may we be blessed with the courage of St. Clare of Assisi to follow our own path of love for you and all sisters and brothers.

Today is Mother's Day and we want to take a moment to acknowledge our source of life- Mother Earth, the mother's that birthed us, the mother figures that have loved us, the mother's that have tried their best, and the mother's that through their failures have taught us about forgiveness and resilience. But today, is for all women and girls and this message is much bigger than any constraints we might want to place on it because of a commercialized holiday.

In ancient Israel and in particular rabbinic literature, the adherence to a code of hospitality was not just about having good manners. It was a moral obligation. It meant welcoming in the weary traveler or stranger. In Jewish culture, it was considered a great Mitzvah (a high commandment from God). It went beyond just being kind- it was an extravagant hospitality. In the Psalms 23 passage, the ideas of still water, the restored soul, the green pastures, being without want, the cup

that runs over- these are all visuals of what it means to truly care for the weary traveler. You leave the individuals better off and more whole, than when you first met them.

I began to think about this idea of caring for the weary traveler in our present day. Who would that be? I am sure you can plug in faces you know, individuals you've encountered, and images from the news, into that description. When my mind conjures up a weary traveler- it is almost always a woman. When I look my sisters of the world, I see some very strong yet weary travelers.

- In the US, 7 out of 10 girls believe they are not good enough and don't measure up in their looks, school performance, relationships, friendships, and in their families. (The Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse)
- 60% of the chronically hungry people around the world are women and girls. (UN)
- Women and girls around the world spend a collective 200 million hours a day getting water. (UNICEF 2016)
- Among US High School girls, 44% are attempting to lose weight. (The Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse)
- Currently, women working full time year round, earn just 80 cents for every dollar that men earn. (2015 Institute for Women's policy). If progress towards closing the pay gap continues at the same pace, it will be another 50 years for women to be paid equally to their male counterparts and maybe closer to 100 years for women of color.

We are weary travelers. Please don't confuse weariness with weakness. We are not weak. We are not overly emotional or any more conflicted than men. We are not naive or misled. We are strong women. But, here's thing with being strong- it can stem from feeling shame. We strong women often feel we need to tough it out on our own. We forget to give others the gift of letting them help us.

The author and public speaker Brene Brown says this, "Shame is a universal human emotion; however, the messages and expectations that fuel shame are organized by gender. For women,

shame is a web of unattainable expectations that say, “*Do it all, do it perfectly, and never let them see you struggle.*” When asked how to counter this shame in our lives, Dr Brown says this, “Shame cannot survive being spoken. It cannot tolerate having words wrapped around it. What it craves is secrecy, silence, and judgment. If you stay quiet, you stay in a lot of self-judgment. That’s what shame needs to grow exponentially. If on the other hand, you’re able to tell your story and own your story with a single person, that is the first step. So I think the first thing is to find someone who can hold space and listen with some compassion to your story.”

So, some personal reflection for my fellow woman weary travelers. We must build each other up. We must create safe and understanding spaces for ourselves and for each other so our souls can be restored. We need to extend extravagant hospitality. It can be particularly hard for women to show themselves the amount of care and tenderness they would offer to another woman. We are so hard on ourselves.

Let’s write a different script than the one we’ve been read for centuries. Let this new script say things like, “I am worthy of the same amount of compassion I would show someone else. I am human and not perfect and that is ok. I am a beautiful mess of contradictions. I am a good person. I am thankful for this bodily vessel I live in, however flawed it might be.” We deserve to speak to ourselves with kindness and gentleness.

I’ve really come to love the author and public speaker, Roxane Gay, she describes herself as a bad feminist because she is, in her words, “flawed and human.” For years, she says, she felt that as a black woman – particularly one who has, at times, identified as queer – feminism wasn’t for her, because the movement “has, historically, been far more invested in improving the lives of heterosexual white women to the detriment of all others”. She also worried that feminism didn’t allow for natural human messiness. But she supports feminism’s aims, wants equal opportunities for men and women, reproductive freedom and affordable healthcare for all, so she came up with the label Bad Feminist, which punctures the need for perfection.

The human messiness of others, most often appears from our perspective, much messier than our own messiness. We like to think so anyway, right? It makes it easier for us to justify our judgments. If our first thought is, “Well, I would never..” or “I can’t believe she...”- we probably need to reexamine where that internal voice is coming from. As women, it does not serve us well, to point out other women’s messiness. I believe society, history, current political figures have supplied us with an ample amount of critical judgment- we don’t need to add to it. Instead, we should be shining a big bright neon light on the amazing things each and every one of us do every day. For the woman at the grocery store with the screaming toddler, offer her a hand and congratulate her for even making to the grocery store. For the transgender girl that just wants the freedom to move through the world as her true self- fight for her and let her know she deserves that right. For the woman that is labeled as angry, learn from her and support her for using her voice. For the girl that is judged for her size and the body she is in, admire her and support her for embracing who she is despite society’s messed up constructs. For the woman that is passed up for promotions and her ideas ignored, advocate for her and draw attention to her brilliance. For the women and girls around the world that are told they will never be good enough, continue to change that narrative one conversation at a time. We must continue to use our minds and power for our common good - there is a long road ahead of us. Let’s make our thoughts (and especially our first impressions) of one another be thoughts of radical hospitality, not of judgment and shame. We are all weary travelers in one way or another.

Roxane Gay says this in her 2015 Ted Talk:

Once upon a time, my voice was stolen from me, and feminism helped me to get my voice back. There was an incident. I call it an incident so I can carry the burden of what happened. Some boys broke me, when I was so young, I did not know what boys can do to break a girl. They treated me like I was nothing. I began to believe I was nothing. They stole my voice, and in the after, I did not dare to believe that anything I might say could matter. But -- I had writing. And there, I wrote myself back together. I wrote myself toward a stronger version of myself. I read the words of women who might understand a story like mine, and women who looked like me, and understood what it was like to move through the world with brown skin. I read the words of women who showed me I was not nothing. I learned to write like them, and then I learned to write as myself. I found my voice again, and I started to believe that my voice is powerful beyond measure. Through writing and feminism, I also found that if I was a little bit brave, another woman might hear me and see me and recognize that none of us are the nothing the world tries to tell us we are. In one hand, I hold the power to accomplish anything. And in my other, I hold the humbling reality that I am just one woman. I am a bad feminist, I am a good woman, I am trying to become better in how I think, and what I say, and what I do, without abandoning everything that makes me human. I hope that we can all do the same. I hope that we can all be a little bit brave, when we most need such bravery

