

Author Brene Brown wrote a blogpost this week called *Doubling Down on Love*. She begins sharing that ever since the El Paso and Dayton shootings, she's been offline and struggling. She writes: "At first I thought it was a combination of physical and spiritual exhaustion, or maybe low grade cultural despair with a side of burnout...I couldn't access hope or possibility. I poisoned every good thing with thoughts of potentially horrible things. I didn't want to let my family out of my sight, but I didn't feel like I had much of myself to offer them even when they were within arm's reach." She goes on to describe that although she tried just working through her struggle, picking up the pace of her schedule hoping she'd get reinspired and snap back into it, she actually fell at her child's school and broke three of her toes. Getting a cast was one way to make her slow down and deal with whatever was working within her. Then it hit her in the middle of the night, that maybe it wasn't exhaustion or burnout dragging her down, but *lovelessness*. She writes:

"Yes, the world is suffering from traumatic levels of lovelessness right now, but what really brought me to my knees these past few months was how susceptible I was to perpetuating lovelessness in my own response to our collective pain. As I started to untangle everything I was feeling, I realized that over the past few months, I had unknowingly turned away from love – the only fuel source that really works for me. Instead of being fueled by love, I unconsciously had turned to fear, contempt, self-righteousness, and maybe a touch of high-octane disdain to navigate hard news and hard people." Love is the fuel and she says it this way: *love is sustainable, renewable, and it burns clean*.

Now some of us may say, "Well, of course, love is the foundation. This is what Jesus teaches us about." But how often do we confuse love for ineffective Christian "niceness" that really just drains our souls and doesn't get at the anger, the loneliness, the broken hearts we feel about the suffering, the injustices, the basic disregard for life we see and experience regularly in our nation and beyond. This *lovelessness* is seeping into us more than we want to admit. I don't want to admit it, but I know it's seeping into me.

I bet the ten people Jesus healed while on the road to Jerusalem knew a thing or two about lovelessness. They were used to people disregarding them. Their skin condition made them unclean for entering the Temple, the Samaritan (and we don't know the context of the whole group) he already wasn't welcomed being that he was a foreigner. The gospel even says that when calling out to Jesus, they kept their distance. They expected that people would cringe and turn away from them. I can't imagine that receiving that type of regular treatment from people, I'd be able to maintain some kind of warm and fuzzy heart, or at least a foundation of love that would compel me to contribute positively in the world. Against all odds though, this Samaritan found space within himself to turn back to Jesus and give thanks. Not just a *thankyousomuch* Jesus and moving on, but a praising of God with his whole body. I can imagine

seeing him physically beam and stand out from the rest of the group. Giving thanks, connected his physical healing to a healing of his entire being, removing any lingering lovelessness.

See, Jesus healed this group of ten, but *after* he called on them to go to the priests who they knew wouldn't welcome them. Jesus told them to be brave and take risks before he even healed them. He's expecting them to trust that God will be there with them no matter what. So when the other nine are healed, where do they go? Do they slip back and blend into the crowds around them? Are they still headed to the priests as Jesus said, but still with crusty hearts filled with hate for the ones who rejected them? The one, the Samaritan, he'd still stick out and not be welcomed, but he made himself known and expressed gratitude. Maybe Jesus celebrates how against all odds the Samaritan's gratitude demonstrates love as his foundation. Jesus heals him and he pauses to note the wonder, the awe, the power that God gives. When praising God's presence, that love keeps flowing in the veins and maintains him for the challenges to come. As one preacher put it. "Ten people were healed, but only one was transformed." I'd bet that the Samaritan will have the resilience to keep going and work for a better world for himself and others based on his posture of gratitude to Jesus.

Countless studies have demonstrated that practicing gratitude is better for our health, our relationships, our overall sense of well-being. Ending our day listing off even a few things we're thankful for can actually rewire our brains, cleaning out the coldness, the crusties, the blocked parts of us that stop us from living lives of genuine love. What if we practiced gratitude more in our lives? Could that clean out blocked parts of our hearts? Could that help deepen love as our foundation?

Author and poet Audre Lorde who faced many challenges in her life due to the multiple oppressed identities she carried as a Black lesbian woman, she famously said, "The Master's tools will never dismantle the Master's house." What we're seeing today--the tools of hatred, contempt, and disdain flung from one side to another--it's not going to breakdown the house of institutional racism, hetero-patriarchy, ablism, capitalism. Our world longs for transformation, and Jesus wasn't about anything less than that. It wasn't enough to just be healed and move on like the nine people did. Jesus wants a transformed world and he saw the Samaritan man opening his heart for the love and healing needed to be part of that transformation. I'm not saying that a gratitude practice is going to change your life or change the world. But, we need something to change us, to de-crustify our hearts, to be our shield of armor in the ugliness of human interaction and disconnection plaguing our culture, this contagious disease of lovelessness. A gratitude practice may help us open our hearts to God, along with God's help through the work of the Holy Spirit who's active and alive, seeking us out. She finds us in the cracks of our crusty hearts like a resilient weed poking out of the concrete sidewalk. She finds us in the moments we believe in our voice even if it shakes, she finds us as a church sees that calling someone illegal is just another name for leper. She finds us simply because she loves us more deeply than we could

possibly imagine. The Holy Spirit is the foundation of love in our lives and the fuel that will save us from ourselves. So let us bow down and give thanks. There is so much still, to be thankful for.

In the name of our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, Amen.