**What does it mean to be a people of Beloved Community?**

**February 2021 Soul Matters Theme for CC/CG Sessions**

**Opening Words & Chalice Lighting**

“Community is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives…That person is always in your community somewhere; in the eyes of others, you might be that person.” *Henri Nouwen, Catholic teacher, activist, pastor*

**Moment of Silence**

**Check-In**

**Topic – Readings**

Speaking to his supporters at the end of the Montgomery bus boycott in 1956, Martin Luther King Jr. declared that their common goal was not simply the end of segregation as an institution. Rather, he said, “Our ultimate end must be reconciliation; the end must be redemption; the end must be the creation of the beloved community. We have before us the glorious opportunity to inject a new dimension of love into the veins of our civilization. The type of love that I stress here is not eros, a sort of esthetic or romantic love; not philia, a sort of reciprocal love between personal friends; but it is agape which is understanding goodwill for all… It begins by loving others for their sakes and makes no distinction between a friend and enemy; it is directed toward both. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opposers into friends.” *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

In my vision of a beloved community, I see a dazzling, light-filled, breathtakingly beautiful mosaic, a gigantic, all-encompassing mosaic, where each of us can see, can really see, and deeply appreciate each piece. We know that each piece is of immeasurable value. We know that each piece is part of a larger whole, a larger whole that would not be whole, indeed would not BE, without each piece shining through, and being seen and appreciated as its unique self. *Marla Scharf, First Unitarian Church of San Jose, California.*

Beloved Community is when we say "we," and we mean everyone. Beloved Community is not homogenous. It can't be. When commonality is presumed, when we make assumptions about who's present and whether people are "like us," or not, we're not practicing Beloved Community because Beloved Community doesn't make those assumptions. It doesn't presume commonality... Another thing that Beloved Community is not is Beloved Community is not like-minded. Because we're not called to be like-minded in spiritual community. We're called to be like- hearted. And, finally, Beloved Community is not devoid of conflict. And this one is also really hard. Beloved Community is not easy. There's nothing easy about practicing Beloved Community. When we avoid conflict in order to "get along," we're not practicing Beloved Community, because Beloved Community exists when we trust each other, we have the relationships, the strong enough relationships to actually disagree with each other, to be in conflict, even to risk hurting each other, and we can stay in relationship through those disagreements, and conflict, and potential hurt. That's practicing Beloved Community. *Alex Kapitan and Rev Mykal Slack*

There is a danger, in issue-oriented groups not based on community, that the enemy is seen as being the one outside of the group. The world gets divided between "the good" and "the bad." We are among the good; the others are the bad. In issue-oriented groups, the enemy is always outside. We must struggle against all those who are outside of our group, all those who are of the other party. True community is different because of the realization that the evil is inside-- not just inside the community, but inside me. I cannot think of taking the speck of dust out of my neighbor's eye unless I'm working on the log in my own. Evil is here in me. Warfare is inside my own community, and I am called to be an agent of peace there. Warfare is also in me and I am called to seek wholeness inside of myself. Healing begins here, in myself. Wholeness and unity begin inside of myself. *Jean Vanier, From Brokenness to Community*

**Questions for Reflection**

1. What was your first experience of Beloved Community?
2. It’s said that Beloved Community isn’t about the absence of conflict, but the willingness to stay at the table and work through it. What has been your best strategy for staying at the table? What practice or wise words keep you from running (or attacking) when things get hard?
3. What is your first response when you hear the call to “Love your enemy”?
4. What one new commitment will you make this year to build Beloved Community?

**Deep Sharing / Deep Listening**

**Connections & Responses**

**Housekeeping**

**Likes & Wishes**

**Closing Words & Extinguishing the Chalice**

To be fully seen by somebody, and then loved anyhow—that is a human offering that can border on miraculous. *Elizabeth Gilbert*