

Pastor Roy's sermon from August 26, 2018

We sometimes put others on a pedestal. Perhaps we think they are special, different, slightly superhuman. Oh, we know this isn't true, but somewhere deep inside of us, we wish it were, we want it to be true. Physicians, police officers and other first responders, military personnel, nurses, pastors, bishops, teachers, sports figures, movie stars. Even attorneys and politicians who often get a bum rap, we tend to elevate above others. Or perhaps we are envious, or afraid of their power. As a society and church, I believe we are making progress toward holding all persons accountable for their actions regardless of their position. We aren't there yet, but we are making progress. No one deserves a free pass based on their position.

As most of you know, this past week a grand jury report spelled out over a thousand allegations of sexual abuse by clergy against underage parishioners. Such violence perpetrated against powerless children is beyond tragic. Though the focus of this grand jury was Roman Catholic clergy, clearly there are pastors from every denomination who have violated the trust placed in them by abusing minors and adults.

Fortunately, many denominations including the ELCA have for many years performed background checks and psychological tests on those who enter the candidacy process to become clergy. And Mt Zion/Faith parish does background checks on those who provide care for children as part of our ministry. Yet even with these helpful policies in place in churches and schools alike, we as parents, family, and friends must be proactive to protect those most vulnerable among us. We can assume nothing. One of the best ways to insure our children's safety is to have fairly regular conversations with them about these issues. It's a tough issue to raise with a child in elementary school, but the conversation is healthy and opens the channels of communication which will always be helpful whether the topic is sexual abuse or about drug, tobacco, and alcohol. As I said, these conversations are challenging, but your relationship will be stronger as a result. Likely the earlier you start such conversations, the better. That conversation not only shines light on the past, but it also helps the child to know that some behaviors and conversations are never ok for children no matter what someone else may say or do.

Now, to my knowledge, few leaders take advantage of those placed in their care. But the few who have and have been allowed to repeat their behavior over and over again—these have left behind a great deal of pain. I'm guessing that some here have shared that pain in some way. And it's all the worse that broken leaders have not been held accountable by their peers or supervisors because of some sense of loyalty to the institution of the church. This is a twisted, self-serving abuse of power and should never have been tolerated.

Jesus served and died for the vulnerable. He questioned the powerful and called them to accountability. When John remembers Jesus saying, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven," and "The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh," he is lifting Jesus up not as one full of power who manages power and bestows it on others, but as one full of love who calls *us* to love and give our power away to lift up others. **The source and nature of true power is not control but love, clearly not the ability to do what one pleases without being held accountable.**

I regret that some here this morning, based on statistics, likely have been abused and mistreated by clergy, a teacher, a parent, or spouse. Perhaps some sought justice and were denied. Perhaps some have never had the opportunity to share their story and be heard. I am sorry that the church has *often* not been a safe place for victims to be heard and respected—for tears to be safely shared. The reality is that the same has made it impossible for abusers to find healing for their brokenness. Silence helps no one. Not victims, nor offenders. We have all sinned, we are all broken, we all need help. There is always hope. But silence does not bring healing and hope. Silence clings to pain. We need to be heard, to be validated, to be honored as we have been made in the image of God. Freedom comes to those who tell their stories in safe places. Those with significant sins against others find freedom and new hope by confessing and owning their actions to their victims. Healing is possible for all. But certainly the grief will continue since neither pain nor regret are erasable.

If you have a painful story to tell, and have never had the chance to tell it, please find someone you trust and tell them your story. I am willing to listen. If you are a woman and you wish to be heard by a pastor who is also a woman, I know of female pastors who would be glad to hear your story and pray with you. Emotional pain which is expressed and heard with compassion diminishes. Emotional pain bottled up tends to grow in intensity and effect. Please, allow yourself the grace of being heard in a safe place. And if you need to confess something significant, I can receive that. Confession reminds us that God loves us unconditionally. God's love is non-negotiable. Forgiveness is guaranteed. That said, confession is only the beginning. Healing will never come if an offender is unwilling to confess guilt and become vulnerable to the one he or she has offended and violated. Yes, God loves you, but no, you will not be free until you confess your brokenness to the ones you have crushed. This is true for pastors, teachers, parents, spouses, as well as

perfect strangers. If you wish to talk to be about this, I would welcome the conversation as I would welcome you and strive to be God's love incarnated for you.

Healing takes time, raw honesty, and a supportive community. May this be such a community. Blessed are they who give it a chance. Amen.

Children's sermon: What does it mean to be wise? (Smart? Old? Nice?) Joseph. . .Simeon kept, Judah/Benjamin "Now, therefore, please let your servant remain as a slave to my lord in place of the boy; and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the suffering that would come upon my father." That is wisdom, Joseph allowed his brothers to prove to him that they loved his brother and father more than themselves. He forgave his brothers. That is wisdom.