

Transgender Inclusion in Congregations

Transforming Hearts Collective

TRANSCRIPT: Session 1: Introduction to Beloved Community: Welcome as a Spiritual Practice

Welcome, everybody to this first session of Transgender Inclusion in Congregations. We're going to get started with an opening reading and a chalice lighting.

The opening reading is by philosopher and poet named Mark Nepo. Some of you may be familiar with his work. He wrote a poem called "Accepting This." So we will start there. And Alex is going to light our chalice.

"Yes, it is true. I confess,
I have thought great thoughts,
and sung great songs—all of it
rehearsal for the majesty
of being held.

The dream is awakened
when thinking I love you
and life begins
when saying I love you
and joy moves like blood
when embracing others with love.

My efforts now turn
from trying to outrun suffering
to accepting love wherever
I can find it.

Stripped of causes and plans
and things to strive for,
I have discovered everything
I could need or ask for
is right here—
in flawed abundance.

We cannot eliminate hunger,
but we can feed each other.
We cannot eliminate loneliness,
but we can hold each other.
We cannot eliminate pain,
but we can live a life
of compassion.

Ultimately,
we are small living things
awakened in the stream,
not gods who carve out rivers.

Like human fish,
we are asked to experience
meaning in the life that moves
through the gill of our heart.

There is nothing to do
and nowhere to go.
Accepting this,
we can do everything
and go anywhere."

Thanks, Alex, for lighting the chalice.

So, with that, we're going to begin with just a brief moment of welcome and introducing ourselves. My name's Rev. Mykal Slack. I live in North Carolina. I have been engaged in the work of transforming congregations and doing specific work around sexuality and gender and engaging some of the intersections of social justice work, in and out of congregations, for a little while now, both in UU spaces and outside of UU spaces, so I am really happy to be with all of you today.

Thanks, Mykal. My name is Alex Kapitan. I am super excited to be teaching this class with Mykal. I am a lifelong Unitarian Universalist. And if you're not a Unitarian Universalist, that's okay. This class is open to folks of any faith who would like to have these conversations. I live in Western Massachusetts. I used to work for the national headquarters for Unitarian Universalism, and since leaving there I've struck out on my own to do this sort of work, in relationship with other folks like Mykal, and we are in the process of starting a collective together to do transformational change education and organizing called The Transforming Hearts Collective.

Yay!

You can check that out at: www.transformingheartscollective.org So, super thrilled to be here. Some other things to know about me are that my pronouns are he and him or z and per--which is short for "person"--or just Alex.

I was, of course, going to be the one to forget my pronouns. (laughter) My pronouns are he, him and his.

- Fabulous.
- Excellent.

So, with that-- And you'll get to know us a bit more over the course of this class, too, but just to give you that brief introduction to who we are-- we wanted to chat a little bit about the class as a whole and the course as a whole before getting into our topic for today which is "Beloved Community," and how to understand welcome as a spiritual practice. But first we want to talk about the course as a whole and talk a little bit about why this course is important and what makes this class unique.

Right. One of the things that I continually hear whenever I go and do this kind of work is, you know, folks are really excited to sit down and finally understand what the kids are talking about these days, right? I hear that a lot. I want to understand terms. I want to understand identities better.

And yes, absolutely, one of the reasons why this course is important is that we are growing knowledge, that really matters. But what really matters more, I believe, and it's one of the reasons why I show up for this stuff and why I know Alex shows up for this kind of work, is this is really about building relationships, not just about growing knowledge.

When we talk about what it means to be trans inclusive in congregations we're not talking about issues to be studied and understood, we're really talking about the lives of people with whom we're making a commitment to be in relationship with. We're talking about understanding who we are in community and how we show up for one another. We're talking about liberation, and being able to recognize how and why my liberation is bound up in yours.

So it's deep work that doesn't really begin with feeling like we understand other people but really understanding ourselves and who we are in the greater context of gender and how gender shows up in the world.

Absolutely. Another way in which this course is going to be unique or different from maybe some of the other stuff that's out there is that, like Mykal said, in order to truly create trans-affirming congregations and communities we can't just add to our existing knowledge base, we have to actually transform our understanding of gender and understand how gender intersects with every other aspect of ourselves and our world. So instead of simply doing what has come to be known as a simple "Trans 101," we're really going to get into talking about culture and how to transform it.

So regardless of your background and experience when it comes to gender, gender diversity, transgender folks, whether you're trans yourself, whether you have family members or friends who are trans, whether you've been doing this work for a really long time, or whether this is brand new, this is a class for you. Because we're going to provide you with the background material to help you get a basic understanding of transgender identity and concepts. But, ultimately, this course is about going much farther than that 101 level. We really want to talk about how to transform ourselves, our relationships, and, ultimately, our congregations and our wider world.

So, that's not a tall order at all, but we're really excited to do this together with you.
(laughter)

It's important to remember that this is work that takes time. We may hear some things that we've never heard before. We may be introduced to concepts that are brand new and invited to be in the world in a different way. That takes time, and it takes practice, which is why this is all a part of our spiritual practice. So we invite you to stay in it. Even if it feels tricky or uncomfortable or hard, stay with it. It will make a difference, it really will.

So what I thought we might do is, really quickly, just go through, just to ground ourselves a little bit, just to go through a quick roadmap for the course so we're all on the same page about what we're doing.

As Alex mentioned, we're going to begin today by talking about Beloved Community and understanding that concept and how it serves as a foundation for this work moving forward. Then we're going to spend some time in the next session really talking about how patriarchy and colonialism have laid the groundwork for how we understand gender in the world, and here in the U.S. specifically, I think, and to talk about the subtle and not so subtle ways that gender roles show up in society and in our congregations.

In the third session we're really going to unpack the gender binary-- understand what that is, what it means for all of us. And in the fourth session we're going to have opportunities to engage trans experience and spirituality in some new ways and really learn what gets missed out on when the lived experiences of trans and non-binary folks aren't honored and celebrated.

And from that point on, for sessions five and six, we're going to talk a lot about culture, how our cultural values impact trans exclusion, both in really clear ways and also under the surface-- and that's the stuff that I think is really important for us to take a look at, because we don't necessarily see it happening in real time. And also shifting culture, or doing things differently, being different people in our congregations.

So that's a sort of roadmap for the course, and every next session will have been built upon what we did in the previous session.

We wanted to just lay out a couple of things that we hope folks will bring to this course. The first is an openness of heart, mind, and spirit. And this is the most important thing you can bring to this material. My dear friend and colleague Rev. Paul Langston-Daley says that animal nature is to approach the world through suspicion and fear, but human nature is to approach the world through curiosity and wonder. And he calls on us to see this as a spiritual practice-- to approach new things with an attitude of curiosity and wonder so that we can grow spiritually.

So an openness of heart, mind, and spirit is the most important thing for you to bring to this course, especially when you feel yourself getting uncomfortable or unsure try to access that openness of heart, mind, and spirit and that attitude of curiosity and wonder.

Also, the kind of learning that we're going to be doing during this course happens best when you can share it with others, rather than doing it in isolation. So, if possible, try to be with other folks. It could be your congregation's welcome team, a staff team, your welcoming congregation committee, even just a small group of chosen family members if that works best for you. If you can't take this course as part of a team, then find someone you can check in about as you're going through this material and chat with about what you're discovering and learning and that kind of thing. Try to do this and be in this with somebody else.

And then the last thing we want to make sure that folks bring to this class is some time. Beyond sitting with these particular recordings and course materials, give yourself some time to reflect, to write, and talk about what's coming up for you after each session. And if you've got any questions, please let us know and we'll do our best to respond as clearly and fully as we can.

And know that we do have "process circles" where we'll get a chance to-- all of us taking this class and us instructors-- talk together in real time. So make time for these sort of opportunities to engage beyond just watching the video and reading materials.

Sound good? Did I get all the things?

All the things.

Awesome!

Moving into the content for today, and this session, is we want to invite folks to just engage in a moment of reflection for a minute. And this moment of reflection, you're invited to think back in your life to a time when you experienced a profound sense of welcome and belonging. And this time could have been anywhere. It could have been when you joined a new church or a new group. It could have been a party that you attended with friends. It could have even been an interaction with a single person.

But try to call to mind some experience from your life of profound welcome and belonging. And if you've never experienced something like this, or you're having a hard time thinking of something, imagine what it would feel like to experience profound welcome and belonging.

As you hold that memory in your mind, think about what it felt like. What were the circumstances? And also think about what happened in your body. How did it feel, every bit of you, to experience that sense of welcome and belonging? What sort of impact did it have on you? And how did the space itself change because you entered it?

We'd like to invite you to pause the video here and just take some time to reflect-- either just in your own mind, or on paper, or on a device of some sort-- and just ponder those questions.

Now that you've had a chance to reflect, imagine what it would be like if everyone who entered your congregation or spiritual community felt that sort of profound welcome and belonging, every time. That's the vision that we're here today to help manifest.

Now that we've had some time to reflect on a profound sense of welcome for you, it's a good time to talk a little bit about Beloved Community, spend a little bit of time on that. I know, for myself, I've heard that phrase used in a number of different contexts, and particularly in congregations I've heard that phrase used quite a bit.

We are here in Beloved Community. Our intention is to be Beloved Community, to live into Beloved Community. But very rarely do we spend a lot of time really delving deeply into what that is and what it means, where it comes from.

So we just wanted to talk about that a little bit to help ground us in why this is so important. Beloved Community-- the first time that was ever spoken was by a philosopher and theologian named Josiah Royce. Josiah Royce was a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and that's actually the largest interfaith-- largest and oldest, I think-- interfaith peace organization in the U.S., and it's dedicated to the promotion of non-violent conflict resolution.

But Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. was the person who popularized that phrase, beginning as early as the late 1950s. He spoke of Beloved Community as the end goal of non-violent boycotts. For King, Beloved Community was a goal to be achieved. It was a vision for how the world could be. And it really began with recognizing this notion that we are in fact all different people. We're different people and we show up with different ideals, different values, different understandings about how the world works. We exist in the world in different ways.

We talk a lot about social location; that's a phrase that we use. What does it mean to show up as ourselves in a space, recognizing that we may all show up very differently? And how can we then still be in the space together? How do we understand that we need each other even though we may have completely different notions about what it means to exist in the world?

And this is at the heart of King's work-- by getting folks to actually sit down and be together, despite, and in fact, because of our differences, that those differences can make us stronger and better as people. And so Beloved Community is really an ideal. It's not a thing that exists on its own. It really relies on all of us coming together and engaging in deep conversation and communication and listening, even through those places, and even in that understanding that we show up in different ways.

So that's a little bit of the history and the philosophy behind it. And so it actually gets back to what Alex was talking about. The quote that you spoke from Paul Langston-Daley sort of gets back to that-- showing up with an intense amount of openness and a willingness to exist in a different way because we don't exist in the world in isolation or on our own.

Absolutely. And the course materials for this course will also engage deeper in Beloved Community, and give you a better sense of that, as well.

- That's right.
- Because people learn in different ways.

And we don't have a ton of time to talk about all the different elements of it here, but we did want to spend a little time on-- now that you've heard what it is-- what it's not. Because, like Mykal said, this term often gets used as sort of a buzz term, in ways that don't actually align with its real meaning.

So what are some things that Beloved Community is not? Beloved Community is not an enclave. There can be no Beloved Community if walls have been formed around that community, because that's antithetical to the concept of Beloved Community. So a congregation is not a Beloved Community. There is no such thing as "a" Beloved Community, there's only "the" Beloved Community.

Beloved Community is basically-- my understanding of it from a UU place is that it's heaven here on earth, it's all of creation being in right relationship. So a congregation can practice Beloved Community, but as long as there is an "us" and a "them," there is no Beloved Community. Beloved Community, for me is when we say "we," and we mean everyone.

- Right.
- Everyone.

So that's thing #1-- it's not an enclave.

Thing #2 is Beloved Community is not homogeneous, 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 or a sense of being homogeneous.

Another thing that Beloved Community is not is Beloved Community is not like-minded.

- And this is a difficult one, right?
- Yeah.

Because we're not called to be like-minded in spiritual community. We're called to be like-hearted. We don't have to think alike in order to build community together, to practice love and compassion toward each other. So Beloved Community is not about being like-minded; it's about being 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.

- And, again, not easy! (laughs)
- Right.

Actually, really hard. So those are just a couple of things to keep in mind.

Right. And one thing-- Thank you for that, Alex. One example that you'll actually find in some of the materials that you can take a look at either before or after you watch this video, there's a really nice way of setting up the distinction between our dominant paradigm and Beloved Community, and the Beloved Community paradigm, and one of the examples that really struck me was thinking of the dominant paradigm as seeing issues as problems to be solved, versus the Beloved Community paradigm, which is seeing issues as a way of life, to be transformed.

And it actually gets at the heart of what makes this course unique. We're not just talking about issues to be resolved, we're talking about building relationships with people who may have different lived experiences from our own.

And so that's just one way of thinking about the distinction between our dominant paradigm and how we tend to think about things and the Beloved Community paradigm, how to think about things differently.

There's going to be conflict because we are different people, and that that is, in fact, a good thing, to be honored, and an opportunity. It's an opportunity for us to grow as communities when we live into that rather than run from that.

Yeah, and another really amazing, for me, distinction between the dominant paradigm of how to create change or do social justice and the Beloved Community paradigm is the idea that the dominant paradigm is about things, and "issues," and Beloved Community is about people and relationships. So dominant paradigm is like "LGBTQ," and "race," and these are "things." Or even just racism and homophobia and transphobia-- these are like "things," and "issues," and in Beloved Community it's all about-- How do we actually get to know each other? How do we actually work for liberation for ourselves and each other? How do we get back into right relationship? Which is so different! (laughs)

Yeah, so different. And, on the one hand, the one sort of lifts up the fact that these issues are siloed and they can't exist together, whereas if we think about how to be in relationship with people we all show up in all of our complexity. We are all never one thing. And so the Beloved Community paradigm really invites us to acknowledge that and to really engage in what it means to do justice work, to be in relationship, and be in community together, acknowledging those complexities and thinking about how to exist within them rather than forcing us to think about one issue at a time.

Yeah, and I think-- Tell me if you agree with this, Mykal. I feel like Beloved Community paradigm for change really calls us to be mindful all the time of the folks who really embody the most intersections of all of them, especially in terms of oppression, because if we-- What happens when we try to isolate a thing or a facet of identity is we end up only fighting for the liberation of people who are different from the norm in that one way.

So, for example, if we see ourselves as trying to "isolate out" sexuality or gayness, I guess, or whatever "gay rights" means, we're really only fighting for the rights of people who are privileged in every single way except for being gay. So we end up fighting for the rights of people who are white, gender-conforming, upper class, able-bodied, English speaking, U.S. citizens, and male--let's be honest-- and who happen to be gay, as opposed to understanding that we have to look at the experiences of folks who are none of those privileges and also happen to be gay, which is a really different approach.

No, that's absolutely right. Dominant paradigm-- A model of the dominant paradigm is that it tends to lift up dominant culture, whatever that happens to be, with the exception of that one issue, personalizing issue. Whereas Beloved Community paradigm does the exact opposite of that.

And how that shows up in congregations, I think, is-- I often have conversations with people who will tell me, "Look, it feels like in my congregation it's okay if I'm different in one way from what's sort of the expectation and assumption is-- that sort of likeness and homogeneousness that exists, that people assume.

So if the assumption is that everyone here has a college degree, is making enough money to make ends meet, and is white, and able-bodied, and speaks English, then it's okay for me to be different in one way. I can be gay, but I can't also be disabled or working class, or I can't find a way to feel welcome and belonging in the space. Or it's okay for me to be Latina, but I can't also be undocumented or [not] speaking English as a first language, which really is a huge barrier to even being able to welcome anyone into our spaces.

So that would be the dominant paradigm showing up, and being like, "Yes! We welcome so-and-so," but only if they're just like "us," in every way except for that one way.

- Right?

- Right. It shows up...

Particularly in our congregations this shows up when we're thinking about and talking about worship, for example. But recognizing that that's a word that may or may not have meaning to everybody who is listening in or watching. But this comes up quite a bit in worship. Well, there's one way for us to do this, and to do anything in any other particular way takes away from the cultural experiences of a number of people in the room, and then presumptions get made about who that impacts and who it doesn't. Right?

Again, thinking about specific issues rather than engaging in relationship and understanding, which can completely shift the way that particular moment happens-- on a Sunday morning or whenever that happens to happen for you.

Absolutely. I'm sure there's lots of people listening in and watching who know exactly what that feels like and have had that experience in probably multiple spaces and congregations.

No, that's absolutely right.

So in terms of, again, that concept of welcome and welcome as a spiritual practice, welcome often gets talked about in terms of the newcomer coming to church service for the first time on Sunday. But that's not what Mykal and I mean when we're talking about welcome. We're really talking about creating that feeling of belonging that we reflected on earlier for every single person, every time they enter a space, whether it's their first time or their 500th time coming in the doors.

It's about how our children experience our community as much as it's about how our elders and our leaders experience our community, and our newcomers. It's all of this. So when talking about welcome, please know that that's really what we mean.

Right. It's really-- I started using the phrase, "It's the full-bodiedness of congregational life"- - How we each show up in the space, how we each feel valued in our fullness, how we feel celebrated in our fullness. And in order for that to happen, space has to be created. We have to build space for this acknowledgment that we show up in all of our complexity. There has to be room.

We have to make room for all the ways in which we show up. And if we make a commitment to doing that, then effectively we're making a commitment to come into conflict in some way about how something should or shouldn't happen, or what we should or shouldn't do, or who should or shouldn't be in leadership, and why.

At every layer of congregational life this Beloved Community paradigm matters, and it is why we use this and offer this as a foundation for the work that we're doing. Because that is really what can ground us. Because issues are going to come up. There will be uncertainty and confusion and fear. There always is when we're talking about culture shift. And it takes practice. And it takes time. And that's good.

We have a tendency sometimes in our social justice work to engage an issue, engage it for a moment of time, check it off, and move on to the next thing. And feel great about that, and there's nothing wrong with feeling good about the work that we do because all of it matters. And this is a lifelong journey. This is lifelong journey kind of work. It can't be work to be checked off. We continually grow in it.

And so the hope is that as we do this work together over these next sessions that we can understand how to hold the space of living in that reality, not just for the time period that we're in the course together, not just for the time period that your congregation decides,

for example, that it may want to re-engage Welcoming Congregation work, not for that limited time, but for the long haul.

It will make a difference in who we are as people. It will make a difference in how our congregations feel-- not just to newcomers, but to people who have been in the community for a while.

Right. Well, as we move through this course together, please keep this held in your heart and at the center of your consciousness, this idea that this course is not about expanding welcome for that mythical trans person who's going to come through the door on Sunday. This course is about creating belonging, and a sense of belonging, for everybody in your community, in your spiritual community, in your congregation, including yourself and your family and the people who are already there, including the trans people who are already there.

And that that's really our calling as people of faith, is to practice Beloved Community as a community, as a people. So thank you for engaging in that with us.

We wanted to-- If it's okay for me to move on, Mykal--
Yeah, absolutely.

We wanted to close this first course with a practice that you can use to actually practice Beloved Community, because we know sometimes it's really great to think about this and to think, "All right, yeah, I'm going to practice Beloved Community." But how? How do we practice Beloved Community?

So this is something relatively small but incredibly meaningful that you can do to practice Beloved Community, and it's called Compassionate Communication. It's a tool for compassionate communication, and it can not only help you practice Beloved Community but really ground us in the work that needs to be done during this course.

So the concept of Compassionate Communication is that, in much of our lives, something will happen-- someone will say something, or we see something on the news, or on Facebook, or we stub our toe-- and we move directly from that stimulus to a reaction. And when we immediately react to a stimulus like that without taking the time to think or check in with our feelings our reaction is often more of an explosion than a measured or grounded response.

So the invitation of Compassionate Communication is to interrupt that chain reaction from stimulus to immediate response and invite awareness-- to move from stimulus to awareness to an intentional response. And we can do that by simply taking a breath.

If, when a stimulus occurs, we take a breath, we allow for the possibility of awareness to enter. It's that simple, and it's that hard. (laughter) Because if you're like me, when something happens it is really hard to pause; it's really hard to take a breath. But it can make all the difference in the world in terms of how we respond.

So what can we do with that moment, that moment of breath, to try to invite in awareness and lead to an intentional response? Well, one option that I recommend is to practice THINK, which is an acronym for a practice that comes out of a Quaker tradition. And THINK stands for Thoughtful, Honest, Inspirational, Necessary, Kind. And I want to just quickly run through what those words mean in this context.

So is what I'm about to bring forward thoughtful? Is it intentional in a way that's informed by thought? Have I put thought into this?

Is it honest? Is it true? Is it true to myself, to my conscience, to my understanding of the community that I'm offering it to? Is it true? Is it honest?

Inspirational-- and this one's tricky, because inspirational in this context does not mean inauthentically positive or Pollyanna -- inspiring, in that sort of way. It's actually about whether what I'm going to add to the space or the conversation, whether that will carry the community toward its communal goals, whether it's in service of the community. Sometimes being of service to a community means disrupting the status quo. So inspirational means responding in a way that's in service of our shared way of being rather than being in service of my own ego. So is it inspirational in that way?

Necessary-- Is it needed? Does it really need to be said or done? And am I the right messenger? Is it necessary for me to be the one to offer forward whatever I'm thinking of offering, or moved to offer?

And, finally, is it kind? And this one is also super important and easy to misconstrue, because when I say "kind" I do not mean nice. Kind is not the same thing as nice. Kind means centering the shared humanity of all beings. Responding with kindness means asking myself-- Am I leading with a wise heart? Am I leading with a desire to remain connected, even in conflict? Kindness means there's a heart quality to my interaction and engagement with the world.

So, for example, I can be incredibly kind and deeply oppositional when in my opposition I don't dehumanize the person in front of me. So what being kind really requires of me is never losing sight of the humanity in the person across from me. It calls me to have my heart on the line and be in connection. Nice centers social conventions. Kind centers human beings.

So, again, "THINK" before you react-- Is it thoughtful? Is it honest? Is it inspirational? Is it necessary? And is it kind?

And one final piece of this is how can we really embody Compassionate Communication once we do this breath, we engage THINK, and then we take the moment to make that intentional response?

So, in addition to these two pieces there are some best practices that can really help to try on which I've found really helpful in my efforts for Compassionate Communication. The first of those is asking open-ended questions, like, "Can you tell me more?" "Is there anything else?" These sorts of open-ended questions can really engage compassionately and be authentically curious about a person's experience. And trying to create space for understanding where is this reaction coming from in me, as well.

So, "Can you tell me more?" And really importantly, avoiding the word "why." This was a really interesting learning for me, was to find out that the word "why" immediately puts people on the defensive. No matter how you use it, it's not a very conducive word for engaging authentically in deep connection.

Another practice that can really help with Compassionate Communication is taking a breath as a group practice. So not only taking a breath personally when I experience a stimulus, but as a group. For example, if you have a congregational committee or team or a staff team, after someone shares a thing, taking a breath together as a group practice instead of immediately being like, "Ooh! I have a thought!" And sometimes you're even forming that thought before that person has finished speaking. I know I do that. So that breath allows us to actually center that person and focus on that person, and not be thinking about what we're going to say or what we're going to argue next.

And then the final really important best practice that is going to be super important for us in this course is being willing to stay in discomfort-- when you experience discomfort, recognizing that that feeling of being uncomfortable is actually the world telling you something important. And so instead of rushing to try to reinstall a feeling of comfort, can we be strong enough to sit with the discomfort and really feel that discomfort, and question what is the world trying to tell me right now? And what's the compassionate, intentional response to this discomfort?

So if you have time and can pause the video here, we'd really love to ask you to reflect on a time in your life when these practices around Compassionate Communication might have come in handy or been helpful. And if you don't have time right now, that's fine. Just be sure to take some time to reflect on this at some point before you take the next course. But if you have time now, please go ahead and pause and reflect on that question.

Thank you so much, Alex, for going through that practice. So our hope is that you will engage in that practice. And, honestly, spend time reflecting on what happens when you don't engage in that practice, and what good comes out of situations when you do. It's important to spend that time reflecting.

Assuming we're ready to close out our time, I just wanted to lift up for all of us again one piece of our opening reading. Two, actually, but I'll start with the first, where we say,

"My efforts now turn from trying to outrun suffering to accepting love wherever I can find it. Stripped of causes and plans and things to strive for, I have discovered everything I could need or ask for is right here-- in flawed abundance."

We have what we need because we're prepared to be present for this work. It is work, and it is beautiful work, and it is work worth doing if at least one person in your community, if their experience is made better, and if your experience is made better by the work that can happen here.

And so our hope is that you will really engage it, stay in it, even if it gets uncomfortable, especially if it gets uncomfortable, to really, really think about Beloved Community as a foundation for what we're going to be doing moving forward.

If you haven't already, please check out our resource readings. There's some good stuff in there. Jot down any questions that come up for you, and please utilize the discussion board.

We're really excited. We're excited to be on the journey with you. This is going to be an exceptional time. I feel that. I believe that. And, how does Mark Nepo say, at the end-- "There is nothing to do and nowhere to go. Accepting this we can do everything and go anywhere."

So I hope that those words give you the kind of hope and commitment that it gives me. And I'm excited to do this. So with that, we will extinguish our chalice, and say farewell for now. We're looking forward to being with you the next time.

Take care.