

Bible Study: Where all are welcome, all are safe, and all are free

By Rev. Elizabeth Congdon

Materials needed:

- 8” x 11” thick stock paper, cut out in the shape of a human body, one for each participant
- Pens

Welcoming exercise:

How I see myself as part of this Beloved Community?

Give each person a paper cut-out of a human body. Instruct them to write their names at the top of each side of the body. On one side, invite each participant to write a few words or phrases about how they see themselves; what attributes do they have?

Example: Liz
Concerned about injustice
Loving

How others see me as part of this Beloved Community

Invite participants to pass their papers one person to the left. On the reverse side of the paper body, that person will now write words or phrases describing attributes they see in that person. So, using our example above, Liz will pass her paper to Sarah on her left. Sarah will flip the paper over to the blank side and write attributes she sees in Liz.

Example: Liz
Thoughtful
Hard working
Caring
Creative
Energetic

Have the group continue to pass the papers around until each person has had the opportunity to write something on every other person’s paper cut-out. When the cut-outs make their way back to the owner, give them a few moments to read what everyone else has written about them.

Reflection:

Take time for participants to reflect on this experience, and share how this exercise helped them to see themselves as part of the Beloved Community. Did they discover something new about themselves?

Scripture Study

Invite volunteers to read the following passages:

Deuteronomy 10: 18-19, 16:19-20

Psalms 82:3-4

Isaiah 1:17

Jeremiah 22:3

Amos 5:24

Micah 6:8

Matthew 5:44, 5:39, 26:52

I John 4:19-21

Words from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Invite volunteers to read some or all of the quotations below.

“The term **Beloved Community** was coined by the early twentieth-century American Philosopher Josiah Royce (1855-1916). But most of us learned it not from Royce but from The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. who often spoke of it as his ultimate goal.”
(<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/carlgregg/2015/03/what-do-we-mean-we-when-say-building-the-beloved-community/>)

“The evils of poverty, racism and militarism are forms of violence that exist in a vicious cycle. They are interrelated, all inclusive, and stand as barriers to our living in the Beloved Community.”
(*The King Philosophy, The King Center* www.TheKingCenter.org)

“Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives.”
(www.TheKingCenter.org)

“Love is creative and redemptive. Love builds up and unites; hate tears down and destroys. The aftermath of the ‘fight with fire’ method which you suggest is bitterness and chaos, the aftermath of the love method is reconciliation and creation of the beloved community. Physical force can repress, restrain, coerce, destroy, but it cannot create and organize anything permanent; only love can do that. Yes, love—which means understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill, even for one’s enemies—is the solution to the race problem.”
(*Martin Luther King, Jr., 1957*)

“But the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform those who oppose into friends. It is this type of understanding goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men.”
(*Martin Luther King, Jr., “Facing the Challenge of a New Age,” 1956*)

Reflection:

Invite group discussion on questions such as the following, or others of your own. If you have a larger group, or one in which members don’t yet know one another well, you may want to have people discuss in pairs first, then share highlights of their pair discussions with the larger group.

- What themes did you hear amongst the scriptures we’ve read?
- Where do you feel the scriptures and the quotations from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., intersect? Were there common themes? Resonances? Were there any differences?
- If you were to create your own definition of Beloved Community, what would that definition be?
- How do you feel this group lives out Beloved Community?
- In what way do you feel it could live out Beloved Community more fully? What plans could we make together that would help us deepen that experience here?

Rev. Elizabeth Congdon is a retired American Baptist pastor. Her last five years of pastoral ministry were at First Baptist Church of Trenton, a multicultural congregation, and Liz continues to be deeply engaged in multicultural communities and dialogue in retirement.