

Message: “Healing the Person”

“**Can I ask you a theological question?**” That’s the kind of text message most pastors and youth workers love to get.

‘Sure thing,’ Corey replied. He was glad to reconnect with Jason after not hearing from him for several years after high school.

‘**Why does God hate me so much?**’ Not the kind of text pastors and youth workers love to get.

‘**Why do you think God hates you?**’ Corey asked, dodging the question.

What followed was one of the longest text message diatribes Corey ever received. Jason texted about how his dad abandoned him in a house that was soon to foreclose, how he had no car or driver’s license, how he had to drop out of high school because he couldn’t get there often enough, how he was about to be homeless and had no money, job or food.

‘**So why does God hate me so much?**’ Jason and Corey made plans to meet the next day at a local coffee shop. After buying Jason some lunch, they sat down to talk. The first thing Corey asked was whether they could put the theological question of God’s hatred of him on hold.

Instead, Corey began working on the challenges Jason was facing and tried to get him to a place of stability. Over the next few months, Jason made great progress. He got his GED, found a family that would take him in for a while, got a job and his driver’s license. Jason also started attending weekly Bible study and got involved in some of the other things the congregation was doing with young adults in their community. Though previously unchurched, Jason eagerly explored the opportunities for developing his faith as the rest of his life began to come together.

Six months later, they sat down again for coffee. After seeing dramatic changes in Jason’s life, Corey asked Jason if he remembered his theological question that brought them together that first day. Jason had completely forgotten.

So Corey asked, ‘Why do you think God hates you so much?’

Jason smiled. He remembered and visibly reflected on where God had taken him over the previous six months.

‘No, God doesn’t hate me. I can’t believe how much [Jesus] loves me.’ Jason’s story is a profile of many unchurched young adults and other people. They aren’t opposed to the church. They aren’t angry with the church. The church is simply so irrelevant to their lives it doesn’t even register as meaningful.

When Jason’s life became desperate, he didn’t reach out to the church. He reached out to the person who had invested in his life years earlier in hopes maybe that person might still care enough to help him out somehow. I give thanks to God for Jason’s willingness to share his story and to Corey and his congregation for recognizing a need in their community and responding with grace. They were present and available.

Sometimes I wonder what would happen if we dialed back the rhetoric and became engaging, loving people practicing radical hospitality and grace toward people who really do need and want God and other people in their lives. I think it would be good for them and even better for our health and well-being.

It seems like there are many times we allow our ‘rightness’ to get in the way of our relationships. Though we’d never say it, we often act as if winning a debate, an election or an argument is more important than winning a heart. I believe the way to Christ is through relationships with trustworthy people who care enough about other people to set aside their arguments and just get to know them.

What does that look like on a practical level? It means restraining our impulse to insist we have every answer to every question figured out. It means giving people room to explore questions on their own. It means realizing if we engage in a person’s life over the long haul, we’ll have lots of opportunities to have those conversations and perhaps even earn the right to have them.”¹

¹ <https://transformmn.org/portfolio/why-does-god-hate-me-so-much/> (modified)

I believe the path to healing and wholeness for our community and nation starts with you and me. It begins in our household and with our neighbors. It begins with other people; all kinds of people.

What does this have to do with healing? You may not feel like you need healing, but I believe ALL of us do. We’re all hurting, grieving and anxious, filled with doubts and uncertainty. Our trust in each other is the lowest it’s been in decades. We need healing personally, as households and as a community.

Need evidence? The unrest surrounding the election and protests over racial injustice are only two examples. We aren’t meeting together in the sanctuary because of COVID-19. Getting a vaccine could take up to a year, which means we’ll be dealing with some of the ramifications of the perfect storm for a long time. We need healing.

I hope you’ll hear me when I say this: you are not defined by your fears, flaws or hurt feelings. You are not defined by your doubts, anxiety, depression or lack of trust. You ARE God’s child, created in God’s image, each and every one, to do good things together. The most important thing we can do right now: admit we need healing, get help and start the process of getting well. God’s Spirit will show us the way. Having Jesus in our lives makes them better.

God loves you even when you wonder why God made you the way you are. God loves you even when you turn away and embrace unhealthy ways of living. God loves you no matter whether you feel alone, are alone or feel trapped in a lifeless circumstance.

God’s love isn’t just something we know in our head. God’s love touches our hearts. Even more important, God’s love is what connects our soul to God’s Spirit, the very source of light and life.

Without God, we’d be worse off. I can’t imagine what it’s like to face the challenges of today without hope in something higher and greater than what humanity offers. We know God loves us. We’ve experienced love. We feel a tug on our heart, mind and soul, telling us there’s something more. We know we’re made for more, and better things. And we’re called to this path, walking in Jesus’ footsteps, for we know it’s the way to a better life, life in it’s fullest.

How do we heal? I’m going to take us through a healing meditation at the end of the sermon, during our time of reflection and prayer. I hope you’ll stay, participate and come back.

There’s one thing you need to know: healing is only one side of the coin. I believe humility is on the other side of the coin. Our scripture readings for today, the story of general Naaman and the story of the Galilean leper, teach us about healing and humility.

I found an amazing sermon on these lessons by Rev. Dr. Gennifer Benjamin Brooks (see below). I included her full message in my sermon notes which you can find on our web site (coronaumc.com). With all respect to Rev. Dr. Brooks, let me share a few thoughts.

General Naaman, or should I say Naaman the leper, was an important person. He was respected and feared by kings and people across the lands where he traveled. But he had a problem. Naaman was a leper. He had a skin disease that interfered with his life. It interfered with him at work and home. It probably made other people avoid him.

Naaman would do anything to get well. Given his wealth, position and authority, you know he tried every cure and option offered to him. Except one. When Naaman heard about the miraculous powers of Elisha the prophet, he made the long trip from Syria, the center of the power, to a small house in the tiny country of Israel.

But Naaman didn’t travel quietly. Naaman went in style! He had an entourage. His king wrote a letter to the king of Israel smoothing the way and warning of repercussions if they didn’t cooperate. And Naaman showed up at Elisha’s door bearing gifts – millions of dollars in cash, clothing, the promise of fame.

What kind of reception did Naaman get? Elisha didn’t even come out to meet him. Elisha sent a messenger to tell Naaman he would be cured when he washed himself in the river Jordan, refused the gifts and went on with his day.

How would you feel?

Naaman was furious! He left thinking, *“I would at least have expected the prophet to come out and do a public ceremony”* (2 Kings 5:11).

You can hear the next thought ... *whether it worked or not*. Naaman didn't believe, wasn't Israeli, didn't trust and went away angry. He was humiliated. Naaman felt entitled to healing and was frustrated when things didn't go his way.

I don't know how they did it, but Naaman's caregivers told him the truth. *“You would have done anything to be cured, no matter how difficult. What does it hurt to try?”* Naaman got his anger in check. He went to the Jordan, bathed and was miraculously healed.

Contrast the narrative of Naaman the leper with the leper who approached Jesus while he was in Galilee. The person came to Jesus with great humility, pleading and kneeling before him. Rather than expecting healing, the person said, *“If you choose, you can make me clean”* (Mark 1:40). This person didn't have anything to offer Jesus: no money, no fame and no position. They offered all they had, themselves.

Jesus was filled with compassion. Breaking all the rules, Jesus reached out, touched the person and said, *“I do choose. Be made clean!”* (v41). Instantly, the person was healed.

Two desperate people, both in need of healing. Both had to overcome their pride, to be humble. “Naaman couldn't do it, but this unnamed leper could. Naaman couldn't make the hard choice of humbling himself, putting aside his pride, falling on his knees in supplication, but this leper who knew that this was the only choice, the only opportunity that they had to be restored to wholeness, could, and did. It took others to help Naaman understand the choice for a new life was in his hands. The unnamed leper who had already lost whatever place they had in society knew that reaching out to Jesus was all that they could do. And they did it.

Can you imagine the overflowing joy, the relief when Jesus healed them? At last, everything they hoped for, longed for, prayed for, was in their grasp. It wasn't just a promise, it happened. The healer received them, as others had not. Jesus reached out and touched them as others no longer did, and they were whole. They couldn't contain their joy. They couldn't be silent. They had to tell everyone. They had to share their joy.

What a difference from Naaman. You may say Jesus’ attitude was different from Elisha’s. Yes, it was, but that’s not our focus. Two people, given the opportunity to be healed, to be made whole, and two very different, opposite reactions.

It’s a matter of choice. All of us are bent, broken, sick, lost, and lonely. We have the opportunity to be made whole. For all of us who come to Christ with all our brokenness, asking and pleading, ‘Lord if you choose,’ our Savior has an answer. Hear what Paul says: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not our own doing; it is the gift of God.”* (Ephesians 2:8).

Our healing, our wholeness, is a matter of choice, but it’s not simply our choice. First and best of all, it’s God’s choice. Our very lives are the result of a choice God made at the time of our creation, and that’s something those who would deny the full humanity of all people, regardless of color, class, gender, sexual identity, or other social location, need to understand and accept. We are all created in the image and likeness of God, and that was indeed God’s choice.”²

So I invite you now: turn to Jesus with humility. Set aside your ego. Deflate your pride. Don’t try to dictate what will happen. Be grateful and willing to be pardoned and healed.

Jesus is willing. Are you?

² <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/a-matter-of-choice>

2 Kings 5:1-14 (CEB)

Naaman, a general for the king of Aram, was a great man and highly regarded by his master, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. This man was a mighty warrior, but he had a skin disease. Now Aramean raiding parties had gone out and captured a young girl from the land of Israel. She served Naaman’s wife.

She said to her mistress, “I wish that my master could come before the prophet who lives in Samaria. He would cure him of his skin disease.” So Naaman went and told his master what the young girl from the land of Israel had said.

Then Aram’s king said, “Go ahead. I will send a letter to Israel’s king.”

So Naaman left. He took along ten kikkars of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. He brought the letter to Israel’s king. It read, “Along with this letter I’m sending you my servant Naaman so you can cure him of his skin disease.”

When the king of Israel read the letter, he ripped his clothes. He said, “What? Am I God to hand out death and life? But this king writes me, asking me to cure someone of his skin disease! You must realize that he wants to start a fight with me.”

When Elisha the man of God heard that Israel’s king had ripped his clothes, he sent word to the king: “Why did you rip your clothes? Let the man come to me. Then he’ll know that there’s a prophet in Israel.”

Naaman arrived with his horses and chariots. He stopped at the door of Elisha’s house. Elisha sent out a messenger who said, “Go and wash seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored and become clean.”

But Naaman went away in anger. He said, “I thought for sure that he’d come out, stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the bad spot, and cure the skin disease. Aren’t the rivers in Damascus, the Abana and the Pharpar, better than all Israel’s waters? Couldn’t I wash in them and get clean?” So he turned away and proceeded to leave in anger.

Naaman’s servants came up to him and spoke to him: “Our father, if the prophet had told you to do something difficult, wouldn’t you have done it? All he said to you was, ‘Wash and become clean.’” So Naaman went down and bathed in the Jordan seven times, just as the man of God had said. His skin was restored like that of a young boy, and he became clean.

Mark 1:40-45 (CEB)

A man with a skin disease approached Jesus, fell to his knees, and begged, “If you want, you can make me clean.”

Incensed, Jesus reached out his hand, touched him, and said, “I do want to. Be clean.” Instantly, the skin disease left him, and he was clean. Sternly, Jesus sent him away, saying, “Don’t say anything to anyone. Instead, go and show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifice for your cleansing that Moses commanded. This will be a testimony to them.” Instead, he went out and started talking freely and spreading the news so that Jesus wasn’t able to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, but people came to him from everywhere.



Rev. Dr. Gennifer Benjamin Brooks is the Director of the Styberg Preaching Institute and is the Ernest and Bernice Styberg Professor of Preaching at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. She is an ordained elder and full clergy member of the New York Conference of the United Methodist Church. She has served local churches in the New York Conference in rural, suburban, urban and cross-racial settings.

“Some people say that life itself is a matter of choice; and certainly we could not be faulted for such thinking, because at just about every moment of our life we are required to make some kind of choice. Now there are things over which we have no choice, such as the situation or racial group into which we are born – although society at times acts as though we do, and even that we should be penalized for it. But there are some simple choices that we make almost on a daily basis. Each of you made a choice to get out of your bed, get dressed and go about your day’s activities, and you certainly made a choice, hopefully a wise one, to come to chapel to hear a word from the Lord. Because, that is why you have come, I hope. I hope it isn’t simply to hear the latest preaching candidate. We are here together in God’s house, and we have gathered in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to worship him; so whether you meant to or not, you have made the choice to enter into God’s presence, to experience God’s self-revelation, and offer your response. And since I made the choice to be the preacher at this service, I have the responsibility to listen to what God is saying to us about making the right choices for our lives.

You heard the lessons read, and since you already know the title of this sermon, it must have struck you as pretty obvious. Yes, there was a lot of choice-making going on. So what about it? Well, let’s just take a look at things. Naaman the leper – I love this story. I would almost call it one of my favorite Bible stories. If you looked up the story, you would see it represented as Naaman the leper, not Naaman the commander, not Naaman the wealthy man, but Naaman the leper. Isn’t it amazing how folks pick on what they consider our inadequacies to describe us? As an

African American woman and a pastor, that is a situation with which I am very familiar; but we are talking about Naaman. The thing I love about it is that it is so apropos of life. We are known and judged by the choices that we make or even those we do not make, but that are often representative of the actions we take. Naaman, Elisha, the two kings -- just look at their actions, and you will see so many similar life situations and experiences.

Naaman was the commander of the mighty army of the King of Aram (or ancient Syria), and he is a favorite of the kings because he was instrumental in Aram being victorious over Israel. Actually, he was God’s instrument because it was believed that it was actually God that gave the Arameans victory over Israel. However, Naaman had a problem, a big problem. He suffered from leprosy. Now you do understand that we are not necessarily talking about the disease as it is known today. At that time, any skin eruptions were called leprosy; but whatever it was exactly, Scripture says Naaman has leprosy. He was a leper. Imagine if you will, the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the most powerful nation on earth with a bad case of psoriasis, the virulent kind that itches terribly. At the most inopportune moments, and most likely in the most inappropriate places, he had to scratch. The greatest commander of the greatest army would break out in a sweat as the need to scratch an uncontrollable itch took him. Now that is a problem, a big problem.

Can’t you imagine him coming home angry, snarling and shouting because once again he felt humiliated because in that critical moment, at a time when he was trying to be dignified, he just had to scratch. He had no choice; the itch would not go away. For Naaman, dealing with his affliction was not a matter of choice. It was a necessity, an absolute necessity. His wife tried all the remedies money could buy; they tried making herbal solutions, cooling salves, special baths, but nothing worked; the problem continued. Now consider how he felt when he heard that there was the probability of being cured. It did not matter that the healer was from little Israel, a lesser nation, a captured nation at that. He would try everything, do anything to get rid of the problem. Or would he?

Naaman sets out for Israel to find the prophet; he is coming to be healed. But despite the need that confronts him, he has to show himself for who he is. He comes as a conqueror. He intends to make an impression, and he comes showing off his wealth. What else would you call arriving with ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments? Perhaps we can justify the silver and gold by saying that he felt nothing was too much to pay for his healing, but ten sets of clothes? Well, you decide.

Now I know I’ve bypassed the involvement of the kings, but that’s another story. Let’s stick with Naaman. Naaman comes with great expectation. He expects to be treated as his rank and wealth deserves. What happens? He arrives at the prophet Elisha and is totally disrespected. If I were in my church, I would say, he was “dissed.” Despite all that he has done to show that he is worthy of respect, in his mind, he is given no respect at all. He is not treated as he should be, as he has earned through his rank and position, or as he knows he deserves. That’s what goes through Naaman’s mind when the servant of the prophet, not the prophet himself, comes out and delivers a message and goes back inside. Doesn’t it just set you off when folks don’t give you the respect you think, no, that you know you deserve? Certainly, when you are dismissed simply because of who you are, it is more than annoying. It is a source of great anger – especially when such treatment occurs in the presence of others, especially those over whom you have authority, as is the case with Naaman.

Elisha is not impressed with Naaman’s wealth. Elisha, the prophet of God, is the successor of Elijah, who through seeing his teacher taken up into heaven received a double share of blessing as the favored son. Elisha has given up the trappings of his former life for the work of God, and the trappings of power that Naaman has brought do not impress him. He has a word from the Lord that will bring about healing. All he is concerned with is doing what God requires of him. His agenda is not to socialize or to get to know Naaman in any way, just show the working of God and move on. So when Naaman comes with his request, he provides the instructions necessary to bring about the desired healing with no fanfare, and then goes about his business as usual. And Naaman is

furious. He feels totally disrespected, dismissed, diminished, dissed. Scholars who have analyzed this story tell us that the first hearers would have been thrilled to hear of the humiliation of the powerful nation of Aram at the hands of the prophet of Israel. Naaman felt humiliated, but why? Didn't he get what he came for? He was desperate to be healed. He was given a prescription for his healing. So what's the problem?

But you see that's one of the reasons this story is so special; it's so human. Aren't we just like that? We need something, we beg for it, we get it, and we are unhappy, dissatisfied. Why? When you get right down to it, we are ruled by pride. Pride gets in the way of so much. Pride leads us to making decisions that are not in our best interests. Pride leads us to disobedience. Isn't the old adage, “pride goes before a fall”? Wasn't that what happened with our first parents? God said, everything I have made is yours to do with as you will; eat any fruit except that of the tree in the center of the garden. So what did they do? They listened to the snake that said, in effect, God does not regard you enough. God does not want you to be like God. Pride, disobedience, sin, sorrow. It's a matter of choice.

Pride, disobedience, sin, sorrow. It's a matter of choice.

Cloaked in the hurt caused by his pride, Naaman forgot about his desperation to get rid of his disease. He forgot about the uncomfortable, hot days with no relief. He felt humiliated, and he missed the opportunity to be healed. He had been humbled and humiliated because of his leprosy, and here again he was being humiliated. He did not understand the difference between humility and humiliation – same root, different meaning. In both cases, one is brought low, but with humility, it's the individual's choice that is made voluntarily. With humiliation, it's the choice made by others against you that lowers you in the minds of others. So many of us in the African American community suffer humiliation that even our acts of humility at times become fodder for those who would see us humiliated. The commander of the army realized that in this situation he was not in command, and he could not allow himself to be brought low. Humility and gratitude, the only emotions truly appropriate to the circumstance were non-existent. Instead, like so many of us, Naaman allowed his pride to get in the way,

and he made the wrong choice. But thanks be to God, the story does not end there.

“If you choose, you can make me clean.” It was another cry for healing. Jesus had begun his ministry. “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe in the good news.” That was his message. He had begun to call his disciples. Those who heard him teaching in the synagogue were amazed at the authority that it demonstrated, and the unclean spirits made it known to all from where that authority came. Jesus had begun to perform miracles of healing – of body and spirit. He was about his Father’s business. And so the leper came to Jesus. He had no gold, no silver. Given the laws about lepers and leprosy, he was most probably outcast, forced to live away from family and society. He had no wealth and no power, and only rags for clothes. But he was desperate. Like Naaman, he was ready to do anything to be healed, and like Naaman, he found himself in a situation that required humility.

Naaman could not do it, but this unnamed leper could. Naaman could not make the hard choice of humbling himself, putting aside his pride, falling on his knees in supplication, but this leper who knew that this was the only choice, the only opportunity that he had to be restored to wholeness, could, and did. It took others to help Naaman understand that the choice for a new life was in his hands. The unnamed leper who had already lost whatever place he had in society knew that reaching out to Jesus was all that he could do. And he did it.

(Lord) “If you choose, you can make me clean.” “I do choose. Be made clean!” Can you imagine what passed through that man, the overflowing joy, the relief. At last, that which he hoped for, longed for, prayed for, was in his grasp. It wasn’t just that it was within his reach; he had it. The healer who had come to Galilee had received him, as others had not. He had reached out and touched him as others no longer did, and he was whole. He could not contain his joy. He could not be silent. He had to tell everyone. He had to share his joy.

What a difference from Naaman. Now you might say that Jesus’ attitude was also different from Elisha’s. Yes, it was, but that’s not our focus. Two men, given the opportunity to be healed, to be made whole, and

two very different, two opposite reactions. It's just a matter of choice. All of us, bent, broken, sick, lost, and lonely; we have the opportunity to be made whole. For all of us who come to Christ with all our brokenness, asking, pleading, Lord if you choose, our Savior has an answer. Hear what Paul says to the Ephesians: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not our own doing; it is the gift of God.” (2:8). Indeed, our healing, our wholeness, is a matter of choice, but it is not simply our choice. First and best of all, it is God's choice. Our very lives are the result of a choice God made at the time of our creation, and that's something that those who would deny the full humanity of all people, regardless of color, class, gender, sexual identity, or other social location need to understand and accept. We are all created in the image and likeness of God, and that was indeed a matter of choice – God's choice.

Not only was our creation God's choice, but also when we were lost in sin, God made another choice on our behalf. God sent Jesus to take upon himself the sins of the whole world. The grace of God gave us a new start at life and through Christ we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. All we need to do is accept God's grace and live our lives in Christ. As disciples of Jesus Christ, each one of us is called to make a life-changing choice. It does not matter whether we consider ourselves rich in the things of world life or not. As we consider the uncertainty of our times, we all need to recognize the brokenness and sickness in ourselves, our society, our world and come humbly to Jesus, seeking wholeness in all aspects of life.

It may seem like things are happening around us over which we have no control. War seems never ending with the axis of evil widening and shifting continually to new and increasingly lethal groups, with each one trying to outdo the previous one in its global reach. There is also the expanding hegemony of the devaluation of the life of people of color, particularly Black people, here in the U.S. and globally. Evil continues to infect the world and its mark, like leprosy is obvious and infectious. The world seems to have an itch that, like Naaman, it must scratch; but we do have a choice, one that brings us right to the place of total healing, for ourselves and our world, one that brings us straight to Jesus. Each one of

us who feels called into service as a disciple of Jesus Christ is where we are because of some important choices, and because of those choices, we can help to bring about great things, perhaps even wholeness for our world. Hear what Paul says to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1: 26-30):

"Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

The first and most important choice is to accept Jesus at his word and to follow his teachings and examples, not least of these is a life of prayer and faith in the power of God. I know it seems simplistic to say that if we simply pray, war will go away, terrorism will cease; but is it? Did not Jesus say that if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you could make the mountains move from their place and take up lodging in the sea? Did he not say that we could do greater things than he did? All we would need is to decide to have that kind of faith and hold to it. You see, in the end, Naaman's faith, yes faith, kicked in. He believed in the possibility of his healing, and he took the steps necessary to make it come about. Yes, you have the picture; he made a choice for his life.

And at this time in our world, all of us who allow ourselves to be called by His name need to go to Jesus in faith and allow the miracle of healing to take place for the world. I believe that Jesus is waiting for us to make that choice. When we make and live into that choice, then and only then will be able to see the *imago Dei* in each and every person regardless of color or life-situation. When we accept all people as fully human and recognize the truth that all lives matter equally, we won't need a special month to celebrate who they are and to acknowledge the contributions they have made to the world. It's a matter of choice for each and every one of us.

Indeed, it is a matter of choice; and God made the choice long, long ago to be our Savior. God who created us, who chose us for redemption out

of God’s everlasting love, sent Jesus to die and to rise for us. Just as Jesus had compassion on that poor, lowly leper, so our Savior continues to have compassion on us, poor, lowly sinners that we are. Naaman was forced to set aside his pride and go and wash himself seven times in the Jordan River. We, too, are called to set aside the pride and the sin that so easily bests us and wash in the redeeming blood of Jesus. As a nation, we need to set aside the pride that we have in our greatness and admit that we need the healing touch of our Lord. We need to recognize the hegemony that is represented in the systems that operate in and control the U.S. and global society at large. And when as individuals we have been washed and made clean, made whole, healed and forgiven, we can go forward to serve God, to serve the whole people of God. And through our service as disciples of Jesus Christ, we can be agents of healing and transformation in the church, in society and in the world. We can do this with these uplifting, enlivening, fulfilling words of our Savior ringing in our ears:

“You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last ...” (John 15:16a).

Yes, it’s a matter of choice, and God has made the choice for our salvation. And with the choice of life in Christ, let us go forward to do the work of healing that our individual lives, our society, our nation, and our world need so desperately.”³

³ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/a-matter-of-choice>