

Thank you. What a joy there is in this room today.

It is so nice to be in this historic building, with a congregation so long engaged in making to ensure our diverse community is a welcoming and inclusive place.

This room has seen much – joys and sorrows, exaltations and loss, redemption and grace. To be here with you today is an honor.

Despite sometimes amazing odds, the openness of congregations like yours has brought comfort, warmth and welcome to so many in our community. Thank you.

I'd like to ask you to think for a moment with me...

What is the value of home to you?

Why is "home" sometimes a "challenging space" in the structure of our thoughts.

"Home" is a powerful concept in our culture. It can signify a place longed for, a place to return to, or one currently lived in – or both. It can be a positive place – one of support and positive, enabling structure, safety and stability; or it can be a place of trauma, loss, and unraveling, and it can at times be a complex with elements of both.

We call people without what is commonly considered appropriate housing "homeless" – but to call some who reside in tents "homeless" denies that for much of human history, and still in many societies, a tent IS home. At what point, you might ask, do we define "home"? Is it the walls that make it? A type of roof? The intent of its design or materials, or the methods of its creation? Or is it a collection of abstracts, like safety, community, comfort, ease?

I would argue that our difficulties in agreeing on the implications of housing as a human right, is tied to long traditions of denying the commonality of basic needs we all share, for safety, warmth, food, and means to effectively manage the bi-products of living – our material and biological waste. We have a history of determining human worth on the basis of possessed material goods, and denying the shared value of our common humanity. Housing, it should be agreed, comes in many forms – but all need it, and we do our shared future no favors by not trying diligently to ensure that all have an opportunity, if not a right, to experience the benefits of safety, stability, affordability – to experience the benefits of a safe and stable home.

For many that I work with, home is primarily a problem to be solved.

How can I find a place to live that I can afford?

How can I get support so that I can stay in my home?

How can I escape my current home, and find the safety, warmth and stability that everyone needs to grow, develop, heal and thrive?

How can I recover the life I had, or achieve the one I long for, in a home that sustains me and my family; that enables me to be my best and contribute to my community?

And: How can I help another person achieve and sustain a safe and stable home? How can I help them develop skills and habits necessary for self-sufficiency, or get permanent assistance if self-sufficiency is truly beyond their reach?

We have probably all experienced some moment where the future of our home, our health, our safety was uncertain. Where we experienced housing, or food, or income insecurity. Where we

faced great risk, or endured some traumatic loss or setback that seemed insurmountable. Some of you may know this feeling all too well.

In these moments, choice and chance collide. The chance comprised of your conditions and readiness to adapt, and the choices you make to move forward. Circumstance, accident, and welcomed or missed opportunities can drive great and dire outcomes, depending on how all align.

It is hard to know the line between choice and chance at times – certainly the choices we make influence our conditions – but at times there are conditions thoroughly beyond our control. When those times come, do we have the internal and external resources to adapt? Do our conditions support resilience in the face of adversity?

The reason some choose wisely in the face of challenge, or get a moment of advantage or luck in the moment that pulls them through; and that others miss the gate, and are sidelined, undercut, or derailed – these things are hard to truly know. We are taught in many traditions that only God can truly know the reason in all things.

However, we know that children’s experiences often model and mold their adult lives, and their view of choices, chance and opportunity. Their confidence, and their views of their own worth, can vary wildly based on their experiences, and the feedback they receive. Housing instability, traumatic loss, or abuse of any kind can predispose children to recreate similar traumas and behaviors in their adult life.

We often mimic the behaviors around us. If we experience fear, violence, isolation or rejection at home as children – we are likely to

recreate the conditions that generated those same feelings as adults – in part because as a species, we seem to always be trying to create something we can call “home.”

Breaking the cycles of trauma, loss, instability and vulnerability is key to disrupting the supply chain of suffering in our society.

We must not shrink from the work this requires, if we are ever to see the true and lasting changes we desire for all who suffer.

You are all part of a great community. Not only the community of this congregation or faith, but of our greater community of all who need, and deserve to be safe, secure and warm in an environment filled with love and support, sustenance and encouragement, inclusion and welcome.

When preparing to speak to you today, I pulled my father’s Bible off the shelf. It was given to him by my Mother, before I was born, and when I opened it, I found the bookmark silk at Job 10, a point where Job was first sharing his sufferings with his friends, and where he wonders how his God had laid him so low. It is a sorrowful tale from there on, until his repentance secures his redemption and restoration.

We are all as vulnerable to suffering as Job, and as susceptible to despair.

And we are all filled with the potential for good and great things as outlined in Matthew: These things and more can ye do (Matt \_:\_)

I was asked here today to talk about what I do, and what the Housing Opportunities Action Council (HOAC) is doing to address needs in our community.

The HOAC exists to ensure that all in Benton County have an opportunity for safe, affordable, appropriate housing, and the supports required to sustain and realize that opportunity.

My role is to help the members of HOAC do that, with the skills and resources at my disposal. To do that, I have had to seek answers to some fundamental questions about housing, homelessness, and the impact of the relative balance of these on our community. And I am at times tasked with developing and facilitating shared solutions to complex problems such as:

- Lack of adequate emergency shelter across a spectrum of needs
- Sub-optimal or counter-productive interfaces between services, clients, and stakeholders
- Lack of effective care coordination across the network of services in our community
- Lack of adequate mental and behavioral health services in our community/region

All of these have both specific and general impacts on individuals and the community, often requiring custom solutions to meet unique needs.

Communicating these impacts, and the cost/benefit of potential solutions, requires ongoing community conversation to raise awareness, and educate the community about complex issues regarding

- Homeless services
- Illegal camping, and its public health and environmental impacts
- And affordable housing innovation, among others.

My effectiveness is at times uneven at best, as the need is great, and time and energy is always limited.

Fortunately, it is not all on me, as I work with a fantastic array of partners who share a common vision, and who actively work for the betterment of all in our community.

It is not always easy work. Setbacks, blowback, resets and new directions at times seem to be the order of the day.

But with faith in what may be done when we hold our shared humanity, our shared needs, and both our shared and our sometimes contested values as sacred and worth the work to secure, much is possible.

To survive waves of change requires resilience, persistence, will and adaptability.

We must become surfers, riding waves with grace and humility, and always looking forward to the next set. And we must teach these skills and habits to others.

I'd like to leave you with the words of the Reverend Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. from a speech in Washington DC, just days before his death in Memphis.

There is nothing new about poverty.

What is new is that we now have the techniques and resources to get rid of poverty.

The real question is whether we have the will.

Thank you – for the opportunity to speak here today, and for your will to make real change possible in our community. You make Corvallis a better place.