

**“Wonderfully Made”  
Rev. Joyce Kirk-Moore**

**Psalm 139:1-14a  
San Dimas Community Church, United Church of Christ**

**August 21, 2011**

A few years ago my friend, Elaine Miller-Karas, began some groundbreaking work on helping people heal from trauma. Though Elaine has been a therapist for many years and is skilled in various methods of helping people, this work has proven to be extraordinarily beneficial in a variety of traumas, from earthquakes and tsunami victims, to soldiers returning from war, and even to the traumas that we encounter in our ordinary day-to-day living. Because it offers such accessible tools, I have tried to incorporate it in conversations with people who come to me after traumatic events happen as well as using it in my own personal life. I have seen it be healing for many people. Since Jesus healed and wanted people to be whole in body and soul, it seems important for us to do all we can to help the healing process.

I find the trauma resiliency model (TRM) to be scripturally grounded in the Psalmist’s description of how we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” Psalm 139 tells in great detail about the care and intimacy of God’s loving creation of humankind. Our physical bodies are a marvel; we are temples of God’s presence.

Honoring our biology is important to our healing, especially in the trauma resiliency model. Notice the word “resiliency.” Human beings, beloved by God, are resilient. We are empowered with various gifts and abilities and strengths to be our best for God. Using this model helps us be resilient and strong and thus, to be able to be co-healers with God in this broken world in which we live. I am not an expert in this model though I’ve participated in several trainings. I will do my best to describe the first parts of it today and next Sunday and then on Sept. 4th, Elaine will be in town and joining us.

We are wonderfully, intricately created by a loving God. (*Slide of triune brain.*) We have a triune brain (3 parts): the neocortex (our thinking brain), the limbic (our emotional and feeling brain), and the reptilian brain (our survival and instinctual brain). All three parts of our brain were wonderfully made and work in concert to help us be our best selves. The reptilian brain, which helped us survive our earliest development, manages our fear factor. I mention this because my kids remind me of all the time that mine is overactive.

These three parts of our brain help us maintain balance and well-being. But sometimes the reality of trauma or even our perception of traumatic events causes this balance to go haywire. If we can’t make sense of the trauma through thought or emotion, the trauma may get stuck inside us, or our reptilian brain may cause us to fight, flee, or freeze. It’s as though the acceleration pedal of our souls gets stuck.

On the other hand, trauma can cause us to withdraw from engagement, being reluctant to press on the gas and go anywhere at all. Elaine and her colleagues are seeing many returning warriors from Iraq and Afghanistan with post-traumatic injuries who are in a freeze state and have difficulty being fully present or functioning at home. Though talk therapy is often helpful, Elaine has discovered that healing is quicker and maybe more effective when the mind-body connection is treated together.

When Jesus healed he recognized that the mind and body were an integrated whole. Many illnesses in ancient times were due to both sick bodies and broken relationships. People with demons were not only mentally ill but their illnesses were exacerbated by their alienation from community life. Jesus treated both the broken relationships and the illness. This model tries to do the same.

We can look at this model visually this way: (*show slide of normal ebb and flow, then show slide of stuck on high and stuck on low*). Yet because we have been wonderfully made, we have tools to help us get unstuck. We can increase our resiliency.

The first step is to notice what is happening not only mentally and emotionally but in our bodies because our bodies tell us a lot and can help us. (If you've heard of somatic therapy, this model works from a similar basis.)

We learn to sense what is going on in our bodies by bringing our awareness to it. It helps to learn the language of sensation so that we can put words to what we sense happening within us. (*Show slide of the language of sensation*). This takes some practice and attention and it may appear so easy that we too readily discard its importance. What I'd like us to practice this week is noticing the sensations of our bodies throughout our daily experiences. Elaine calls this *tracking*. We track through observation: notice your breath and heart rate, racing thoughts, muscular tension or relaxation, shifts in posture, sweating, skin color, movements of the body.

After we observe, we report: *What do you notice happening in your body? What do you notice about your breathing and heart rate? Do you notice changes in temperature? Where do you notice tension in your body? What sensations do you notice?* Often by just noticing what is happening within our bodies we can experience release, calmness, and a rebalance of our nervous system. For today this is all I want us to contemplate. Perhaps we can practice tracking our sensations as I slowly reread our Psalm for today.

***O Lord, you have searched me and known me.***

***You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.***

***You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.***

***Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.***

***You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.***

***Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.***

***Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?***

***If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.***

***If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,***

***even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.***

***If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night',***

***even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day,***

***for darkness is as light to you.***

***For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.***

***I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.***