



***First and Center***  
**Pastor's Blog**  
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The rise in the numbers of people with opioid or other addictions. Recent suicides by people impacted by mass shootings, especially in schools. The high rate of suicide for young people, especially LGBTQ or gender non-conforming young people. The rise of white supremacy and hate groups.

Hopelessness abounds these days. It breaks my soul when someone decides that life is so without hope, without joy, without future possibilities for goodness, that they either descend into the self-medication of addictions or take their own lives.

Yes, these folk need therapy, perhaps prescribed medications, to help them deal with what is going on in their minds and bodies. But that is not enough. It feels to me like the whole culture needs a dramatic shift into a culture of hope and possibility, and not one of hate, fear, and division.

Søren Kierkegaard, a Danish theologian who struggled mightily with depression, once wrote this:

*“Dwell in possibility. If I were to wish for anything, I should not wish for wealth and power, but for the passionate sense of the potential, for the eye which, ever young and ardent, sees the possible. Pleasure disappoints; possibility never. And what wine is so sparkling, what so fragrant, what so intoxicating, as possibility?”*

What if the air we breathed was full of intoxicating possibility? It would not cure mental illness, but it would give people the breathing room to seek help. It would help prevent the kind of violence that comes from hopelessness and fear.

Is one of the major roles of organized religion, perhaps, to help people learn how to dwell in the possibility of love, life, hope, and joy? For me, that is a central message of Easter. Can faith, prayer, times of praising God in beauty, being with a community of struggle, united in hope, turn the tide just a little bit? Or maybe more? Seems to me it's worth a try.

~ The Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,  
Transitional Minister