

Plenary Presentation

Mending our Nets: The Power of Becoming Whole

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Strong nets are a wonderful thing. We use physical nets to catch tadpoles and fish and protect our fruits and vegetables from insects and birds. We rely on strong relational networks to get jobs, survive trauma, pursue passions, effect change. The idea of a safety net is a powerful one; it allows us to try, and to be caught if we fall. We're embedded and connected in a variety of nets and networks. The network of living organisms—around us and inside us—is what keeps us alive. So holes in our nets are a problem, and mending can be seen as a critical, if undervalued, skill.

We can start by valuing the net. Look around, take in the precious resource of a net that is whole (though, paradoxically, when it's whole, it's hardest to see): human bodies that work, including our internal networks of micro-organisms; supportive and loving extended families; communities that nourish their members, hopefully including our Meeting communities and meetings for worship; inspired classrooms and work teams; islands of responsive and participatory democracy and economics; cultural and religious traditions that uphold whole groups of people; systems of information sharing that allow us to benefit from the knowledge of others; the vibrant and sturdy eco-systems that undergird all life on earth. These are all precious manifestations of connection.

Then, we dare to notice the holes. Our nets are tattered, with gaping holes in many places—and people, places, and values falling through. Consider: our personal lives, with gaps in our well-being, whether physical, emotional, social, economic, spiritual; the gaps in well-being in our families and our Meeting communities; great rents in our shared understanding of what matters as a nation; the tears in our social fabric that come from centering greed and domination, leading to ever-growing wealth inequality and widening holes in our social safety nets that increasingly threaten our access to healthcare, housing, and livelihood at home; even greater gaps in well-being in countries that have been additionally ravaged by colonialism; and damage to the life-giving capacities of our precious planet and the resultant threat to all living beings.

So—how do we become whole? We grieve—and we celebrate. We mend—and in mending, we connect.

We Grieve

I don't quite know what to name the malady that makes our culture so allergic to grieving, but it leaves us all diminished. We're confused by a narrative of inevitable progress, awash in distractions and pop solutions. Unable to grieve, we may turn those feelings of loss outward—to blame, protest, even revenge. (Vengeance, they say, is a lazy form of grief.) Or we turn them in on ourselves. Or we just try to get away: shove each new loss aside and refuse to pay attention; go into our heads; make ourselves small and hide in our comfortable safe places, or turn to our chosen addictions—all of which rob us of our power. Or we bargain to work every waking hour against greater loss in exchange for not having to actually face it.

And yet: a common outcome of any of these strategies for warding off grief is that, by blunting the hard edge of loss, they blunt our ability to connect with all the love and joy and possibility that is also present in our world. In the deepest of ironies, our attempts to protect our hearts from breaking can have the result of hardening them.

I'm persuaded that our greatest safety lies in holding hands, daring to look head on, and just opening our hearts to loss and grief. Yet, this prospect, frankly, terrifies me. If we let loose the floodgates of accumulated grief that are so tightly held in check in this culture, will any of us survive the flood? I have to wonder: is it our grief that is at the heart of the problem, or our fear of facing it?

I need to remember that I know some things. I know the value of having a good cry, and how much more refreshed I feel afterwards. I know about welcoming the tears of children and holding them as they cry. I know that it's better to be with someone than to face loss alone, that good listening helps to open space for grief. I know that being grounded in all the good parts of life helps me to face the grief of the hard ones. And, if the options are being broken-hearted or hard-hearted, my choice is clear.

There is wisdom from the ages to lean on. We can learn from Indigenous traditions around naming and honoring loss: I heard one native elder say, "Weep till the bitter tears run sweet." We can learn models of encouraging shared grieving—from the wall of names at the Vietnam War Memorial to the AIDS quilt and the displays of boots and shoes, t-shirts, and little flags. We can learn from those who are comfortable helping others to just open up and wail. (I heard a story from one Yearly Meeting session that was truly extraordinary).

A two-part frame that's helpful to me is that it's all ours, and all we have to do is our share.

It's all ours. When I was a child, there was a pond nearby, and everyone came to the pond to swim. I can remember later, being in an airplane and seeing housing developments spread out below, almost every one with its little dot or squiggle of blue in back—the swimming pool. What we used to do together in common water, we now do individually and in private.

More recently, after a devastating earthquake, I wondered why I was unable to feel anything. I realized that I was facing some big personal losses; maybe I was just filled up with my own sorrows. But while this was true, it didn't satisfy. Then, the image of a great common sea came to mind. What if I could leave my private little blue dot of grief and come out to the sea with everyone else who was grieving all the loss of the world? Then those impossible questions, "Why me?" and "Why them instead of me?" would lose their sting, in the recognition that it's all ours.

If my tears can flow in with the tears of those who lost so much in that earthquake, then we can be bound together in our loss. Maybe that string of personal losses just loosened my share of the tears of the world. Maybe those tears flowing down my cheeks are mine to feel, but not mine to possess or control, not mine to ascribe to any particular loss.

The same would have to hold true for love. It's easy to think of our loves as private affairs. But what if there's a great sea of love that we all get to swim in? Any loving that I do, then, is part of the great loving of the world. I'm left thinking that who we can grieve for and who we can love is less important than whether we are willing to step into that common sea and do the big loving and grieving that our world needs.

All we have to do is our share. To think that all the loss of the world belonged on my shoulders would be a sign of both hubris and isolation. Maybe my share will be a little less at times when I'm pressed by one thing or another, and maybe a little more as I'm able. I think of the way I pick up trash in the park on my morning walk: I don't try to clean the whole neighborhood, much less the whole city. Sometimes I miss a day altogether, but then I'm back.

I have a program taking shape: We work to challenge our own fears, commit to doing our share of grieving, and help others to do the same — as we also support each other to act as we are able to minimize harm and loss. It won't be easy. Losses will keep coming, and we'll have to keep facing them, moving through layers of grief to find a place to stand. But what could be better than finding that solid ground and looking out at the world together with hearts that remain open?

Aligning ourselves with this power of healing gives us a way to share our love for the world that may have been blocked for many of us. As we find ways to grieve—and grieve together—for this precious world, I believe that new paths, perhaps ones we had never imagined, will open before us.

We Celebrate All that Is Whole

There is a vital balance to be found between sorrow and joy, grieving and celebration. After the election in the fall, I identified the importance of being able to grieve the losses we would witness, but I hadn't realized the importance of tending to joy and celebration as part of that balancing process. The more there is to grieve, the more we need to pay active attention to what is good and whole. And the more we pay that attention, the more space we have for grief.

We're best at celebrating with families and close-in friend circles. But more is possible there. We can intentionally share good news in groups, let no opportunity to appreciate or thank someone go unnoticed, join in noticing the wonders of the natural world, do more singing and dancing together. On a larger scale, we have school events where we celebrate our children, religious ceremonies, local parades, national holidays, sports victories. (Our team won the Super Bowl, and boy, did our city celebrate!) What more might be possible?

Though I don't usually do this, I want to quote Brian McLaren, from his book *Life after Doom*, where he reflects on the potential for celebration in the midst of loss, in the compelling image of a group of people around a campfire singing joyfully into the night:

I could imagine people gathering in small circles of beauty everywhere... on front porches, in living rooms, in forest clearings, around kitchen tables Even if their governments collapsed and electric grids failed, even if the internet were monitored by authoritarian goons, even if public schools were commandeered to teach Orwellian propaganda. Even then, they would gather and give one another life, in twos and threes and tens and twenties. They would speak truth. They would celebrate goodness. They would honor beauty, to see it as the real story, the aboriginal story, the eternal beautiful story. They would sing songs, recite poetry, tell stories, tell jokes They would laugh and cry and dance and sit in silence, watching the sparks rise upward. And life would be beautiful in that circle. There would be joy unspeakable in that circle. No matter what happened outside it.

Here's another angle on sharing our heartbreaks and our joys: It's about a young woman in the youth climate movement. She works long hours. The stakes are high, there are many setbacks and it's easy to get discouraged. She misses her family, who live far away. She worries that she's not doing enough.

Her therapist tries to steer her toward greater attention to her well-being: *Don't work so hard. Close your computer at 5:00. Do things that bring you joy.* As I listen to her explore her sense that something has not been acknowledged, the theme of individualism begins to rise to the surface. Everything the therapist has suggested assumes an individual problem calling for individual solutions.

But the underlying reason that she is working so hard and feeling so badly about not doing enough is the threat to the future of human life on earth—hardly a personal issue! She is responding with overwork. Others respond by looking away and putting their attention, instead, to pleasurable distractions.

But there's a third path, a way between working long hours for the public good and focusing on personal well-being. This is the path of working together, agreeing to long hours during stretches when the stakes are particularly high, making shared agreements to rest deeply at other times, backing each other to do things that bring personal joy.

On this path, everyone in a group effort is encouraged to stop and breathe; share the tiniest successes widely; again, leave no possible appreciation of a community member unspoken; and at times celebrate together with abandon.

People used to work together to bring in the harvest, then feast. We now have a different form of common work to ensure our future, and we could all benefit from bringing more of our work and our pleasures back into the commons, sweating together through the crunch times, then dancing and singing together in the lulls, gathering strength for what lies ahead.

So, let's talk about celebrating! Let's plan for more singing around campfires, more dancing, more attention to the wonders of nature, more open caring for those we love, more tears and more joy as we face these hard times together.

We Mend

Mending doesn't get much respect in this culture. If something develops flaws, we're encouraged to just throw it out. (And we are not helped by a system that is focused on consumption rather than quality—that produces things with an intentionally short life so that it can sell us more.) Throw it out! Get a new one! That's a sign of having made it! Mending is for people who haven't been successful, who have no choice but to scrimp and save, for losers.

But what do we do with this world that is torn and broken, with great gashes, holes, and frayed edges? We can't throw it out—it's the only one we've got. So, even though we're not very good at it, we have to learn to mend.

Fortunately, there may be nothing more satisfying. Why do I love to mend? Let me count the ways! Mending supports relationships and leads to peerness. Mending requires an understanding of how things work. Mending calls for confidence, and is helped by cooperation. Mending requires humility. Mending challenges a throw-away culture. I have so many stories to tell!

Mending supports relationships and leads to peerness. I have been puzzled over the years by how tenacious I get in mending torn and broken possessions. Sometimes it seems ridiculous. Why not, for goodness sake, just throw them out and get something that will work?

It has occurred to me that the issue is one of relationship and service. When I buy something new, it serves me. I am in the relationship of master to that possession. I have it at will. I have placed some value on the service it can provide me, and I expect it to serve me well. If it falls short, there is no reason not to replace it.

Once I start repairing, however, there is a relational shift. Now that my time and skill have gone into making that thing whole again, the relationship is more one of peers. It serves me, and I serve it to the best of my repairing ability. Sometimes it doesn't do as well as I would wish, and sometimes my repairs are wholly inadequate—and I am the one found wanting.

The brown sweater provides a simple example. Acquired by chance, it was not a favorite piece of clothing, but a serviceable one. When I noticed a seam that was coming undone, I took a few minutes to make a neat repair, glad for the skill that made the task so easy. Later it was more seams, a small hole in the back, and a missing button. This repair took a little more time, and more ingenuity. As I studied it for anything I might have missed, I felt a new sense of connection. This sweater had a new lease on life because of my care, and I cared for it more as a result.

As I mend more, I care more. The challenge then becomes when to acknowledge that something I have cared about has come to the end of its useful life, to find a way to dispose of it fittingly, and to mourn its loss. The acquisition of a replacement is bittersweet, and brings with it all the weight of a new relationship.

But I have no regrets. I would rather have all the responsibilities of a give-and-take relationship, when I sometimes do well and sometimes fall short, than be in the role of master, surrounded by servant/slave possessions that exist at my pleasure and are likely to be discarded at the first sign of frailty. I have to admit, it can feel like I'm running a nursing home at times! Letting one of them finally go can be a relief, though bittersweet, and getting something new that works to perfection is a real treat. But I'm still glad to have the skills to prolong so many good and useful lives, and I would never want to give up that sense of peerness, and all that opportunity to care.

Mending requires an understanding of how things work. To mend something well, you have to understand how it's put together. How do the seams work in a dress? What is the process of knitting that

will allow me to repair a long unraveling? How is a chair constructed? It can be hard when, in order to fix something, you have to take a first step that makes it worse. I don't mind disassembling things; if I just pay enough attention, I can usually get them back together. But with my wobbly dining room chairs I needed the support of a more experienced friend to know that, before they could be solidly reglued, I had to knock the joints completely apart. Then, once I had good access to all those pegs and holes, it was easy to know what to do.

Mending requires confidence, and confidence is enhanced by cooperation. There are some things I can't mend. I think of the time my computer was down and nobody around me could help. Though I'm generally suspicious of putting myself in the hands of people with power, the computer store seemed to offer the only hope.

So I walk into the store with my unusable computer, my need, and my suspicion. What I get is a revelation: pure help, served up with kindness on all sides—and a computer that is not only fixed but improved. Why does this rock me to my core?

Well, there's the issue of asking for and getting help: not my forte. But there's more. I think their ability to offer their help with such warmth and generosity was rooted in confidence. They had access to solutions, and they had each other. When one part of the puzzle was outside someone's expertise, they didn't need to defend his limitations or worry about them. They knew that, together, they could do anything that was possible to be done.

I begin imagining other things that might be fixed in such an environment. Maybe children could bring their malfunctioning families to the store. They would describe the problem they were experiencing, and an employee would say, "Oh yes, we can help you with this. We know what to do. We've seen this problem before. It may take a little while, but we can straighten it out."

Or maybe people who are concerned about the climate could bring the planet to the store. They would explain what was broken, and an employee would say, "You're right; this is a bad problem. I'll have to call in all my colleagues—and actually there's a role you'll need to play here too. Let me explain the process. It will take quite a while, but don't worry. We do know just what has to be done. Let's all put our heads and hearts in that direction and do our best. More is possible than you fear."

This experience reminds me of the importance of sharing every bit of real confidence in the possibility of mending that I have. And when I don't, that's where my co-workers—my fellow human beings—can come in. What would it mean, and what would it make possible, if we all could rest in the confidence that we have each other, that together we can make any mend that is possible to be made?

Mending requires humility. Then there is the relationship that gets broken or torn or frayed around the edges. The impulse to just throw it out and get a new one can be strong. But we can practice mending here as well—acknowledging our part, saying we're sorry, listening from the heart, not giving up on ourselves or the other person.

I have struggled in a new relationship that crosses divisions of race and class. The opportunity to be close to this person is a precious gift. I am astonished at how she moves in the world—it is so different from my experience. We take on a project together and come to a point of conflict. Wishing in every bone in my body that this were not the reality, I wade in, knowing beyond a shadow of doubt that keeping my distance could easily be a mortal blow to the life of the relationship. I do my best, but the way I approach it leaves her feeling unseen and disrespected. I feel devastated.

I listen, try to understand, hold off on my urge to explain and defend, pour out my fears to another friend, focus on the part that is mine to correct. I work to stay open to everyone's goodness, including mine, open to new perspectives and opportunities for growth, open to truth. As I learn, acknowledge, apologize, respond in the most open-hearted way I can summon, power dynamics are illuminated, the hard knot of conflict loosens, and the rift begins to mend. Incredibly, we find ourselves stronger on the other side.

Mending challenges a throw-away culture. Our economy has increasingly set us up to be unable to make repairs. Those crappy plastic toys that came into our house when the children were small, and broke soon thereafter, used to drive me crazy. (I'm sure the manufacturers count on adults preferring to buy new ones rather than having to handle the big upsets of small children!) Our electronics are intended for obsolescence as well—so much better for the company's bottom line!

I love the growing global movement for the “right to repair.” Major appliances in Europe must now be produced to be repairable and recyclable. What a concept! And now, right-to-repair legislation has been introduced or passed in every state in the U.S., so consumers can fix their own electronic property, including tractors—whether through parts, software, manuals, independent repair shops, or skilled friends.

With manufacturers being required to produce with the sustainability of products and the planet in mind, we can not only cut down waste, extend product life, and support a cadre of skilled repair people, but also reorient our whole culture to one of valuing what we have, rather than focusing always on the next new thing.

Whole new vistas open up. Maybe we can expand the categories of things we don't throw away—from phones, washers, and computers to marginalized people and small towns here at home, to whole countries that somehow can be seen as expendable. To repair assumes agency and power. What if we claimed it as a human right?

Mending is how it connects us with others, in so many different ways. It connects us with those who are skilled but often unappreciated. I imagine we all have stories we could tell about finding a human being who can actually repair things that are beyond our skills. What a gift!

I place great value on these relationships, and am never quite comfortable with a new appliance till I find someone who can keep it going. It was a pleasure to visit with and get to know the man who was so good with our washer, dryer, and stove, resting in the knowledge that I was in the very best of hands. I would hang out with him, visiting while he worked, just glad to be in his presence. And I'll never forget the sewing machine repair man who once sent home not only my repaired machine, but another one that he had on hand and thought I could use! I have a deep respect for their skills, and my life is better for knowing them.

Mending connects us with others whose need to mend is unavoidable. Here's another story: When the collar began to fray on a favorite shirt, I felt a great sense of loss—until I remembered the possibility of turning the collar. People used to do it all the time—surely I had the skills to pull it off!

Finding a moment when I could justify turning away from “more important work,” it wasn't hard at all to snip the collar loose from the rest of the shirt, sew it back on the other way, then put a little patch on the frayed part, now invisible underneath. I was so pleased! I kept looking at it, folding that fine new collar down, running my finger over it, turning it up to see the patch that would be visible to no one but me.

Why such pleasure? As I sat with this question, it came to me that it was something about claiming my connections in time and space. It connects me to our ancestors, who knew the value of a well-made garment and mended everything as a matter of course.

It connects me to our neighbors as well, to those with less means in the present who have no choice but to mend. My partner and I have spent a lot of time in Northern Uganda. If I had slides, I would show a photo of one of the plastic chairs that can be found everywhere. A broken leg had been repaired with string woven through a series of carefully placed holes. And some of my most satisfying excursions when visiting our son in Nicaragua involved shoe repair. More than once I brought down old shoes that would be discarded as worthless here. At the market, however, we always found men who saw their value and were glad to use their skills to make a sturdy and serviceable mend.

It also connects me to our descendants. The time will arrive when we finally come to our senses and realize that we are living beyond our ecological means, when—willingly or unwillingly—we in the

wealthier nations adjust our lifestyles to a level that the planet can support. When that time comes, a good shirt will have a value that may be hard to imagine in our present-day orgy of consumption and waste. Looking down that tunnel of time, I can see our descendants turning the collars of their shirts once again—and I will be with them in spirit. I just hope it might give them a fraction of the satisfaction and pleasure that it has given me.

Mending connects us with individuals whom we have cast off as “other.” In this country, where we increasingly fear and demonize the “other,” I’m heartened by stories of people who refuse to be divided from family members, but to reach across those divides and tend deeply to the relationships.

To challenge this “othering,” we have to decide to like people. We have to hold out a vision that includes them. We have to have some compassionate and respectful understanding of the ground on which their beliefs have grown. We have to cultivate the humility to be open to learning from them, even as we may continue to hold out a different perspective. If we approach this project of “de-othering” with integrity, I have to believe that nothing of enduring value will be lost. We will emerge more fully human, and our nets will be more whole.

Ultimately, an orientation toward mending connects us with everyone. A grandmother who lived not far from me, but seemed like she might have been from another world, had been in the news. Her children had been lost to drugs, killed, accused of killing. She was now raising a granddaughter, trying against all odds to keep her safe. How could she keep going amidst such violence and despair? And how could she and I, in all my ease, ever have anything in common? It came to me that I have a choice. I can feel isolated from my neighbors whose personal nets are in tatters, which I, from privilege and good fortune, have been able to avoid. Or I can expand my vision to glimpse the reality of my place in a whole world in tatters, and claim my small role, alongside her and everyone else, in the work we all have of mending.

Sometimes, we have to deal with bad mends, and take something apart so it can be put back together in a way that allows it to be whole. There was that case of my dining room chairs. I think also of nets where gaping holes have been clumsily pulled together in bunches and hard ridges in an attempt to recreate wholeness. But they don’t serve. They’ve become narrower, lost that spacious openness that a net needs to do its work of gathering in. The first task is to pull that bad mend apart.

When we’re speaking of humans, this can be painful, like opening a wound. George Yancy, in his book on racism, *Backlash*, speaks of white folks “suturing” to gain closure and control. We try to close off the parts of racism that make us too uncomfortable, sew up those open wounds so that we can seal ourselves off from pain and otherness. The lasting mend calls us to dare to survey the damage, undo those sutures, expose and feel the pain, then do the painstaking healing work of reknitting the strands of our net—one truth, one relationship at a time.

I had my own experience of this on our fourth year in a river paddle in southern Ontario—natives and allies joining together to honor the treaties and protect our Earth. The teaching one evening was a sharing by two women—one indigenous and one settler—of their research on previous impact of the paddle. They found that the overarching theme for indigenous participants was about change, while that for the settler group was about connection. Eager to connect, we non-indigenous folks were learning that there is work to do first.

We need to *reconnect* to ourselves, to the natural world around us, and to our own roots. At the same time, we need to *disconnect* from the lures and traps of materialism and individualism in our culture, and from all the points at which we’re attached, often unwarily, to narratives and systems of privilege. It’s only when we are actively engaged in this process of reconnecting and disconnecting that we can find our way to our heart’s desire: connecting deeply to others across the divisions that colonialism and racism have created.

If we stay fastened securely within the comfort of the status quo, deep connection with those who suffer from it can only be disruptive. Our hearts have not broken open wide enough to make space for the other.

Alternatively, if we flee from our heritage and people in order to cast our lot with the oppressed, what we have left to offer may be of little use. Unrooted, we lean, dependent on the strength of others.

So this paddle down the river gives us allies the opportunity to reconnect: to the land and the water and the sky; to our muscles and skin and beating hearts; to our own goodness as we see the goodness of others like us; to our ancestors, who once knew and loved some bit of land as intimately as indigenous people have known and loved this river.

At the same time, we have powerful motivation to disconnect from the comfortable narratives that have reassured us: that injustice to native people is safely in the past; that we, personally, are not complicit in oppressive institutions. In this process, we are both rooted and opened up. Paddling down the river together, we build our capacity to take in all the connections for which our hearts yearn.

Our national story offers another example. We have a compelling origin story—the birthplace of freedom, a land of sturdy colonists, intrepid pioneers, fierce defenders of liberty, a melting pot that offers opportunity for all.

Yet we are increasingly unable to ignore the unstable foundations or all the structural weaknesses, and some of us are ready to just throw the whole thing out in disgust. Others are clinging to it fiercely: willing it to be true ever more desperately as the weaknesses are exposed, shoring it up with intense loyalty and being angry at those who would do the exposing.

To mend our broken family story, we must do a combination of daring to face reality, reaching to understand and forgive those who were part of the breakage, working to heal what can be healed, and to retrieve and hold that which is solid and good, claiming those who can't bear to look, grieving that which is lost.

Isabel Wilkerson, in her book *Caste*, speaks of that family story and repair project through the metaphor of a house. Here we are, all living together in this old house of a country that was built centuries ago. Unconscionable things happened here before our time, and some are still happening. Regardless of whether we or our ancestors did harm, were harmed, were present to harm, or hadn't yet arrived, we are the ones who are living here now, and our house is in need of major, foundational repair.

I love the image of us all putting our shoulders to the task of repairing this old house of ours: taking on the monumental but doable work of uncovering and repairing rotten foundations; reaching into every dark corner to expose and clean out cobwebs and layers of dirt; cutting down rotting drapes, fixing and cleaning the windows to let in the light.

An orientation toward mending builds our capacities for taking on the gaping holes in our nets. I love how theologian Walter Wink invites us to claim the work of mending our broken institutions. The first step is to envision those institutions—our economy, our political system—whole. Once we have articulated their “divine vocations,” then we can see how far they have strayed, how broken they have become, and begin the process of calling them home—of mending. I love how this invitation is grounded in confidence. We know where we want to be. We are listening for and speaking from our deepest understanding of truth. We are not enslaved. We are not confused. We just have a mending job.

Whether we're sewing a button, saying we're sorry, or doing our part in rebuilding a broken economy or repairing our old house, the nature of the mend and the scale are less important than the vision and the intention. We're engaged in the same process of restoring wholeness. Mostly it just requires commitment, practice, vision, and patience. Mending takes time.

And so we mend. We mend our psyches, healing from trauma and reconnecting with inner wholeness. We mend our souls, tending our wobbly orbits, our fractured moments, our frayed intentions. We tend to holes in meetings for worship, in our families, in the communities that sustain us. We mend our relationships. We mend our stories. When we don't have the skills to do the mend by ourselves, we gather together or look for and support others who can.

The damage to our nets may appear so great that wholeness seems like an impossible dream. But I can see only two choices: to despair and give up, or to turn our lives in the direction of mending. If we think of mending as a critical activity in our quest for a truly livable world, then every time we apologized, or repaired something rather than throwing it out, we could remember that we are building the skills, muscles, and attitudes that are needed to make our world whole again.

To go down this path means shifting the focus from our own shame or guilt, which can so easily immobilize us. It means daring to look straight at the damage and grieve the loss. It means building the relationships that are key to the repair—including with those who have been wronged. It means deciding to stay awake and alert to possibility, to stay in motion in the direction of mending.

In a way, it's breathtakingly simple. All we need is a disposition toward wholeness and a willingness to try. Walter Wink reminds us that it's not all on us. Our job is to listen for that which we are called to, to do that, no less and no more, and then to wait in quiet confidence for a miracle.

Or, as somebody else has said: "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time." How do we mend our nets? One repair, one connection, one knot at a time.