

Self-Care as Resistance: Why Your Bubble Bath Matters in 2025

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 March 2025

Preacher: Tonetta Landis-Aina

[0 : 00] So here we are, and I feel a deep privilege of being able to stand up here on this homecoming Sunday.

This Sunday where we celebrate the Table Church, which began around a dinner table 12 years ago. A day where we celebrate Resurrection City, which also started around a dinner table six years ago.

So much has happened for all of us, and so much has happened since those leaders imagined this community.

So much of our work has happened among the volunteers who have showed up Sunday after Sunday after Sunday. So much has happened bitter and sweet.

Moments of incredible beauty and moments of heartbreak. And we are going to gather, we are gathering to acknowledge it all.

[1 : 09] To trust God in it all. To fill their love for us through it all. The majority of this church, like any church, is messy.

It, we, we together have been tenacious. We have been raucous, some of y'all. Raucous. The beauty of this church is overflowing.

And it is a reflection that, that we have believed and continue to believe that this community has been called to be in this city for such a time as this.

Yeah. Now let me say a few words about homecoming. See, I grew up in a church. Well, particularly at Tipping My Father's Family Church.

And on every first Sunday, we would go to visit there. And we would have a homecoming once a year where we would celebrate and we would invite folks who had been around for a while to come back.

[2 : 16] It was this time to recognize that no matter how distance or seasons of life have affected our relationships, we were still kin.

That we had been nourished from the same spiritual tree and that we had Holy Spirit experiences together that have forever bonded us.

It was also a time to just, like, catch up and hang out. To encounter children that were way bigger than you thought they should be. And to go up to them and embarrass them and say, you know, that got so big.

They did. They sort of pinched my cheeks and I was, woof. That's what was that happened on homecoming. It was this time to take style of additions and subtractions to a family tree. And by the end of it, we always found ourselves in the culture hall.

With a plate that was heat full and with a smile on our faces because we knew that we were a part of something. That had a history before us.

[3 : 21] That had a history before us. And that would have a history long after us. So, y'all, this is Abu Kai. And we're going to end up in that fellowship hall.

They're all being shaken. Woo! I said, whoa! I said, all of you. Thank you. But before we end up there, I am going to preach for just a little while.

That's okay with y'all. Great. Thank you. So, at the end of last year, actually, let me pray for a minute. Let me quiet for a second.

God, oh, all our homecomings. God, who surprises us in the valley of our lives with your presence. God, who is forever seeking us. Drawing us forward on the journey at times to leave home as a faithful self.

[4 : 27] At times to return home as a faithful self. Thank you that you are here in this place abiding with us.

Thank you for every person in this room that you are singing over at this merry morning. May we sit that singing, sit your precious God.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, at the end of last year, my wife made a funny observation that at the time seemed pretty unremarkably.

As we approached December 31st, we often bound ourselves in these moments of very brief reflection on the previous year. It wasn't particularly intentional time.

So, that my wife said something that has stayed with me feels like a real gift. As we sat at our kitchen aisle, and she said simply, Honey, this has been the year of the bubble bath.

[5 : 40] And when she said that, I laughed. Just like y'all just laughed, right? I said, okay. It didn't seem really serious or all that important to take note of.

But the last four years for us had been really hard. We had moved houses so that we could care for our aging parents. We moved again to be a more diverse neighborhood in the Arston School.

And then we moved again to what we thought would be our forever home, which turned out to be a money pit. And it had every problem that you could imagine. When my wife said those words, we were in the kitchen yet another house, which is our current one, praise God.

After we had already moved three years, or three times in like four and a half years. We had endured huge financial losses. Not to mention the anxiety of living in a house that did not feel like it was completely safe for our kids.

So once we moved to a house that finally did seem safe and did begin to feel like a home, we took a lot of bubble baths. Like sometimes, what? Is it your turn?

[6 : 56] It's my turn. Is it your turn? Okay. And I gradually pulled out like this teak tray that one of my friends had given me for my birthday. Like a bath tray.

And I set it up. I bought a bath pillow so I could relax against the tub. Praise them. Yes. And I topped it all off with some of that Dr. Till's Bowman bubble bath with some Epsom salt.

Yes. Yes. Mm-hmm. And during those times, I would like rub my feet and I would realize, oh, I'd never give my feet any attention. Or I would like kind of massage my shoulders and like think about all that they were carrying.

And eventually, I started to do some work in the bubble bath. I would take my phone. I would take a book. I would usually read. But I would intentionally do the work that, as Katie G. Cannon says, the work that my soul must have.

The things that might pour out into my day job, but which also were just about what I needed as a Black, queer, gender nonconforming woman. I was releasing the harm and the grief of the previous four years in those bubble baths.

[8 : 09] And I was embracing what my body and my soul needed. I was carving out space to be refreshed and to feel joy. Well, now it's 25.

And I don't know about you, but for me, I feel a little bit like the world is on fire. And because of that, I'm realizing that the comment that my wife made almost in passing contains something essential.

I have to find ways to both release the pain and embrace what my body and my soul must have.

And as silly as it sounds, I am developing this bubble bath time into like an intentional spiritual practice.

Praise the Lord. And I'm convinced that while you might not have a bathtub or you might not enjoy the fill of water the way that I do, you too will need intentional spiritual practices of self-care to root you in this time.

And some of y'all are really, really good at that. There was one person in the community that I told about the bubble baths. And they're like, you also need to have you. You're sick going through the air. I mean, they were like upping it, upping it.

[9 : 27] I was like, you are good at this. And some of us, you know, are not as good at it. If you're like me, you might not be as good at it. But in times of very real suffering, it can be so easy to feel like we are undeserving.

That we are undeserving of self-care or like we just need to get on with the real work of speaking and living truth to power. But I heard a quote recently that reinforced for me just how essential self-care is.

In writing about the politics of this moment, gay colonist Dan Savage reflected back on the organizing of queer folks in the late 1970s to push back on Anita Bryant's attempt to publicly frame queer folks as needing to recruit.

And in his reflection, Dan Savage insisted, anyone who tells you, anyone who tells you that making time for joy is a distraction or a betrayal has no idea what they're talking about.

Watching clips, he said, of protests against Bryant when he was a kid. He found it remarkable how much fun the protesters were having.

[10 : 50] The folks that Savage observed made space for joy out of care for themselves, out of a need to protect their humanity. But then Dan Savage said one more thing that I, maybe if you don't get anything else, this is the thing to take.

He said, during the days of the AIDS crisis, we buried our friends in the morning. We protested in the afternoon and we danced all night.

And it was the dance that kept us in the fight. Because it was the dance we were fighting for. Yeah, it is the dance we are fighting for.

The dance of love on which the world is founded in pursuing that dance. We got to process our grief and speak up and speak out.

And also remember joy that we were created for joy. We got to do all that while taking care of ourselves because ultimately nobody else will.

[12 : 01] Because of that truth, we are going to spend the weeks leading up to Easter, exploring the practices of self-care through many different lenses.

We're going to follow along with many of the ideas that are found in Dr. Shaniqua Walker-Barnes' brilliant devotional, *Sacred Self-Care*. And that's the book that we're naming our series after.

We actually have some of those on the table. So if you're new around here, you can fill out a connection card and take one. We're also doing a social media giveaway, which was completely Anthony's doing print.

Yes, the tech side of this thing. So you can look for that if you want a copy as well. Now, as I talk about self-care, I've got to name this.

I know that the days leading up to Easter, the season that we traditionally call Lent. And in which we focus on journeying to the cross. I know that those are supposed to be days that are set aside for fasting and self-denial.

[13 : 03] That's usually how we think about it. But this year, when grief and fear and gender identity erasure and very real job loss are all around us, I am encouraging us to practice Lent differently.

It's time to spotlight intentionally taking care of our bodies and our minds and our emotions and our hearts. This Lent, what we can give up once and for all, is the idea that suffering equals goodness. We can give up once and for all the belief that self-denial translates to holiness. And we can take up lived practices of radical self-care.

Galatians 5.13, which Anna, yes, the spirit was at work, already said. It says, for you were called to freedom.

For the whole law is summed up in this single commandment. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The dance of freedom and love that we are called to begins with self and then flows outward.

[14 : 22] Or as Sonia Renee Taylor puts it, radical self-love starts with the individual, expands to the family, community, and organization, and ultimately transforms society.

And while still unwaveringly, all while still unwaveringly holding you in the center of that expansion. To take up radical self-love is to take up its embodiment, self-care.

And when I say self-care, I don't want you to think of the flimsy counterfeit version of it that is peddled by the proprietors of capitalism. Instead, I want you to think about the love and the stewardship and the desire for flourishing that was conferred on all of humanity.

That was conferred on you when God called you very good. Think about something that cannot be bought, that cannot be sold, and which has the power to keep you alive in the deepest sense of that word.

Here's a definition we can take forward of self-care that maybe is more helpful. This is Dr. Walker Barnes again. It is the activities, the habits, the disciplines, the thought patterns that we integrate into our life on a regular basis to maximize our capacity for wellness, given our circumstances,

ability and disability and personal history.

[16:02] Now, in a few minutes, I'm going to talk really briefly about a short piece of scripture that I think is a really interesting building block as we think about sacred self-care.

But before I do that, I want to address one objection that could lurk in the corners of your mind as we go through this sermon series. And that is namely that self-care is not in the Bible.

Now, it's true that Jesus was not slipping away to King's Paw. It's true, all right? It's true that the newly freed slaves, they didn't have scented pillows and bath salts or cozy socks that said Dope Queen.

Okay, they didn't. All right? Nobody had to remind the ancients to drink water because, you know, the process of getting an isle well was so hard.

Once you got it, you drank all you could, okay? And nobody had to tell the ancients to, like, you know, don't forget to move because that's all they did, right? They didn't have a choice.

[17:12] You know, yeah. Mm-hmm. Even as their time, though, is not our time, stewarding our bodies, our minds, our emotions, our hearts speaks a better word against something that I think is very familiar and would have been very familiar to them.

And that is scapegoating. Scapegoating is the practice of sacrificing one person or one group to maintain the unity of the dominant group.

It is to exercise violence against someone on the margins in an attempt to create peace at the center. Scapegoating, it's as old as time. And as we move toward Easter this year, as we hear the stories of immigrants and disabled people and trans folks, people who have expertise in DEI and people who are simply hardworking civil servants, as we hear them and so many others scapegoated, I want us to remember that in the cross, God in Christ became the ultimate scapegoat to disclose one of the most hideous sins at the foundation of the world.

If you are like many folks in the community who struggle to understand what the crucifixion accomplished, start here. Jesus became the sacrifice to end all sacrificing.

Yeah. Co-suffering love will always be a part of the Christian way. You can choose that. But forced sacrifice based in shame or blame or coercion or violence, in the death of God on the cross, that has been revealed for what it is, a satanic way of organizing society.

[19:10] And when our Savior Jesus was raised from the dead, which we will celebrate on Easter. John, the writer of the Gospel of John, records that his first words, the first thing that came out of his mouth was, peace be with you.

As writer Brian Zahn notes, when Jesus was raised from an unjust death, speaking peace instead of revenge, he revealed that society need not be organized on accusation and scapegoating, but can instead be founded on advocacy and solidarity.

Yeah. To practice self-care is to refuse to allow yourself to become the scapegoat. It is to refuse to consent to the sins of society being laid on your body.

It is to let go of the belief that it is acceptable for us to be made the sacrifice for any reason without our consent.

If the death of Christ on the cross reveals anything, it definitely reveals the true nature of systems of violence or coercive sacrifice.

[20:30] The practice of self-care can be a practical way to live out the truth that we no longer have to live that way. Okay. Okay.

So my primary job has been done now to kind of set up the sermon series that we'll be in until Palm Sunday and Easter. Before I sit down, I do want to give you a little bit of scripture because I know some of y'all are like, she ain't got to the scripture yet.

You know, some of y'all are worried too. Y'all are like, she has not gotten to the scripture yet. It's like, so it's just going to be brief. Don't worry, but we're going to go to one passage of scripture that I think can, you know, really intriguingly sets up one building block for thinking about sacred self-care.

So the passage is found in the book of Ezekiel chapter 18, and I'm just going to read one through four. The word of the Lord came to me.

What do you mean by repeating the proverb concerning the land of Israel? The parents have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge. As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel.

[21 : 47] Know that all lives are mine. The life of the parents as well as the life of the child is mine. It is only the person who sins who shall die.

Now, this could, you know, might seem like a bit of a strange passage to use to introduce this idea of sacred self-care. It's found in a prophetic book on the lips of a former priest, and he is addressing God's people who have been exiled to Babylon.

In a moment when national independence had disintegrated and people's sense of identity had been devastated. The folks who would have heard this prophecy are understandably concerned with three questions.

Why is Israel in exile? Is God just? Is a break with a past possible? See, Ezekiel's audience wanted to know if there was any cause for hope.

They believed that the sins of their foreparents were what had landed them in exile. Because they understood God to be jealous primarily. And the kind of deity who was intent on punishing the children for the sin of the parents.

[23 : 13] To the third and fourth generation, as Exodus 20 says. But in this passage, we overhear God expressing frustration with this cultural proverb.

They believed that the sour grapes of harm and trauma and oppression were their destiny. They believed that based on their lived experiences.

That's what they saw happening around them. They thought that is the way that it had to be. Yet through Ezekiel, God says the proverb shall be no more.

If you read the chapter further, you'll notice that more than once it is made crystal clear that God does not desire the death of her people.

But rather their life. Embedded in these few verses is a clash between the way that those people then and many of us now.

[24 : 14] A clash between them and the way that God desires for us to enter into a new reality. Dr. Walker Barnes incisely points out that the folk wisdom found in this proverb is beginning to be borne out through discoveries in the emerging scientific field of epigenetics.

That is, scientists are actually discovering that the ways that harm and trauma were experienced by our ancestors can actually change the way that our DNA is expressed.

That means that many of us, especially black and brown folks, may actually bear in our bodies the sensitivities and protective strategies our foreparents used to stay alive.

And we might bear those even if they don't serve us now or actually might harm us. As a way of living in God's desire that this proverb be no more, we are invited to take care of ourselves.

To practice safe, sacred self-care. Here's how she puts this. As a descendant of survivors of U.S. chattel slavery, sharecropping and Jim Crow, I practice self-care as a reparative strategy to heal pain and trauma that I have not directly experienced but that flows through my body in the form of elevated stress and inflammatory responses.

[25 : 49] I practice self-care as a reparative stress and trauma that I have not directly experienced but that I have not been able to do so.

I practice as a To fight the fatalism that says we cannot escape the cycle of forced suffering.

To escape the scapegoating that our society loves so, so much. But thankfully, in a few days, it will be lent.

We can repent from the ways that we have not been faithful stewards of our own lives. And we can receive the good news anew that God loves us and desires us to enter into life.

A life that only they can give. I am going to sit down in a second, invite us to practice communion together.

[27 : 25] But I'm going to ask the production team to play a song called River Rise. To give us just a few minutes to think about, to contemplate, to sense by the Spirit, what God is calling us to this Lent.

Amen.