



Parish Health Ministry

## ***Spiritual Corner: When We Can't Disentangle Ourselves***

There was a humpback whale in great distress just outside of the Golden Gate bridge in California. The whale had become entangled in numerous crab nets and traps and was struggling for survival when a fisherman saw the whale and radioed for help. The whale was getting weaker and failing fast.

When help arrived it became clear that there was no way the whale was going to be able to free itself. The more frantically it tried to escape the nets the more they tightened. The only possibility of saving the whale was for divers to enter the water with knives to cut the nets off of the whale. This was of course going to be risky, but was less so than might be expected as the whale was exhausted.

The divers began their rescue attempt and the ones who were working near the whale's head reported that they felt the whale's eyes watching them as they slowly cut the nets. The divers' courageous efforts were successful and soon the whale was free. Before the whale swam off, the whale circled the boats several times, seemingly saying a thank you for saving its life.

I have been both the whale and the divers in this story at different times in my life. I have been the one in need of help and the one to offer help. I'm guessing this probably is true for most of you as well. There have been times when I've been tangled up in worry about how I was handling a difficult situation and other times when I have been tangled in grief or self-doubt. What has made all the difference in these situations is when a friend or loved one has taken the time to listen to my worries and thoughts, and helped me sort through them. A listening ear, and a listening heart, can help set us free and help give us the clarity we need to choose a course of action, resolve our worry, or move through grief.

I have worked with many people in my ministry who find themselves tangled up in shame, guilt, and self-criticism. This in turn often manifests itself in more tangles--tangles with alcohol or drugs, or tangled up relationships. While the divers used knives to free the whale, the primary tool we have to help others who are ensnared in shame and self-criticism is simply our loving and compassionate presence. One conversation at a time, we can help cut the cords of whatever nets are binding them.

Perhaps you know someone who is tangled up in some way right now. Maybe it is you. Any of us can get entangled in worry, grief, self-doubt, anger, some kind of addiction, or an unhealthy relationship. Perhaps the story of the whale who was helpless and the divers who risked getting involved will inspire us to either reach out for help or do what we can to make a difference for another, whichever the case may be. The divers had no idea if they would be successful, and yet they had the courage to try, and the whale was able to trust that the divers had its best interest in mind. May we be inspired to do the same, whoever we are in the story.

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