

In his book *The End of Whiteness*, theologian Willie James Jennings describes alienation as disconnection where you expect to experience relationship and belonging. Disconnection, aloneness where you expect to experience relationship, welcome, and belonging.

And yet, as we will see again in our scripture passage today, our God wants to help shape experiences and communities of love and belonging for us all. God wants us to find ourselves beloved and connected, wherever we go. God would give us power to be people who experience and offer love, connection, and belonging.

So today, I'd like to guide us through a spiritual practice around alienation, love, and belonging. I'll invite us to search our lives for signs of alienation. Where are we experiencing disconnection where we would expect to relate and belong? And I'll invite us to ask, to wonder how God is searching for us? How is God offering us love and belonging? What do we have to say to God today? And what does God have to say to us?

Take a moment and make sure you're sitting or standing or kneeling comfortably.

Take three or four deep breaths.

I'm going to take one facing forward.

And one breath, as I turn my hips and head to one side.

And another to the other side.

And one more facing forward.

Spirit of God, we welcome you to move and live and breathe and speak to us as we search our lives for alienation and as we welcome your love and your power to grow in us and in others connection and belonging.

Let's begin.

How do you find the building and neighborhood in which you live? Are you at home and at peace? Do you belong? Or are you lonely, unseen, unknown, just passing through?

How are you at home in the body in which you live? How do you experience the body that is you and is your home?

How are you in your mind, soul, spirit? Are your thoughts and feelings steady and welcome, or do you find them intrusive? Racing? Muddled?

How are you at home in the family from which you come? Living or dead, your ancestors, parents, siblings, relatives, do they welcome and embrace and affirm you? Do they hold you or

push you away? Do you hold them or push them away? If you have children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, younger siblings, how are they a delight to you? How are they a sorrow? How are they both?

Amongst the people you call your friends, perhaps in your church or in other communities with which you connect, how are you seen and known? How do you see and know? How close are you? Who trusts you? Whom do you trust?

How are you at home in your country? How do you belong to a nation or a race or a culture? Who are your people? Do they see you? Love you? Welcome you? Do you belong to them?

In your relationship with God, how are you connected and close? How are you adrift?

Take a moment before we continue and ask yourself: what thought or thoughts about belonging are most important to you today? Where are you most alien? Where do you most belong? What place of disconnection or belonging would you most like God to know about today?

God in these spaces of alienation or belonging, we welcome you. We welcome you.

Four more questions:

If God is looking for you today, where does God see you? How does God see you? Who does God see?

If you God is looking for you today, how is God searching for you? Is God waiting for you, hoping, watching for your return? Is God running to you, arms open, smile upon God's face?

If you could talk with God, as you can, what do you want to say? What are you saying to God today?

If God could speak with you, as God can, what does God say? What is God saying to you today?