

Attracted by the sweet smell, a fly landed on it and began to eat.

“Your Highness,” the adviser commented, “the drop of honey has now landed in the street and is attracting flies. Perhaps we should call someone to clean it.”

“Pay it no mind,” answered the king merrily. “It is not our concern.”

Suddenly a gecko sprang out from under the palace, and ate the fly in one gulp.

Next a cat spied the gecko and pounced.

The cat, playing with its food in the middle of the street, caught the attention of the dog, who attacked it.

“Now, sire, there is a cat and dog fight in the street. Surely we should call someone to stop it?” implored the adviser.

“Oh, pay it no mind,” said the king. “Here come the cat and dog owners, they’ll stop it. We don’t need to get involved.”

So the two continued to eat their honey and rice cakes and to watch the spectacle from their comfortable perch.

But below in the street, the cat’s owner began beating the dog. The dog’s owner then started to beat the cat. Soon the two were beating each other.

The king’s good humor turned to anger as he watched the scene below. “I’ll have no fighting in my streets,” he bellowed. “Call in my guards to quell this battle at once!”

The palace guards were summoned. But by this time the fight had grown, as friends on either side joined the fray. The guards tried to break up the fighting, but soon they too had joined in. With guards involved, the fight erupted into a civil war. Houses were burned, and the palace itself was set afire and destroyed.

The kingdom was never returned to its former splendor, but new wisdom was gained in that country. Some people still say: We are each responsible for our own actions, large and

small. Small problems, if unattended, grow into larger ones, and a whole kingdom can be lost from a drop of honey.

Meditation

“As We Move”

Orlando Brugnola

As we move through life
finding ourselves,
always newly wise and newly foolish,
we ask that our mistakes be small
and not hurtful.
We ask that as we gain experience
we do not forget our innocence,
for they are both part of the whole.

Reading

“Wanting to Break Free”

DeReau Farrar

I'm often accused of being “too reserved,” and there's truth at the heart of that. On the spiciness scale, my expressiveness is on the mild end. I'm sure that stems from my disdain for being the center of attention. Still, I'm frequently advised to "loosen up," and offered the clarification, “That was a joke.”

It makes sense. As children, the older Black folks around would warn us to not “show our color.” Later, I learned to not be too feminine either—whatever that means. These responses are clearly rooted in fear. Just to be clear, I don't mean to minimize the reality that authentic self-expression is still often bold and dangerous for too many people. But fear, however justifiable, is central. So, here I now am, unable to fully live into the freedom of self-expression for fear that I might not be taken seriously.

Like many people, I discovered Tank and the Bangas through their [2017 NPR Tiny Desk Concert](#). I immediately fell in love, so when one of my choir members informed me they'd be performing a concert in town, I quickly bought a ticket.

When the concert finally came, I loved it. However, I didn't dance or scream, sing along or... do much of anything beyond stand there and soak it all in. That didn't feel strange to me, at least not in a conscious way.

At the end of the concert, while saying goodnight to the noisy and appreciative crowd, the band's lead said, "Remember to get carried away. To be grounded is for plants."

She was speaking directly to me. She clearly wasn't... but she was, and I felt it.

The following Sunday, our congregation opened worship with the hymn "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me." I wanted so badly to break free and let loose on it. However, looking out at our (we'll call them) upright congregation, I just couldn't. Most of them wouldn't have minded, but still: I was stuck in my own false ideas of their expectations of me.

Luckily, as with many of life's developments, there's still time.

And this is my prayer:

That which is in us and all around us and which constantly draws us to our holiest selves, remind me that my freedom, fully expressed, gives freedom to others. As I wander among the trees, accept my silent gratitude for not having their stationary life. And, most of all, please remove from me any tendency, by action or in spirit, to quiet the expression of others. Amen.

Offertory

"Imagine"
John Lennon

Sermon

Any Given Day
the Rev. Anne Bancroft

There are about 37 threads from this morning's service already that I want to pull together for us. I want you to remember the prelude . . . "Mama, my intentions were the best." You gotta love country singer and songwriter Randy Travis. And the opening words, "If we have any hope of transforming the world and changing ourselves," we must be bold and brave and loving – enough, that is, to forgive ourselves and others. I want to remind you of the invitation to come and go with me to that land, from our opening hymn – an old African American spiritual. There'll be freedom in that land where I'm bound. I want you to remember the words from our meditation, "that as we gain experience we do not forget our innocence, for they are both part of the whole." And that each of our freedoms, when fully expressed, gives freedom to others.

And then – of course - there's the honey

Remember the honey?

There are so many things we aspire to – we could all just go take a good nap right now and ponder it because they're all worthy, each and every intention: to be wiser, and more loving, to be kind and generous, to be forgiving, to be attentive, and bold, and . . . not least, to clean up after ourselves whatever the mess we have created. The very list of ideas might make us a little tired.

I read an interesting story recently about two young men who had known each other as children. One was routinely a bully, and one the victim, throughout their childhood lives together. As it turns out, the bully found a new way of responding to the world, a new and more productive way of choosing to be in relationship with others. In the article, when asked if he thought he had changed his core self, he suggests likely not, and refers to a statement by Shunryū Suzuki, the monk who popularized Zen Buddhism in the United States: "You're all perfect exactly how you are. And you all could use a little improvement."

Buddhists aren't the only ones who believe this, of course.

We humans hold this fundamental tension – being worthy of love just as we are, even in our imperfection. The Christian tradition might frame that in terms of God loving each and every one of us, and yet . . . we are "sinners," we make mistakes, we err.

Unitarian Universalists claim it in our principles – the inherent worth and dignity of every being, lovable just as you are – imagine that. You are lov-a-ble! Feel that. AND. the journey means that we are likely – pretty much always – in need of a little improvement.

Sometimes I hate those both/ands, those life tensions! I so wish we could just be fabulous, and leave it at that!

In a moment of frustration and confusion a month or so back, struggling with the state of our world, and how we all respond to it and how to make sense of it, and why each of us, really, should even care (or if we do), I called my friend and colleague, Gabrielle. She's a great go-to person. Do you have one of those? Someone you can call when things feel like they just don't make sense? And maybe it's not the person you see every day – because those are the people you're in the struggle WITH – but somebody you can count on for outside-the-box inspiration. Gabrielle is a religious educator; she is all about children and youth. Maybe that's why she is so smart, because she is surrounded by wise and observant beings, which is what children ARE if

we would only listen. But Gabrielle is not just smart, she is wise and she's funny. And she lives in DC, so she gets the current mishigas thing . . .

We were talking about the world, and people, and ourselves, and how tempting it is to want to put one's head in the sand; how hard it is to feel responsible, in a way, for working to make change, or even for being responsible for one's own craziness, right? It's not just about changing the world, maybe not even mostly about changing the world, but about transforming ourselves, which – of course – leads to the world thing. (We're all likely familiar with the Lao Tzu poem: peace in the world; peace in the nations; peace in the cities . . . all the way to peace in the heart.) Gabrielle said she thinks people are mostly good. We mostly want to step up, she thinks. We mostly want to do and be the right thing.

I guess on that particular day, I wasn't feeling quite so confident.

"But, Anne," she said, "think about it this way. I want to be thin. I really do. I know my knees would be happier and I would be able to run around with my grandchildren if I ever have them. The thing is," she continued, "on any given day . . . I'm still happy to kick back and watch three hours of football and eat nachos!

"That's not going to make me thin, but," she added, "I'm still a good person."

Did I tell you about my granddaughter, Maisie? She's two. A few weeks ago, she said to me – completely out of the blue – "you're a good person, Gram."

How did she know I was wondering? "You're a good person, too, Maisie," I told her.

But on any given day . . . we waiver, don't we? On any given day, I'm crabby, and short-tempered. I fall so short of all the things I know I want to be. What's up with that?

And at the risk of making unflattering assumptions, I'm imagining one or two may feel the same way. What's your downfall? What is your nemesis to a better you on any given day? What causes you to do the things you wish you wouldn't? Or not do the things you wish you would? When – or is it how often – do we leave the proverbial honey for someone else to manage?

This living takes a lot of forgiveness, don't you think?

• •

Another one of my go-to people is William Sloane Coffin. He was a Congregational minister, Yale professor, and longtime peace activist until he died in 2006. We never spoke on the phone – he’s a go-to person in writing for me. He is known for saying wise things like, “It is one thing to say with the prophet Amos, ‘Let justice roll down like mighty waters,’ and quite another to work out the irrigation system.” Don’t you love that? He was all about living into our intentions, actually getting done the work we aspired to, for ourselves or for the world at large. You can’t just talk change, you have to do change, and – by inference – it probably won’t be easy.

Gandhi said be the change, as well. He just didn’t imply the hard part.

We want it, but like Gabrielle says, on any given day . . . football and nachos!

So, here’s the deal. Changing the world, or transforming ourselves in whatever way we feel we need to transform, to become different or more – neither are immediate accomplishments. They take time, and imagination. Sometimes I think that’s what lets us off the hook of immediacy, putting off to tomorrow, as they say, what we could do today. Transformation takes creative energy and . . . to be honest, I think it also takes some faith that what we want to make happen *can* actually happen. The person we want to be *can* be. It takes faith to believe in the possibility.

Which brings us back to Coffin:

“It is terribly important to realize,” he said, “that the leap of faith is not so much a leap of thought as of action. For while in many matters it is first we must see then we will act; in matters of faith it is first we must do then we will know, first we will be and then we will see. One must, in short, dare to act wholeheartedly without absolute certainty.”

Dare to act wholeheartedly without absolute certainty . . . sounds easy, doesn’t it!

I resonated quite strongly with our reading today by musician DeReau Farrar. I found it just a little ironic that his comment about the older Black folks warning them as children not to “show our color” felt so familiar to me as a white child – did it to you? We were encouraged to be seen but not heard, more or less. My childhood – and maybe yours – was full of constraint, of being instructed in the “right way to be.” I do this: [*standing straight and contained*]. But I don’t do this: [*waving arms around wildly*]. I am grounded, and I was always told that was a good thing. And then we hear the band leader saying, “Remember to get carried away. To be grounded is for plants.”

And I wonder if I am a fruit tree or an oak. And the truth is I don't always want to be either. I want to be free of some of those constraining roots, and I so easily forget that "my freedom, fully expressed, gives freedom to others." If I needed motivation, that could be a good one!

I want to do *this* [*arm waving, etc.*] more often.

What is your constraint? What is it you long to be on any given day?

I watched a YouTube video recently by an artist named Kenna. He offered a song called, "Sleep When We Die." Don't rest. Dream bigger, he says. Entertain your crazy! Don't you love that?! Entertain your crazy. Put aside your constraint and BE what you imagine and it can be so.

• •

There's a theory that appears to be true that when you start paying attention to something, it shows up all over the place, even – or often – where you least expect it. I recently read the book *A Gentleman in Moscow*, by Amor Towles. It's a *paced* novel – an interesting story about roughly 40 years of Russian history observed by a man – a poet at heart – condemned to reside in a Moscow hotel for the rest of his life. It was a slow read, but I stuck with it, night after night, waiting for something to happen, when one night I read:

"What is an intention, when compared to a plan?" he said, catching Osip by the sleeve. [They were in conversation about getting together at some point in the future.] "*If the sooner the better, then why not next week?*"

What is an intention, when compared to a plan? Isn't that great? What a good question! Amor Towles is solving our existential dilemma! Let's not just intend to be more loving, be more kind, more engaged, more thoughtful, more whatever – let's make a plan and make sure it happens!

Maybe it's the plan that takes our intentions to reality. And maybe the plan requires the wholehearted jump – the leap of faith. Maybe it's not about trying to clean up your honey mess but actually doing it. On. Any. Given. Day.

I was thinking that when Jesus said things like, "let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds," he wasn't saying, "when you get around to it."

• •

I don't think I've ever met someone entirely at peace with themselves, or their life – though, to be sure, there are degrees of contentment. But it's likely there's something each of us is yearning for. In the quiet places of our hearts, even those of us who trust in our inherent worth and dignity, our lovability just as we are – and many of us are still working on that! – we likely recognize the room for a little improvement, on just about any day.

I wonder if you might choose the wholehearted leap to a new way of being? Even if you don't know how it will turn out? And if you do, I hope you will share it with us! Share it so that we'll all be inspired by your courage; we'll all shine brighter for your light; we'll all be made a little freer of constraint, whatever our own is.

This life is too precious and short to wait. Let's stop thinking and make a plan and get on with it. Just imagine how great it will be. I have faith.

Come and go with me to that land.

CLOSING WORDS (*repeat of Opening words*)

If we have any hope of transforming the world and changing ourselves,
We must be
Bold enough to step into our discomfort
Brave enough to be clumsy there,
Loving enough to forgive ourselves and others.

May we, as a people of faith, be granted the strength to be
So bold,
So brave,
And so loving.

May it be so.