

September 18, 2022

Centering Thought: “I would feel more optimistic about a bright future for man if he spent less time proving that he can outwit Nature and more time tasting her sweetness and respecting her seniority.”
-E.B. White

Prelude *Andante from Water Music* Handel

Welcome and Announcements Geoff Tegnell - Deacon

Introit Silver Rain Zimmerman/Henderson/Amidon

Lighting the Chalice

Opening Words “Sweet Darkness: by David Whyte
From The House of Belonging

When your eyes are tired
the world is tired also.

When your vision has gone
no part of the world can find you.

Time to go into the dark
where the night has eyes
to recognize its own.

There you can be sure
you are not beyond love.

The dark will be your womb
tonight.

The night will give you a horizon
further than you can see.

You must learn one thing.
The world was made to be free in

Give up all the other worlds
except the one to which you belong.

Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet
confinement of your aloneness
to learn

anything or anyone
that does not bring you alive

is too small for you.

*Hymn #326 (Gray) *Let All the Beauty We Have Known*

*Let all the beauty we have known illuminate our hearts and minds.
Rejoice in wonders daily shown, in faith and joy, and love that binds.*

*We celebrate with singing hearts the loveliness of sky and earth,
the inspiration of the arts, the miracle of ev'ry birth.*

*Life's music and its poetry surround and bless us through our days.
For these we sing in harmony, together giving thanks and praise.*

Unison Affirmation

Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law
To dwell together in peace,
To seek the truth in freedom
To serve humanity in love,
Is our covenant with each other and with God.

Meditation

Offertory

Melody

Schumann

Centering Time

Intergenerational Message

The Man and the Tiger
a Buddhist tale

Singing the Children to Classes

*May your mind be open to new learning
May your lips bring truth into the world
May your heart know love
And your hands do the work of justice
As you go your way in peace*

Reading The Wisdom of No Escape: How to Love Yourself and Your World
by Pema Chödrön

In a little book called *A Guide to Walking Meditation*, in the chapter “The World Contains All the Wonders of the Pure Land,” Thich Nhat Hanh says, “I don’t think that all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the three times will criticize me for giving you a little secret, that there is no need to go somewhere else to find the wonders of the Pure Land.” That sense of wonder and delight is present in every moment, every breath, every step, every movement of our own ordinary everyday lives, if we can connect with it. The greatest obstacle to connecting with our joy is resentment. Joy has to do with seeing how big, how completely unobstructed, and how precious things are. Resenting what happens to you and complaining about your life are like refusing to smell the wild roses when you go for a morning walk, or like being so blind that you don’t see a huge black raven when it lands in the tree that you’re sitting under. We can get so caught up in our own personal pain or worries that we don’t notice that the wind has come up or that somebody has put flowers on the dining room table or that when we walked out in the morning, the flags weren’t up, and that when we came back, they were flying. Resentment, bitterness, and holding a grudge prevent us from seeing and hearing and tasting and delighting.

There is a story of a woman running away from tigers. She runs and runs, and the tigers are getting closer and closer. When she comes to the edge of a cliff, she sees some vines there, so she climbs down and holds on to the vines. Looking down, she sees that there are tigers below her as well. She then notices that a mouse is gnawing away at the vine to which she is clinging. She also sees a beautiful little bunch of strawberries close to her, growing out of a clump of grass. She looks up and she looks down. She looks at the mouse. Then she takes a strawberry, puts it in her mouth, and enjoys it thoroughly. Tigers above, tigers below. This is actually the predicament that we are always in, in terms of our birth and death. Each moment is just what it is. It might be the only moment of our life, it might be the only strawberry we'll ever eat. We could get depressed about it, or we could finally appreciate it and delight in the preciousness of every single moment of our life.

Anthem *What a Wonderful World* Weiss/Thiele/Amidon

Reading “Suffering Is Not Enough” by Thich Nhat Hanh
From his book Being Peace

Life is filled with suffering, but it is also filled with many wonders, like the blue sky, the sunshine, the eyes of a baby. To suffer is not enough. We must also be in touch with the wonders of life. They are with in us and all around us, everywhere, any time.

If we are not happy, if we are not peaceful, we cannot share peace and happiness with others, even those we love, those who live under the same roof. If we are peaceful, if we are happy, we can smile and blossom like a flower, and everyone in our family, our entire society, will benefit from our peace. Do we need to make a special effort to enjoy the beauty of the blue sky? Do we have to practice to be able to enjoy it? No, we just enjoy it. Each second, each minute of our lives can be like this. Wherever we are, at any time, we have the capacity to enjoy the sunshine, the presence of each other, and even the sensation of our breathing. We don't need to go to China to enjoy

the blue sky. We don't need to travel in the future to enjoy our breathing. We can be in touch with these things right now. It would be a pity if we were only aware of our suffering.

We are so busy we hardly have time to look at the people we love, even in our own household, and to look at ourselves. Society is organized in a way that even when we have some leisure time, we don't know how to use it to get back in touch with ourselves. We have millions of ways to lose this precious time- we turn on the TV or pick up the Telephone, or start the car and go somewhere. We are not used to being with ourselves, and we act as if we don't like ourselves and we are trying to escape from ourselves.

Meditation is being aware of what is going on—in our bodies, in our feelings, in our minds, and in the world. Each day 40,000 children die of hunger. The superpowers have more than 50,000 nuclear warheads, enough to destroy our planet many times. Yet the sunrise is beautiful, and the rose that bloomed this morning along the wall is a miracle. Life is both dreadful and wonderful. To practice meditation is to be in touch with both aspects. Please do not think we must be solemn to meditate. In fact, to meditate well, we have to smile a lot.

*Hymn

#77 (Gray)

Seek Not Afar For Beauty

Seek not afar for beauty; lo, it glows
in dew-wet grasses all about your feet,
in birds, in sunshine, childish faces sweet,
in stars and mountain summits topped with snows.

Go not abroad for happiness; behold
it is a flower blooming at your door.
Bring love and laughter home, and evermore
joy shall be yours as changing years unfold.

In wonder-workings or some bush aflame,
we look for Truth and fancy it concealed;
but in earth's common things it stands revealed,
while grass and flowers and stars spell out the name.

Sermon "The Tiger and the Strawberry" The Rev. Rali M. Weaver

What if the world contains all the elements of the Pure Land or heaven? What if a panacea for all the world's problems is within our grasp right now, and always?

Most days, I will admit I don't feel that way. I think something is always amiss, and I feel an urge for change. In other words, I feel like a person being chased by a tiger, afraid, panicked, and uncertain about what my next move should be. I must admit I especially felt that way before I saw many of you in church last week and heard from many more of you that you wanted to be here, but your kids had a soccer game, or your work schedule wouldn't allow it.

Hearing all of your plans to reconnect with each other has been sweet and comforting. Even as I sometimes feel chased by the never-ending to-do's, seeing your smiling faces helps me to relax and be more present. You all have been the strawberry foil to my worrying tigers!

The story of the tiger and the strawberry has enticed me for a long time. To be honest, at times in my life, I have seen the strawberry eater as a foolish figure who chose pleasure rather than face the realities of their situation. This week, I have been rethinking that judgment.

Today I want to ask you, as I have been asking myself, "How can we get out of this quagmire of worrisome times if we refuse to also see the "blue sky, the sunshine, (or) the eyes of a baby?" In troublesome times I believe we must ask ourselves what brings us joy and train our hearts and minds to focus on those things.

After a person in my life has died I have found that the grief clouded my vision, so everything seemed grey and unsatisfying. The clouded vision grief of all kinds creates, is a common threat to joy. Under a cloud of suffering, it is hard to find any happiness. Often, when grieving people are lucky enough to experience some happiness or laughter, they express guilt at finding joy in the face of hardship or sorrow.

Often I have heard people facing uncommon life obstacles express worry about how others might perceive them if they have fun.

It is the conundrum of grief and sadness that I wish to challenge today. First, I want to affirm that depression and despair are not like switches you can turn off and on at will. At the same time, when bad things happen, when we feel dispirited, it is our antithetical human nature to want to stick our heads down and get through it. What we might be able to stop doing is lumping all bad things into a pile as if they were all that is going on in our lives. What might be within our grasp is to start treating the beauty and wonders of life as if they are precious gifts that are equally important as the sorrows. How might your life change if you rated the wonders of life as precious and important as your disappointments?

Yesterday Eileen, Colin, and I went on the Nature and Nurture walk. We started at Brook Farm, the intentional Community founded by Margaret Fuller and the Transcendentalists. We traipsed through the woods and ended up at a cemetery. Thinking I knew where we were going, I led the three of us willy-nilly through the graveyard. I will admit that it is not uncommon for those who go on a walk that I am leading to get lost at some point. This was true yesterday. We passed a few of the same spots more than once and finally had to return to the highly trafficked road to find our way back to our cars. Fortunately, Colin and Eileen are used to this and can see the beauty even in the absurdities of our walks. This is something I believe would behoove us all to train our minds to do. Despite the dilapidated

nature of the Brook Farm home, it was a beautiful day, and Colin started out by noticing the lovely lavender growing beside the path. With no path maps, we started walking toward The Gardens at Gethsemane on the flat driveway until we found a lightly worn path. The trail took us through a beautiful wood with no markers. We ended up in a cemetery that I wrongly believed was The Gardens at Gethsemane- until we realized we were in the Baker Street Jewish Cemeteries. To my credit, this land had been a part of Brook Farm. Unfortunately, as usual, I got turned around, and we walked in circles for a while. There have been times in my life when I would have lamented my poor sense of direction, but yesterday was beautiful, the conversation was engaging, and I was happy to be away from my computer and my to-do lists. When there is nothing you can do to change a situation it is often the best course of action to try to enjoy it.

In his book "When Bad Things Happen to Good People" Harold S. Kushner suggests that:

"If we think of life as a kind of Olympic games, some of life's crises are sprints. They require maximum emotional concentration for a short time. Then they are over, and life returns to normal. But other crises are distance events. They ask us to maintain our concentration over a much longer period of time, and that can be a lot harder."

Using Kushner's terms, yesterday's walk was more of a slow sprint. The difficulty of walking down busy Baker Street with the broken sidewalk when our feet and legs were tired from going in circles was probably the worst of the journey. This was perhaps the quietest we three had been on our journey because we had to walk single file where the sidewalk wasn't. It took all of our concentration to avoid tripping on the cracks in the sidewalk. In many ways, I think yesterday's nature walk could serve as a perfect metaphor for the attention required to get in and out of anxiety producing situations. When things got hard, we put our heads down and focused on the walk until we found our cars, said goodbye, and went our separate

ways. As we neared our cars, Eileen spontaneously reminded us of another walk we had been on where we encountered a couple that was about to get engaged. This made us all smile and laugh to think about despite our tired legs and crazy path to get there.

We can change our story dramatically if we just focus on the positives. Paying attention to the lavender on the side of the road, the clouds in the sky, and the sound of crickets may be a good way to foil the anxieties we are faced with and return to joy.

However shifting our perspective from suffering to joy can at time seem as risky as reaching for a strawberry when surrounded by tigers. The state of our nation's democracy, the immigration crisis, and the problem of climate change and illness are long endurance problems that take infinitely more concentration and intentionality to overcome.

Our house plumbing may be a better metaphor for the longer-term, more pressing problems we often deal with. For the most part, once plumbing in a house is installed, you don't have to think about it. However, once there is a leak somewhere and you can't figure out how to fix it on your own, you have to call a professional.

A few years ago, the parish redid a bathroom at the parsonage because there was a leak in the front hallway. After the bathroom was gutted, the fixtures changed out by a professional plumber, the walls tiled and painted, and the hallway replastered, the leak started to happen again. The plumber again reworked things, and again there was a leak.

I won't go through the several iterations it took to straighten out the problem, but suffice it to say, the whole process was anxiety-producing and infuriating. "We might never be without a leaky halfway ceiling!" I feared. The more it happened, the more I wanted just to ignore it and pretend it wasn't happening.

How often do we try to ignore the worries in our lives until they grow into more significant problems?

Finally, Sam King worked with the plumber until a second new shower with a trap in the shower was installed to stop the backup. Getting to the other side of this nearly two-year-long problem required a great deal of negotiation and then training my daughters to empty the trap of their long hair.

More significant problems in our lives require us to take a more serious look at the trial, invite professional help and educate ourselves and others to do something new. The problem will only worsen if we put our heads down in these situations. If over time, we stay focused only on the issue and refuse ourselves any fun or pleasure, we will become anxious infuriated messes. If we learn to find beauty all around us while working toward positive solutions to our problems, we may be able to raise our spirits.

Last week I woke after a generally fitful night's sleep to find this little pink fuzzy thing in our bed. I was folding the laundry the night before and I imagine it came from the laundry, but I have no idea where it goes. Pink isn't even my favorite color but it was so unexpected and so soft and so pink it made me smile. I have kept it near to me and have enjoyed fiddling with it all week. What this pink fuzzy string has also reminded me of is that life is both chaos and comfort. As Thich Nhat Hahn suggested in our reading, meditation, and breathing can also help us to connect with our bodies. In meditation, we can return to the truth of the world that it is both 'dreadful and wonderful'.

The story of the tiger and the strawberry can remind us that life is short, and we cannot make it any longer by worrying but we may make it more enjoyable while we are here by focusing on what gives us joy and pleasure. Breathing and paying attention to what is right in front of us will help us to see the beauty in life. Finding joy and beauty everywhere may not solve all the world's problems or even

