

Beginnings and Endings...

As we begin another New Year, I invite us to rejoice in this moment we have arrived at the crossroads of our past and our future. Here in this moment we have all of the possibilities and opportunities lying before us. It is at the turning of a New Year that we acknowledge this crossroads but I believe that we are at this place of new beginnings far more than we are not. Yet here we are and we take stock of those important endings and beginnings that occurred over last year. In this moment of reflection and resolution I wonder “whom do we need to forgive, need to love, whom do we need to be at peace with to be able to move forward in our lives?” And to ground this question I go just a step further and wonder, “why do we need to feel at peace at all?”

Realizing the “why” is usually the most important place to start – I wonder why I might and need to seek peace in my life... In truth, my heart aches when I see the violence in this world that is rampant - violence, fighting, murder and war front and center and accelerating at an alarming rate. I cringe at the incivility among neighbors, we find it all too readily in Sudbury and Metrowest, and I worry about us and how easy it is to lose faith and become a willing cynic... I wonder if cynicism is a type of armor that we wear to protect ourselves from being hurt... What seems to me is that our society, in large measure, has lost perspective – our moral compass spins wildly out of control. Thus it makes it hard for one to determine the right/best direction so we stand or sit paralyzed, uncertain. My heart aches at the death, destruction and exploitation that I read in the news... and I think of Harvey Cox’s words in a conversation that I was part of where he explained that the God of the Israelites is no longer the focus of humankind but that humanity/society has shifted its focus and worship to wall street where brokers were considered to be Gods and capitalism/consumerism is our religion. How can one find peace if our prayer is for accumulation of more? Is it possible to find peace with a perspective that is so askew? In a world where the rich are so rich and the poor are so poor? And violence blossoms out of hunger and frustration? How do we know what is right and wrong (a much larger question to be sure).

Yet, in spite of it all I remain optimistic because I believe in you and I and our commitment to uncovering/finding the answers. I pause at this cross roads and I stare at the whirl of humanities moral compass and I imagine that we all might like to find a place where there is peace and balance, a place where people are accepted, nurtured and loved for who they are and what they bring to this world... But how can we find peace in the world if we struggle to find peace in our hearts?

We begin again... I turn to an old adage, shared by Alexander Graham Bell who explained that, “When one door closes, another opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us.” In this moment we have open doors all around us that we may not even realize

exist. Let go of what has been and embrace what might be... The words of Rainer Maria Rilke help me to anchor my faith:

The hour is striking so close above me,
So clear and sharp,
That all my senses ring with it.
I feel it now: there's a power in me
to grasp and give shape to my world.

I know that nothing has ever been real
without my beholding it.
All becoming has needed me.
my looking ripens things
and they come toward me, to meet and be met.

Rilke, a poet of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, considered this little piece of wisdom a prayer. Inspired by a visit to Russia in 1899 he was compelled by the simple communal spirituality that he discovered. It was a time of serfs becoming "the people," big ideas and revolution. After his trip, Rilke went to Germany bringing the desire for the simple life of a cloistered monastic monk with him, wearing peasant clothing he was compelled to write his Book of Hours – Love poems to God. In this short piece he speaks of the power to grasp and give shape to his world... he is ecstatic, he is inspired by what he has encountered in the world around him. Why? What is it inside of him, or inside of any of us, that ignites a spark and quickens our breath, that compels us forward into the next moment and then the next... That spark cultivated into a flame burning within can propel us to defy the odds, it can ache like a nagging pull at our mind, is it love, God or is it something else??? Why does one seek to be inspired especially when our hearts are breaking?

Richard Branson, entrepreneurial billionaire, head of the Virgin Group (think music and airlines) at the age of 16 struggled through school with "dyslexia and poor academic performance, and on his last day at school, his headmaster told him he would either end up in prison or become a millionaire." Branson shared these words on January 2, this last Friday as a reminder:

Don't betray your dreams for the sake of fitting in. Dreaming is one of humanity's greatest gifts – it champions aspiration, spurs innovation, leads to change, and propels the world forward.

We should all dream, and encourage others to do so too. In a world without dreams there would be no art, no adventure, no moon landing, no female CEOs, and no civil rights. What a half-lived and tragic existence we would have...

Don't be self-conscious about dreaming, or about people thinking you're too idealistic, and not serious enough. Don't allow your self talk to be judgmental. Look at the world with wide-eyed enthusiasm, believe you are more powerful than the problems that confront you, and dream big. (<http://www.sunnyskyz.com/feel-good-story/1358/Dream-Seriously#PrQYuXs3DAVQf14K.99>)

“Believe you are more powerful than the problems that control you, and dream big!” Juxtapose Branson’s reminder with Rilke’s prayer: “I feel it now: there is a power in me to grasp and give shape to my world...” Inspiration resides in our dreams even in the face of cynicism... I believe that it is our love and respect and our support and enthusiasm for one another that propels us forward to achieve our dreams when our inspiration and enthusiasm runs thin. It is the hope for better and another’s hand on our shoulder and a kind word shared that reminds us that we can in fact do it...

We live in a “critical” world with feedback that hurts more than it helps because it does not bolster our self worth but separates us and categorizes us and in large measure makes us less than... What would the world look like if all were truly welcome and valued for what he or she might bring just as they are?

Can we do this as we stand at the crossroads? Can we support and bolster up others and ourselves and can we unplug from negative self-talk? **My New Year’s Mantra... *Change your self-talk and change your life...***

I would like to share a story about: a vacationing American businessman standing on a pier of a quaint coastal fishing village in southern Mexico. He watched as a small boat with just one young Mexican fisherman pulled into the dock. Inside the small boat were several large yellowfin tuna. Enjoying the warmth of the early afternoon sun, the American complimented the young man on the quality of his fish.

"How long did it take you to catch them?" the American casually asked.

"Oh, a few hours," the fisherman replied.

"Why don't you stay out longer and catch more fish?" the businessman then asked.

The young man warmly replied, "With this I have more than enough to meet my family's needs."

The businessman then became serious, "But what do you do with the rest of your time?"

Responding with a smile, the fisherman answered, "I sleep late, play with my children, watch ball games, and take siesta with my wife. Sometimes in the evenings I take a stroll into the village to see my friends, play the guitar, sing a few songs..."

The businessman impatiently interrupted, "Look, I have an MBA from Harvard, and I can help you to be more profitable. You can start by fishing several hours longer every day. You can then sell the extra fish you catch. With the extra money, you can buy a bigger boat. With the additional income that larger boat will bring, before long you can buy a second boat, then a third one, and so on, until you have an entire fleet of fishing boats."

Proud of his own sharp thinking, he excitedly elaborated a grand scheme which could bring even bigger profits, "Then, instead of selling your catch to a middleman you'll be able to sell your fish directly to the processor, or even open your own cannery. Eventually, you could control the product, processing and distribution. You could leave this tiny coastal village and move to Mexico City, or possibly even Los Angeles or New York City, where you could even further expand your enterprise."

Having never thought of such things, the Mexican fisherman asked, "But how long will all this take?"

After a rapid mental calculation, the Harvard MBA pronounced, "Probably about 15-20 years, maybe less if you work really hard."

"And then what, señor?" asked the fisherman.

"Why, that's the best part!" answered the businessman with a laugh. "When the time is right, you would sell your company stock to the public and become very rich. You would make millions."

"Millions? Really? What would I do with it all?" asked the young fisherman in disbelief.

The businessman boasted, "Then you could happily retire with all the money you've made. You could move to a quaint coastal fishing village where you could sleep late, play with your grandchildren, watch ball games, and take siesta with your wife. You could stroll to the village in the evenings where you could play the guitar and sing with your friends all you want." (<http://www.weboflove.org/051230whatmattersinlife>)

At a crossroads... What would you do if you were the fisherman? What would you do if you were the businessman? And why? The "why" is the most important question... The choices that we make in each moment direct the steps that we take in our lives. It is also true that the things that we say to ourselves and to others in passing each moment, and many times without harmful intent, can change the course of history, ours and theirs. How do we want to live the rest of our lives, if we could let go of and forget all of the things that have constrained us from the past (all of those closed

doors) and be present to that small still voice within what would it say to us in this moment? What might those words of inspiration be?

Here is something that I have been thinking a lot about lately... that happiness and satisfaction and love come from within... that there is nothing that I can buy, there is no one that I might invite into my life, there is no accomplishment or money to be made that will bring me peace... ***Peace, I must create within me.*** Once I have a sense of peace within me I can then share my peace with you and if you accept this vulnerable gift for its sheer simplicity and you nurture it within maybe then you can pass it on to another... maybe you already are bringing the light of inner peace to the world.

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My friends as we intentionally begin again in 2015 I ask each one of you to consider this cross roads – to consider our moral compass and how we might slow and right its spin. I would ask us to begin again by forgiving and loving our self and in this act of self-care we may just be free enough to let go, forgive and love others and in this simple, and not so simple, deed we might find a sense of genuine peace.

As we move into the rest of today, the rest of our week, month and year may the words and feelings that we share with SELF be kind and nurturing and may we find the courage to hope, dream big with abandon and share loving kindness with one another.

For this we pray, blessed be, amen

Please rise in body or spirit to sing hymn **Hymn #1052** – in the teal hymnal supplement:
The Oneness of Everything