

Calendar November 2024

Minister's message

A friend of mine named Ronnie, no not Molly's friend Ronnie the cross between a Jack Russel and a Border Collie, but a human also called Ronnie. Ronnie has been on a bit of a spiritual journey recently. He was away this weekend and was trying to put in practice things he has been learning. One was to do one good deed of generosity each day. He told me he was in the hairdressers the other day. Whilst there he noticed a couple; the man was also having a haircut. When he was finished, he offered to pay for the man's haircut as well as his own. The couple said that they couldn't do that. Ronnie insisted and told them that he had to do so as he had to do a good deed each day and this was it. Eventually they relented and let him pay for the haircut, as a favour to him.

It was a lovely tale and it's great to see Ronnie progressing. Afterwards I suggested that the next time he finds himself in a similar situation that instead of asking recipients to do him a favour that he could ask them to pass the favour on, to pay it forward for someone else. He seemed to like the idea. I wonder how he has gone about his daily deed doing these last few days.

Now my friend had told me of these deeds as that morning I had shared the wonderful "Love and the Cabbie" by Art Buchwald. A tale of hope and love that involves passing on blessings and compliments to others in the hope that they will do the same and thus lift the spirits of all you meet. Yes, many may reject the good blessing, but others will respond positively and pass it on to others, thus spreading the joy and love. Doesn't the world need this right now.

It is easy to look at our world and despair and give up and say "what's the point? Everyone is out for themselves. If I go out of my way to help another, they'll just take advantage and what will I ever get back in return?"

There is through another way; the way that Ronnie is attempting. The principles found in the "Pay it Forward" concept; the way that Art Buchwald suggested in "Love and the Cabbie." We can change our world, one act at a time. This is religion in its deepest and simplest form, binding up the broken, and manifesting God's love in life. At its core is this life affirming principle that in spite of a great deal of evidence to the contrary faith, hope and love do in fact still remain. You see these ripples touch everybody both the giver and receiver and all who are eventually touched by them; both the giver and receiver are transformed by the experience; both giver and receiver are blessed abundantly.

So let's become the blessings we have all been searching for; let's remember all those times in our lives when someone has gone out of their way to help us with no expectation of anything in return; whether they have helped us materially,

intellectually, emotionally, or spirituality; let's re-feel these occasions and to meditate on them and to come up with ways that we can pay these debts forward; let's think of ways we can give back to our world; let's create ripple effects that can impact in our shared world in ways we perhaps can't even begin to dream of.

We can change our world today; we can become the blessing that we have all been waiting for.

Love and respect
Rev Danny

Dates

Tuesday 19th November at 11am "Our Common Search for Meaning": Do You Remember When?"

Exploring "Memory" Especially how it impacts on the present and how it can in many ways bring the moment to life. We will look at how memory can and does change how attitudes to the past can and do change and history can indeed be re-written or at least it can seem to be. We will also explore the differences between remembering and remembrance...

Extra Material

From "Cultivating the Mind of Love: The Practice of Looking Deeply in the Mahayana Buddhist Tradition" **By Thich Nhat Hanh**

Thich Nhat Hanh on the meaning of interbeing regarding the spiritual practice of connections.

"Seven years after the death of my mother, I woke up suddenly one night, went outside, and saw the moon shining brightly. At two or three o'clock in the morning, the moon is always expressing something deep, calm, and tender, like the love of a mother for her child. I felt bathed in her love, and I realized that my mother is still alive and will always be alive. A few hours earlier, I had seen my mother very clearly in a dream. She was young and beautiful, talking to me, and I talked to her. Since that time, I know that my mother is always with me. She pretended to die, but it is not true. Our mothers and fathers continue in us. Our liberation is their liberation. Whatever we do for our transformation is also for their transformation, and for our children and their children.

"When I picked up the autumn leaf and looked at it. I could smile, because I saw the leaf calling back through a multitude of her bodies in the ten directions, just as Shakyamuni Buddha did in the *Lotus Sutra*. Then I looked at myself, and saw myself

as a leaf, calling back countless bodies of mine to be with me at that moment. We can do that by dissolving the idea that we are only here and now. We are simultaneously everywhere, in all times.

"When you touch the soil here, you touch the soil there also. When you touch the present moment, you touch the past and the future. When you touch time, you touch space. When you touch space, you touch time. When you touch the lemon tree in early spring, you touch the lemons that will be there in three or four months. You can do that because the lemons are already there. You can touch the lemon tree in the historical dimension or the ultimate dimension; it is up to you. The practice of the *Lotus Sutra* is to touch yourself, the leaf, and the tree in the ultimate dimension."

An Excerpt from "*Learning to Fly: Trapeze-Reflections on Fear, Trust, And the Joy of Letting Go*" by Sam Keen

In his poetic, passionate and philosophical book on the aerial art of the trapeze, Sam Keen shares with us his many pleasures. Here is an excerpt on the spiritual practice of beauty.

"Flying trapeze! What better to give us a premonition of what Jochim de Fiora, a 13th century Franciscan, called 'the third age of spirit', a time in which we would celebrate cooperation rather than competition, lyric virtues rather than the martial vices. In the Biblical tradition the new age of the spirit that Isaiah prophesied was characterized as a time when the ancient habit of violence would be broken. 'Instead of the thorn the fig tree; the lion will lie down with the lamb; we will study war no more,' and Sunday afternoons will not be given over to the NFL. In that mythic time 'those who wait upon the Lord will mount up with wings as eagles' and fly.

"Because we usually think of trapeze as a form of entertainment in the ambiance of the circus, we are unaccustomed to thinking of it as a ceremony that incorporates a message.

"What is the gospel according to trapeze, it's good news, about the human condition? The artistry of the trapeze troupe emerges from a cooperative effort to create something of fleeting and fragile beauty. It knows danger but not violence, courage but not conquest, striving for excellence but not competition, the joy of achievement but not victory. As a strictly physical achievement the quadruple somersault to the hands of a catcher is a feat of skill, daring and grace that is unmatched by any ball-bearing athlete in the NBA or NFL.

"In this ceremony, at long last, gender really doesn't matter. If some trapeze troupes still have only token female flyers who do simple tricks in skimpy costumes, others like the Korean troupe are predominantly female. In the airborne commonwealth, men and women must submit to the same disciplines, develop the same measure of

strength, stamina and courage, take identical risks to create the ultimate performance art — a drama enacted by a flyer and a catcher on an airy stage that has a life span a million times briefer than a Navajo or Tibetan sand painting, a Christo fence, or a Soho performance. The ephemeral beauty created by a trapeze troupe lasts only a few seconds from the time the flyer leaves the platform, goes into the hands of the catcher, and returns to the platform. Like quarks, those sub-atomic particles that are released when atoms are bombarded in a cyclotron, the substance of the trapeze art exists for an instant and vanishes forever. We watch with fascination, and then it is over almost before it began, leaving us with an image of fleeting and eternal, beauty.

"The aerial art celebrates 'the passing moment, beautiful beyond belief'. That is every man and woman's story."

From "Gilead: A Novel" by Marilynne Robinson

"I have been thinking about existence lately. In fact, I have been so full of admiration for existence that I have hardly been able to enjoy it properly. As I was walking up to the church this morning, I passed that row of big oaks by the war memorial — if you remember them — and I thought of another morning, fall a year or two ago, when they were dropping their acorns thick as hail almost. There were all sorts of thrashing in the leaves and there were acorns hitting the pavement so hard they'd fly past my head. All this in the dark, of course. I remember a slice of moon, no more than that. It was a very clear night, or morning, very still, and then there was such energy in the things transpiring among those trees, like a storm, like travail. I stood there a little out of range, and I thought, it is all still new to me. I have lived my life on the prairie and a line of oak trees still can astonish me.

"I feel sometimes as if I were a child who opens its eyes on the world once and sees amazing things it will never know any names for and then has to close its eyes again. I know this is all mere apparition compared to what awaits us, but it is only lovelier for that. There is a human beauty in it. And I can't believe that, when we have all been changed and put on incorruptibility, we will forget our fantastic condition of mortality and impermanence, the great bright dream of procreating and perishing that meant the whole world to us. In eternity this world will be Troy, I believe, and all that has passed here will be the epic of the universe, the ballad they sing in the streets. Because I don't imagine any reality putting this one in the shade entirely, and I think piety forbids me to try."

From "On the Road to Calm" by Nancy G Shapiro

"The Winds of Grace"

"The winds of grace are always blowing, but it is you who must raise your sails."

- Rabindranath Tagore -

I feel the turbulence and confusion out in the world, and have been feeling an underlying exhaustion from the end-of-year hectic pace. Yet I am also feeling strangely exhilarated in these last days of (the year). Curiosity gets me moving—a curiosity that wants to experience the undefinable power Tagore and so many others identify as Grace. Grace is thankfully much larger than my imagination, and its undeniable presence reminds me to nurture any clarity (however tiny), accept the tired feelings, take small steps, and breathe in gratitude.

I used to have a recurring dream of being in a track meet in a large stadium, and when the starting gun went off, all the other runners rushed ahead though I couldn't move because I was knee-deep in mud. Over decades, this sensation of standing still—the frustration that appears when things don't work out—has become a practice instead of a hindrance.

I glance up as I step out of my car and am given the gift of a dove perched on the edge of the roof. It stays still long enough for its beautiful silhouette to be captured against the light of an oncoming storm.

A sick husband. An overnight rainstorm. A cracked taillight. A car repair shop manager and his mechanic fix the shorted-out signal and brake light. For free.

An accreditation course is cancelled. A flurry of panic, until I find another course that is even better, and promises the excitement of new knowledge.

An emergency doctor's appointment is miraculously available because a receptionist is an angel of detail and quick thinking. Two days before Christmas, she is kind, calm, and tracks down a cancellation. For that very day.

The list goes on. Small events that lead to an open heart, an allowing mind, and the surprising Grace of the world around us. When we raise our own sails and are forever curious about what the wind will bring.

"The Bones of Grace" by Mark Nepo

My wife, Susan, was ill last spring with a serious stomach flu that took us to the emergency room. Tending her brought me closer to the paradox of true care: that giving our all is what matters though we can't take another's suffering from them. Yet this awkward tending means everything. On the eighth day, after fixing her pillow and rubbing her head, we heard a bird we didn't recognize, and that sweet short warble brought us back into life.

We enter the sanctity of our being in the simplest moments—while playing with animals and watching birds fly or standing in the dark awash with the shimmer of the moon or watching a loved one wake into their truth. These uncluttered openings are

the bare bones of grace. We could name grace as the unnameable presence that lives under all we do or aspire to.

When stopped at the bedroom door while stepping into the day, when the quiet warmth of our nest makes me realize how precious and irreplaceable the simplest things are, then what I'm given is more than enough and I am grateful. In this way, grace appears as a brief communion with the fragility of life. It changes how we move through the thousand tasks that lie before us.

The word *grace* comes from the Latin, meaning *thankful*. Gratitude opens us to grace. Thankfulness lets in the energies of life that surround us. When humbled into the open, often against our will, our bones can rattle like wind chimes, making beautiful and haunting music, though it aches to do so. It takes a deeper kind of effort to live what is ours to live, while staying open to the mysterious forces that surround us. As the **Buddhist** teacher Ajahn Chah says:

Proper effort is not the effort to make something particular happen. It is the effort to be aware and awake each moment.

Grace is what wears down the face we show the world, until leaning into what we're given without a mask is the work of the soul. In time, we're destined to lose some of what is dear to us, which is only tragic if we forget that the dearness lives in us. Beyond our lifelong dance with loss, it's wondrous that we should litter the world with things we hold dear. This is one way that we make the world dear. And for all our shouting, we land in silence, and for all our barking about God and truth, we settle, if blessed, into living simply by just being true, the way a mountain is true.

A Question to Walk With: Describe a time when you felt carried by a moment of grace.