

Turning to Wonder

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

October 3, 2021

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

I heard this short phrase at two meetings this past week, one among our Sudbury Area Churches network and the other at a gathering of lay worship leaders planning for Advent. "Turning to Wonder" is one of the key touchstones developed by educator and author Parker J. Palmer and the work of *Circles of Trust*.¹ You know those times? I think that we all have them, when someone says something hurtful to me? At that instant my "fight-or-flight" instincts kick in – that is, our innate biological response to danger, either fighting back or seeking (emotional) cover. Of course, neither of those options are rational, nor will either help to resolve the conflict or bring reconciliation.

An example is offered by one leadership consultant.² She,
... carpooled with a friend who had a baby daughter. [One day, during rush hour] the sitter called, and the baby started spiking a fever. The friend called the doctor and was told the office would squeeze them in if they could get there by 5:30. [They] left the office immediately and hurried to the sitter. Of course, it was rush hour and there was road construction. A lane on the road was closed up ahead and everyone was merging. How would we make it on time?

This consultant continues:

I am not sure of your attitude toward the people who whiz by you when the lane is ending, but I have always considered them selfish, arrogant, pushy... And yet, I opted to zip down that merge lane to the very end to save us precious time...and someone graciously let me back in! We made it to the sitter and my friend and her sweet baby made it to the doctor's office on time!

We are so painfully human, as people race by in the merging lane, isn't it easy to get upset. At that moment she takes a breath, and turns to wonder, thinking, "[I wonder,] where might that person be hurrying to, what might be going on in their lives?"

The refrain among practitioners goes: *When things get rough, turn to wonder*. Rather than making cynical assumptions about the another's motivations, instead, assume that most people have good reasons for their behaviour. What could they be?

It needs to be said of today's passage that it is not an easy one for any of us (I'm including myself in that number) as Jesus debates about marriage and divorce. In Jesus' day, when a woman received a "certificate of divorce," she lost most of her rights (like the right to own property).³ She could soon find herself begging for food on the street, or worse, becoming a street worker just to survive. Jesus clearly has some pastoral concern for women of his time, making reference to how women's lives can be torn apart by a man's exercising his privilege to divorce his wife.

¹ More about Circles of Trust can be found at <http://www.couragerenewal.org/>

² Rory Gilbert, talking about how she incorporates "Turning to Wonder".
<https://thunderbirdleadership.com/2018/06/15/turn-to-wonder/>

³ David B. Howell, "Pastoral Perspective." *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary* - Year B, Volume 4: Season After Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ).

We have a glimpse of God's kin-dom vision according to Jesus as he gestures towards the child that the disciples have been going to great pains to keep away from Jesus. The last shall be first and the first last in God's kin-dom vision. Those on the margins who regularly get shooed away from the circles of decision-making.

We can prayerfully embrace them – those relegated to live in tents in the park behind me, women in the United States speaking out against largely male legislators making critical decisions impacting women's bodies.⁴

On this World Communion Sunday, the Sunday to celebrate togetherness, we might find this a strange passage – talking about marriage and divorce. Sometimes this story has been used as a blunt weapon by Bible literalists to say argue theologically that marriage is only for a man and woman. It must be said, though, that Jesus' context was very different from our complex, modern, world we live in today. Let me just suggest, that the foundational message of Jesus of the Gospels is unconditional love.

If we are blessed to find a partner in life whom we love and from whom we experience such love regardless of gender, creed, or racial difference – Love, Love, Love.

When we are coping with anxiety, anger, or fear when in a conflict with someone who seems to be profoundly different from us – may we try “turning to wonder”. Love, Love, Love.

⁴ As we worship on October 3rd, several state legislatures are making abortion illegal and the Supreme Court has been, thus far, upholding those decision. Protests are happening across the country, see <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/abortion-rights-advocates-march-across-u-s-to-protest-restrictive-laws-1.6197724>