

Living out of Wholehearted Faith

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

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by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Rachel Held Evans was a bestselling Christian author, who was very open about her struggles with traditional Christianity, very open about her doubts, her questions about faith, and she dedicated a great deal of space in her published books to encouraging others, young and old, to dare to question faith.

This book, *Wholehearted Faith*¹, was published after her sudden death – pieced together by her friend. It is an interesting read, please come and borrow it from me. There is a quote that stands out for me, where she talks about traditional Christian faith, she feels, as being too often fuelled by the fear of death. “But death,” Held Evans said, “is something empires, not resurrection people, worry about.” She continues, “In any case, I wonder sometimes whether we’re playing at death and calling it life. Maybe we’re playing dead when we refuse to ask the big questions...”

Maybe we’re playing dead when we fail to consider, when we’re at a table or in the sanctuary – who’s not at that table or in that sanctuary – who isn’t welcome and why. Maybe we’re playing dead when we fixate on other’s (slogans) yet refuse to interrogate our own. ²

My friends here at St. Andrew’s, I must make a confession to having a perfectionist streak fuelled, at least in part, by my fear of failing. I suspect that many have moments where we “play dead”; where we accept the mythologies taught to us, rather than taking a risk, daring to question our assumptions, making the bold statement that is burning inside of us, taking the stand on an issue that terrifies us, yet not taking that risk haunts us.

Can you relate? *Fear of death is for Empires*, that is, for people with power and who don’t want to lose it.

Coming to St Andrew’s five years ago, I came to realize that there was great love for the season of Lent here. Lent, the season that begins with Ash Wednesday, a day when Christians mark themselves with ashes and tell one another: Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return.³

A truly humbling sentiment, isn’t it? In the ancient tradition, Christians would wear that ash cross out in public, a reminder of how truly human and fragile they, and we, truly are. Then, Lent culminates with Holy Week. Particularly powerful is Good Friday, where we retell the story of the arrest and crucifixion of God’s Beloved, Jesus.

In that gripping moment of crucifixion, my Christian faith, invites me to embrace some spiritual amnesia. My faith tells me, “Dave, forget that you know Easter is coming. Stay in the shadowy grip of God’s Friday.”

¹ *Wholehearted Faith*, pp 110-111, Rachel Held Evans (with Jeff Chu, using her manuscripts posthumously). © 2021 HarperCollins.

² Ibid

³ Genesis chapter 3, verse 19.

Death is challenging, but also an opportunity to “get real”, to stay in our experience of grief and loss, and perhaps even those feelings of guilt. We are invited to also stay with the experience of death. Easter makes no sense without Good Friday, from the perspective of “Wholehearted Faith.” We have to cry and grieve before we can embrace the joy of Dawn. The true joy of Easter cannot come without the death of Good Friday. There is no Resurrection without, first, death.

I invite us to, together, aspire to living, individually as well as collectively as at St. Andrew’s, to aspire to a Wholehearted Faith that starts with letting go, and, perhaps allowing some things to die. I invite us to let go of our spiritual baggage, whatever that might mean for us. You know, baggage, like those spiritual peccadillos that are unique to you, and to me. Let ‘em go, so that we can muster up the courage to risk resurrection.

What is that death and resurrection work you need to do?

What death and resurrection work do I need to do?

What death and resurrection do we as St. Andrew’s United Church need to do in these coming days, months, years?

In life. In death. In life beyond death.

God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.