

Scripture
Psalm 30

Becoming Fire

I just spent five days out on the water. When I am on the water I often rediscover myself. Sailing feeds my soul. There is something about the wind and the waves carrying me forward while I try to maneuver the best path that symbolizes the reality of life. One moment it is smooth sailing, the next moment you are battling the wind and the waves fighting to hold your course, it can bring healthy fear to the forefront like an entertaining wrestling match, and then suddenly everything dies down and you feel stuck in the water and so you turn on the engine and motor on. Only to do it all again in a few minutes, or hours or perhaps the next day. It's life full of the wind and the waves and moments of basking in the sun.

I felt I was taught at a young age that if I just did the right things and followed the rules and prayed the right prayers everything would work out. Faith was a bit like a magic trick - do this and amazingly that will happen. I think the historical church set itself up to believe that for the institution itself and for the individuals within it. In doing so however the creators of the institution did not predict a drop in Christendom or that the most common worldview would broaden beyond a set of expected rules and laws. Religion was built more as a philosophy than something that is rooted in place and changes the lives of those who embrace it. The church I grew up in didn't expect that I would take the scripture so seriously that as to think it was speaking to me. When I read the life story of Jesus I saw a person of welcome, compassion, learning, adaptation and growth and that is who I followed and I knew I had to do and be more than someone who sat on the sidelines and watched others (particularly the men) serve or preach or teach or tell us how it is. I felt a call on my life and my faith brought me courage.

I spent some time listening to an interview with Carol Vaccariello on Matthew Foxes creation spirituality essentials. She focussed on Essential 2 of the six and it really struck a cord. Essential 2 states "It is through the work of spiritual practice that we move beyond fear into compassion and discover our deep and true selves." So much of ours lives is about moving beyond the fear that stifles us, that controls our behaviours, that gets us stuck. We can't operate with compassion for ourselves and others until we unpack our own fear.

Every one of us has fears, some of us are more willing to admit it than others but I guarantee it is there, acknowledgement of it is half the battle. Fear and anxiety can be healthy if acknowledged. In the last weeks I have found myself needing to get massage and Physio because the tension in my body became unbearable. Each time I have needed to admit that stress is a factor, yes I likely injured myself with a rather aggressive 'workout' but if I wasn't a little more anxious than usual that probably wouldn't have happened.

It was my massage therapist that said "anyone who is not a little fearful and anxious right now isn't paying attention." She's right.

Last week I hit a bit of a wall of exhaustion because I was spending my days attempting to figure out how to run a safe program for children out of the church. How do we sanitize and clean, what are the protocols to follow for sick kids and staff, how do we take care of them and how do we keep everyone safe? Then I go home and learn an acquaintance has been diagnosed with covid, I watch the news somewhat religiously to figure out what schools are doing. Reading articles about why or why not to send your kids to school, attempting not to take on the panic of some parents and teachers that I encounter online and in the community, then donning a mask to go to the grocery store. Have you noticed that all the commercials are even getting reshot with people with masks, that's been really striking for me. And then there is other world news that continues to be tragic and so we pray for Beirut and Belarus and the United States of America. (and that is not even half of what is going on at work and in my life)

So much of the anger and fear being expressed in our world today is out of fear, and anger and hurt of a lifetime that has turned into personal fear rather than compassion. My fears are so minor compared to the majority of the world. But they still impact who I am and how I live. Until we are willing to acknowledge life is hard and we will get it wrong, we will struggle, and we have fear you will not be able to understand others and have compassion and empathy for them.

Most of us have stories of life that have impacted us in such a way that we get stuck and we don't live into our purpose and potential. And often even when we know our heart and our truth we let others stifle it. Vaccariello says "If you know who you are and where you are called to be and what you are called to do then go do it and if people keep telling you, you are wrong but you know what you are called to then it is time to start listening to different people." Amen. Our whole purpose in life is to discover our purpose and share that gift with the world. We are all created out of compassion and love and we all have been given the gifts to share that with the world but when our self focus becomes our fears rather than our God given gifts then we stop living the image of God within us. And when we stop living out our divine light we and all those around us live a little less.

I want to share with you a Drew Dellinger poem that is motivating me today. It's called Ancestors and Angels. If you are comfortable close your eyes as you listen.

Ancestors and Angels

**I write words to catch up to the ancestors
An angel told me the only way
to walk through fire
without getting burned
is to become fire.
Some days angels whisper
In my ear as I walk
Down the street and I fall in love
With every person I meet,
And I think, maybe this
Could be a bliss**

Like when Dante met
Beatrice.
Other days all I see
is my collusion
with illusion.
Ghosts of projection
masquerading
as the radiant angel
of love.
You know I feel like
the ancestors
brought us together.
I feel like the ancestors
Brought us here and they
Expect great things.
They
expect us to say what
we think and
live how
we feel and follow the hard paths
that bring us near joy.
They expect us
to nurture
all the children.

I write poems to welcome angels
and conjure ancestors.
I pray to the angels of politics
and love.
I pray for justice sake
not to be relieved of my frustrations,
at the same time burning sage
and asking for patience.
I march with the people
to the border
between nations
where
everything stops
except
the greed of corporations.

Thoughts like comets
calculating the complexity
of the complicity.

There is so much noise in the oceans

**the whales can't hear each other.
We're making them crazy,
driving dolphins insane.
What kind of ancestors
are we?**

**Thoughts like comets
leaving craters
in the landscape of my consciousness.**

I pray to the ancestors and angels.

**Meet me in the garden.
Meet me where spirit walks softly
in the cool of the evening.
Meet me in the garden
under the wings of the bird
of many colors.
Meet me
in the garden
of your longing.**

**Every breath
is a pilgrimage.**

**Every
breath
is a pilgrimage
to you.**

**I pray
to be
a conduit.**

An angel told me:

**The only way
to walk through fire—**

become fire.

- Drew Dellinger

There is a lot that can hold us back but until you are willing to get on the boat and become one with the wind, until you are willing to risk becoming the fire you will not become fully who you were created to be. Vaccariello said some thing else that resonated with me this week. She said I

can't pray "on earth as it is in heaven" anymore. She said I must pray on earth heaven. On earth heaven because heaven is on earth, it's not some mansion in the sky like the old hymns say it is here and now. If everyone in the world saw everyone as loved and beloved as a part of the image of God, earth would be heaven.

Quinn G. Caldwell wrote "One of the more awkward things about our faith is how firmly tied it is to the concrete world.... This particularity makes religion potentially fragile. Build your religion only on Eternal Abstracts like love or truth, and there's no concrete way to disprove or undo it. Tie it too closely to particular things, on the other hand, make it mappable – and one spelunker with carbon-dating supplies in her backpack might bring your whole situation down.

But a religion that's not tied firmly to things that mattered – homelands, histories, bodies – probably doesn't have much power to affect things that currently matter – homes, histories, bodies – either. I don't need general love; I need love for me. I don't need general salvation; I need salvation specific to each of us. I don't need general blessings; I need the blessing of the God of Jesus Christ, who walked, and loved, a concrete world."

I have a call on my life and I will forever discover new ways to share that call to share God's love, compassion and abundance with everyone so that all may experience the fullness of life. We are all pilgriming through this life together. One author wrote "all of life is a journey and if you think you have arrived you are lost." I haven't arrived, I am still on the journey. We at Squamish United Church haven't arrived, we are still on the journey of birthing Christ in the world over and over and over again. Meister Eckhart asked "what good is it that Christ was born in a stable in Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago if he is not also born in me?"

I hope you will join me in courage and faith as we continue to discover God's call on our lives as individuals and church. May we birth Christ's love in the world.

Amen.