

What Holds Us

Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society
February 11, 2024

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I am convinced there is something in human nature that causes even the most focused or disciplined among us to begin one task and, at least occasionally, soon find ourselves immersed in an entirely different one. A few weeks ago I decided to rearrange some of the books in my library. It's never a quick task, but I took the cold air and gray landscape outside my window as an excuse to stay in and devote my attention to it.

I got off to good start, pulling books one by one off the shelves and stacking them into piles according to various categories. Then a blue slip of paper, sandwiched in between and barely clearing the top edge of the pages of a book of reflections by my colleague Jane Rzepka caught my eye. The blue paper piqued my curiosity because it wasn't a bookmark I recognized as my own which are as often paperclips or old receipts as they are actual bookmarks. Standing with the book in hand I opened it to the where the blue paper was inserted and began to read...

For as long as I can remember, as the days get longer, I get this funny feeling.

I was immediately hooked, sat down, and continued reading,

I get the feeling the time's about to change. Moreover, I get the feeling that everyone else on the planet knows just when Daylight Savings Time begins.

I paused and thought, I don't remember ever reading this reflection, let alone marking it for later reference. And even if I did it's too early for a story about Daylight Savings Time. But something in me was resistant to putting the story aside and getting back to sorting my books. Remaining seated I continued to read Rzepka's apparent musings on Daylight Savings Time,

You all have the secret formula, you learned some clever nursery rhyme that tells you when it happens, you all get a postcard in the mail from the office in charge of these important matters. But not me. Then the bad dreams start, the ones were I, blissfully in the dark, miss the spring time change and arrive at church Sunday morning just in time for coffee hour.

Last year I finally went to the library, investigated the Uniform Time Act, learned that the time always changes the last Sunday in April, wrote the date on a piece of paper, and put

it in my top desk drawer, where I see it every single day. It feels good to be solidly in the know, settled.

But still I have the funny feeling that time is about to change. Didn't I hear somewhere that they're changing the changing? Can they do that?!

She continues,

I don't ask for much; I know nothing stays still these days: my uncle could marry a different aunt, my children could change their given names, my childhood home could one day become a parking lot, I could decide to become a donut maker or roller Derby Queen. I half expect all that. I'd just like a little something I could keep on a scrap of paper in my desk drawer, something I could count on.

I closed the book and, sitting quietly with it resting in my lap, stared forward at nothing in particular. I kept hearing the closing words echo in my mind, "I'd just like a little something.... something I could count on."

I imagine Rzepka's not alone here. In the face of the mystery we experience as life and our awareness of its apparent, inevitable end, humankind has long hungered for, created, and fought over "something we could count on."

Once upon a time we turned to gods and goddesses. People around the world dreamt up fanciful tales meant to ponder, explore, and establish reliable truth. But we made the mistake of taking them literally instead of seriously and have all but lost the richness and depth of meaning religious myth invariably points to, rendering much of what passes for religion today a hollow shell echoing the harsh screeching of dogmatic nonsense or wistful whispers of wishful unthinking.

In place of religion, many turn to science and technology as that something we can count on. A trend that has gained considerable momentum since the industrial revolution. Granted, science and technology have made many aspects of life more comfortable, convenient, and in some cases, more predictable, but present day debates concerning the potential impact of things like social media, AI (Artificial Intelligence), not to mention space tourism and colonization, suggests science and technology is less "something we can count on" and more something to keep an eye on.

And then there's that perhaps uniquely American take on something we can count on...the individual. Not our unique individuality, mind you, that's an entirely different thing that our culture actually tries to suppress. No, I'm talking about the individual self: me, myself, and I: The trinity of that most admired but entirely fictional character, the self made person. The business press, political pundits, and motivational speakers love to preach the gospel of this figment of our cultural imagination who gets where they're

going and arrives where they're meant to be by virtue of their hard work or talent alone, believing one can...and indeed everyone should... ultimately rely only on themselves. But to believe this is to believe one exists in a vacuum, completely separate from all other life on this planet, past, present, and future.

Indeed, belief in the self-made person, like belief in anthropomorphic deities running the show, or that science and technology are our salvation, runs counter to the lived story of humankind. A story in which, Rachel Naomi Remen says, is hidden the One story.

In the story of humankind there are no self made people, nor chosen people with exclusive claim to heaven or earth. And advancements in science and technology have had both salvific and damning results, often unpredictably so.

Indeed, the story of humankind reveals time and again as The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. observed, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

King's observation tells us the story of humankind is not one of separate beings thrust together, each to find themselves and their own way, but demonstrates that who we are is a matter of whose we are. It is a story that invites us, its co-authors, to continually ask, as my colleague Victoria Safford writes, "Who needs you? Who loves you? To whom are you accountable? To who do you answer? Whose life is altered by your choices? With whose life, whose lives, is your own all bound up, inextricably, in obvious or invisible ways?"

Ask the questions. Ask and listen. Listen for the story, The One story hidden in all our stories. Listen and that story, Rachel Naomi Remen reminds us, "becomes clearer and clearer....our true identity, who we are, why we are hear, what sustains us....Indeed as the One story unfolds through our own stories we discover what has held humankind throughout the ages and what hold us still, today...love we risk giving and receiving... peace we must make with that risk... light that illumines the scars, gouges, and jagged edges of the beautiful heart....and grace bestowed not for who... but that... we are.

And, as it happens, what holds us points to something we can count on....something more dependable than Daylight Savings Time, indeed, something we didn't create but nonetheless enjoy by virtue of our humanity: The unique privilege to shed an existence by competition under the laws of supply and demand and instead fashion a life lived under the laws of justice and mercy. A privilege we exercise when we risk surrendering a perfectly functional muscle in favor of a beautifully complex heart. The heart that beats at the center of our most cherished and needed stories.

May it be so.

Amen and Blessed Be

