

Feeling Our Feelings
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UUMSB
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Reading: Jake Morrill, *The Eternal, Calling* - November 25, 2020,
<https://www.uua.org/braverwiser/eternal-calling>

Sermon:

There is so much that is in crisis in our country and world, so much that is not okay. Yesterday, white supremacists marched on our capital, engaging in violence as speakers threatened political assassinations, cheered on by elected officials including the outgoing president. People are dying, and hungry, and losing their homes, and all of that is the air we are breathing each day. *And*, today I am not going into the details, or a thoughtful theological call toward building a just world. Today I want to talk about our emotional well being, our resilience, and where we are right now.

I am starting with something vain and low stakes, but stick with me.... As you may remember, my hair is not naturally this color. It has been getting redder and redder, the more I stay in my house, through a variety of means--some are hippy gentle ways, and some are box dye from the drugstore. This week my roots were really getting to me, so I got some box dye and did them up yesterday. Then, because it is 2020, I thought, 'huh, maybe I should set this up for autoship so I will remember when to do it next.' So I went to go do that and discovered there is a limit on the number boxes of hair dye you can buy at a time from some shops, because of shortages. Then the color I just used wasn't available in a lot of places, and I started to get a little frantic, what if I couldn't match the color? I was looking all over the interwebs for R68 dye. I found a supplier that ships in boxes of three, and I placed an order, so I am set through eight months from now to have this hair color if I choose to. I may change my mind at some point next year, but I had that hoarding, anxious feeling, about \$10 boxes of hair dye. Because of disruptions in the supply chain, sometimes things aren't available anymore when we want or need them. One week it's olive oil or paper towels, and another it could be medications or a hospital bed. Because of the privilege I have experienced in my life, of the availability of goods as long as I had the money to pay for them, this year has been a new and not so great experience. In response to this challenge, I have engaged in behaviors of which I am not proud. I have more dry goods in my pantry than *ever* before. My deep freeze is full. I have dry beans tucked away in cupboards and the freezer. Again, I am not proud of this. I want you to know I am speaking from my experience of managing feelings around scarcity and control. Sometimes I feel ridiculous, like when I order three boxes of hair dye, and other times I am so grateful we were able to stock up this summer as we were growing more food in our garden. Things are not normal. And every day there are little reminders of that--from looking for R68 hair color, to finding an aisle at the grocery store empty, to finding a business we love has closed, to needing to turn around and go back home when you are halfway to wherever you were headed because you forgot your mask. All these little things, and the big things, like grief, and fear, and injustice add up. We are holding a lot.

And so, we come to the holiday season, often filled with giving gifts, celebration, and lots of food. This year there are more people than ever who are going to be struggling with the basics, nevermind gifts and roast beast. Many of us are missing people who have passed. Many are

missing family and friends we won't get to see in person. This time of year can be very isolating and hard when we're not in a pandemic. This year, more of us are holding a heavy emotional load along with whatever else may be happening in our lives. *Everyone* has challenges, fears, and grief, and moving through that is not linear. We take steps forward, sideways, and back. We experience conflicting feelings all at once. We laugh as we grieve, we cry at good news. People are complicated. I cry at some point every year while decorating my Christmas tree, thinking about people I miss, and the hands that made the ornaments I am hanging. I am also delighted by the beauty of it, and singing along to the Muppets as I go. All these things are true all at the same time.

We cut our tree yesterday, and hope to decorate it tonight. We picked a frasier fir that is beautiful and chubby, but also has downturned limbs. I named it Eeyore. Not only this holiday season, but every day, we can help each other let go of expectations of how things "should" be, what they "should" look like, and how we "should" feel. There aren't actually any rules for how we are supposed to feel between Thanksgiving and New Years each year, or *any* day of the year. Toss your "shoulds" in the 2020 dumpster fire.

It is important, when things are bad, for folks to be able to say that they are bad, and not feel they have to pretend otherwise. Some days we may choose to fake it until we make it and that can be really helpful and pull folks out of toubling places, but it can be crazy-making when something is on fire in front of us, and we are expected to proceed as if that isn't so. It can make people's suffering feel invisible. One of the kindest gifts we can give another person is to see them, and meet them where they are.

When one is suffering, when things are on fire, there *are* paths forward. Jake Morrill shared in our reading:

Just as birds sing differently because you are there, you live differently for the presence of birds. That's not a poetic notion, but an ecological fact....

...Who can say how you've been hurtling through all these days, flung from morning to night, all of it such a far cry from what you had planned? All I know is that the wilderness alongside every moment, sprawling in each direction, holds more than the silence that theologians imagine of God. Listen. There is something like birdsong, sweeter for the simple, holy fact of your life. It calls even now from the forested edge of the day, to awaken that within you which has always been there, so you know what to follow as you make your way home.¹

Wherever you are in your emotional life, there is a door for you to open to connect with the season, if you wish to. You might engage with pagan themes of kindling light in the darkest time of year, and merriment making in the cold. You might remember the Christian story of the birth of a prophet, of wonder, and the vulnerable seeking shelter. You might share in the Jewish story of a miracle of oil light lasting long enough to allow a community at war to reconsecrate their sacred temple. You might honor the power of connection and celebration of African-American culture through candlelight and ritual in Kwanzaa. You might burn things or toast the end of 2020 on New Years Eve. Maybe any kind of holiday or symbolism is all too much and what resonates for you is the next breath and then the one after that. Moment by

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moment. That works too. Twinkling lights in windows and on trees remind us that we need each other's light to make our way through the shadows. Perhaps it is time to reach out to someone on the phone, or take a walk and listen for birds. Perhaps it is time to drive around and look at Christmas lights or clip some greens from a tree outside and light a candle. Maybe there is something that you have been feeling that you *need* to or *should* do, that you can just let go. There is no right way to do winter holidays in a pandemic, just choices we make. Wherever and however you are, is worthy and okay, *you* are worthy and okay, and you are connected to all that is, was, and will be.

Darkness soothe my weary eyes, that I may see more clearly.

When my heart with sorrow cries, comfort and caress me.

And then my soul may hear a voice, a still, small voice of love eternal.

Darkness when my fears arise, let your peace flow through me.²

So may it be. Amen.

² Shelley Jackson Denham (#55 Dark of Winter)