

“It’s not going to be different if you don’t believe it’s going to be different.”

I was caught having to chew on my own words. How many times have I said to myself and to others around me, your biography is your biology. What you say about yourself, what you say about your situation, what you say about your own wellness is how you will be. And there I was, caught not believing in the transformation I have believed can happen for as long as I can remember. “It’s not going to be different if you don’t believe it’s going to be different.”

More of my own words came back to me: “the only thing you can change about the situation is how you will experience it.”

How many times have I said that to others who are frustrated with the behaviour of others, or complaining about what a relative is doing, or a boss, or a co worker. The only thing you can change is how you choose to experience it.

And then the kicker “I need you to change.”

I need you to change. How many times have I said in a closing blessing, be the change you hope to experience in the world. Don’t you hate it when your own clichés come back to roost? I’ve been in the church most of my life; the last 14 years I’ve been preaching. This is one of those things I really believe – be the change you want to see in the world. But once in a while, I forget my own words, and neglect my own practice, caught in my own pity party or need to be right. My words come back to roost. If you want change, be the change. Then I was simply invited to pray. In weighing my response, I thought to myself “don’t just talk about it Blair, do it.”

In her book *Illuminata: a return to prayer*, a book she wrote in the 90’s Mariane Williamson says that contrary to popular belief, there is a worldwide movement underway. It’s under the radar screen and certainly out of the sites of the media cameras. It doesn’t sell many newspapers and it makes for boring television sitcoms. Something is up, she says, as if something significant, something big is about to happen. It starts with the world wide sense that something is fundamentally wrong.

“It isn’t just the environment, just the wars, the gangs, the violence, the drugs. It isn’t just the lack of integrity or values or love....our centre isn’t holding. Our centre isn’t there.”<sup>1</sup>

I had a conversation with a woman just this week about that which seems to be fundamentally wrong. Over the din of my car radio, she was telling me about her upcoming two week honeymoon to Venice. We both stopped when we heard more news about the young girl of Pakistan, who was shot in the neck and the head by the Taliban because she has been given an education. The woman in my car switched gears completely and asked my perspective about bringing children into this world. She told me lots of her married friends are talking about why they would ever do that. It does seem like there is something fundamentally wrong.

And yet, the movement, which flies under the radar screen of public scrutiny, the movement that is stirring the collective human condition is as old as creation itself. Williamson writes that there is a cosmic electricity running through the veins of those giving shape to this movement. “The antidote to what is fundamentally wrong,” she writes, “is the cultivation of what is fundamentally right...The choice to love each other is the only choice for a survivable future. Every time we open our hearts, we create the space for a global alternative.”<sup>2</sup> Williamson calls the world to prayer.

“I need you to change,” were the words that came back to me. In my ensuing experience of prayer, I realized that we have not lost our centre at all. In direct response to what seems to be despair, the light at the centre shines equally bright. I saw it in my time of prayer, I experienced it. The practice of prayer changes the world because I am changed in the doing. And if this is true for me, it’s true for the whole human family. Williamson writes that the whole human family faces again its fundamental story – we’re poised for a fall. “As a group we will fall, or as a group we will fly.”<sup>3</sup>

So on behalf of the whole human family, we are called to pray. We are called to the centre, to be different, to be the change we want to see in the world. We are called to pray in silence as we have experienced these past few weeks, returning to the centre where the hologram of God that lives within each of us, burns brightly.

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson, Mariane, *Illuminata: a return to prayer*, p 5, Riverhead Books, New York 1994

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p 6

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p 8

We are called to pray outloud, together, in community, the great prayers of the church, adding our voices to the human collective that has cried out over the eons. And today, in our music, in our storytelling, in our silence, we have been offering prayers of praise. We have simply opened our eyes and ears to the wonder of life, the wonder of love, the wonder of God and attempted to put words on our relationship with the ultimate.

You heard Judith speak about the text from 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles. It is the writer's own reflections, his own echoing of the events of Hebrew history. And this morning we heard in King David's final words, his great and very public hymn of praise, echoed and amplified by the text writer. These are the words of the great *Te Deum*, the cantata of praise the church has been singing since the fifth century. 'Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of our ancestor Israel, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. Riches and honour come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might; and it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all.'

But in real, practical, everyday terms, how do we pray such prayers, and more to point, when? I was having this conversation with Alan Marriott on Friday night as he prepared to explore the notion of wonder and awe at Friday Night Live. I suggested he simply remember those times when his breath was taken away but something he saw or experienced – the northern lights, the birth of his first son, the way the stars twinkle at night, the fireworks on English Bay, the way a musician offers his gift empowered by a whole new relationship with the instrument he plays.

I ask you now the same question. When did you last have your breath taken away by something so incredible, so stunning, so lovely, so honouring that all power and glory and victory and greatness rested on that moment. I think these moments touch us most when we least expect it. These are the moments when we realize there is something more, something beyond, something bigger than ourselves and we feel connected.

In the silence of this moment, I ask you to do that right now. Go to that moment, when you last had your breath taken away surprised or humbled by wonder, awe.

Now that you remember that moment, what words do you use to honour that experience? What is your prayer of praise? And our first prayer is one of praise....for acknowledging the holy moment when you felt connected, maybe for the first time in your life. What words do you pray? Write them....on your leg with an imaginary pen...even as you sit in silence.

Or are you weeping?

Or are you silent? Remembering God's first language?

Do your words seem inadequate? Offer them anyway.

For the sake of the whole human family we must pray. We must be the change we hope to see in the world. If this is to be a house of prayer, we must pray. Here and in our daily practice. Faith doesn't come uninvited. Faith comes because we practice it. Prayer is our first practice.

Amen.