

## Knowledge and Knowing

Theodore Parker Church

March 22, 2020

### Opening Words

A month or more ago, our choir offered us a version of Julian of Norwich's mantra, All will be well, all will be well, all manner of things will be well. Of this, the Rev. Meg Barnhouse writes, "as I experiment with this mantra and risk feeling stupid, which is a feeling I despise, I ask myself, 'Which is more stupid: to despair my whole life just in case things aren't going to end well, or to live in joy and hope my whole life, whether or not things turn out well?' I'm going to keep singing this mantra to my fears. All will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well."

Welcome to our worship service, friends – let us sing together in joy and hope  
For the Beauty of the Earth –

### Opening Hymn 21 For the Beauty of the Earth

#### Wooden Boats

I have a brother who builds wooden boats,  
Who knows precisely how a board  
Can bend or turn, steamed just exactly  
Soft enough so he, with help of friends,  
Can shape it to the hull.

The knowledge lies as much  
Within his sure hands on the plane  
As in his head;  
It lies in love of wood and grain,  
A rough hand resting on the satin  
Of the finished deck.

Is there within us each  
Such artistry forgotten  
In the cruder tasks  
The world requires of us,  
The faster modern work  
That we have

Turned our life to do?

Could we return to more of craft  
Within our lives,  
And feel the way the grain of wood runs true,  
By letting our hands linger  
On the product of our artistry?  
Could we recall what we have known  
But have forgotten,  
The gifts within ourselves,  
Each other too,  
And thus transform a world  
As he and friends do,  
Shaping steaming oak boards  
Upon the hulls of wooden boats?  
~ Judy Brown ~

## **Homily**

## **Knowledge and Knowing**

the Rev. Anne Bancroft

I'm looking at all your amazing faces – and reminded of a welcome that has new meaning today:

It is good to be; it is good to be here; it is good be here together. I have sometimes found that greeting a little cheesy, but it takes on new meaning in this environment and today it feels only holy, and real: It is good to be; it is good to be here; it is good be here together.

And just so that I see some smiles among us – and because we know the wisdom of laughter - I will share a joke that my mother offered me yesterday: What happens to a frog's car when it breaks down? It gets toad away!

These are trying times, friends. No doubt about it. We have not seen times such as these in any history of recent experience, and they are likely to last for quite awhile. But what I want us to feel encouraged to remember, this morning, is that we know, in our hearts and in our bodies, we know how to manage this. Like the builder, shaping the wood of his boat to fit the curves, there is wisdom in each of us to shape this time with care, and with love, and with compassion. We have that wisdom within us in a way that does not require more information, or more statistics, more numbers reported or maps projected. It's not about the knowledge we can acquire, but about the knowing that resides in each of us.

My colleague, the Rev. Victoria Safford, has a story in a meditation manual called, “Walking Toward Morning,” that describes her family’s daily time of blessing their food. In their house, she says, the table grace does not look like religion – it is not organized or prescribed – they all come to the table hungry and a bit tattered and can’t find the matches and the napkins are still in the laundry. They all sit down and then somebody leaves to wash their hands and then when they’re finally there they sing something which is as likely to be The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round as it is to be Dona Nobis Pacem or something more liturgical. But, she says, they are in a self-imposed time-out.

“The smell of the food becomes real. The sounds of our breath and the feel of our damp hands, still sticky, these are real. We are together, our circle invincible in this one holy moment . . . . We are trying to remember one true and real life. We are trying to touch that, to call it up . . . . We are trying to remember what we love and what to do, and how to be ourselves, good gifts.”

What I want us to remember today, friends, is that we have that within us. There has been enough wisdom spread within, among, and between us to guide us gently during this time of separation and fear.

We may want to remind ourselves what columnist Doug Larson suggested, that “wisdom is the reward you get for . . . listening when you’d have preferred to talk.” We need to be listening just now for the questions that will rise up over time. Like a good therapist would tell you, we have the answers within us – it’s all about listening to figure out the right questions, pulling from within us the answers we already know.

I wish you could have been with us last night on a Zoom call with some of our children. Rose shared a beautiful story called *Miss Rumphius*. One family shared the story of Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai called *Malala's Magic Pencil*. The next family chose to offer the story, *What Do You Do with a Problem?*, by Kobi Yamada. “I don’t know how it happened,” the story begins, “but one day I had a big problem. I didn’t ask for it, and I really didn’t like having it. But, it was there.” Saylor read to us, with a little help from his mom, eventually sharing the book’s surprise that, in fact, every problem has a secret, and the secret is that in every problem there is an opportunity . . . an opportunity for something good . . . you just have to look for it.

Nola share a book called *Apples* – about one child who wants to pick some apples, and another who comes along to help.

What I can share with you today is no less or more profound than the wisdom our children shared with each other last night. Miss Rumphius reminds us we must leave the world more beautiful. Malala reminds us of our capacity to make a difference. Kobi Yamada reminds us We have a big problem, and that it is likely – even in the midst of a problem we have never known – there is an opportunity for something good, likely having to do with caring for each other – sometimes as simple as helping each other find and collect our metaphorical apples.

These are things we know deep in our bones, pieces of wisdom that come out through our capacity to mold and shape our responses to this big problem.

It's like the table of grace, friends. "We are trying to remember one true and real life. We are trying to touch that, to call it up . . . We are trying to remember what we love and what to do, and how to be ourselves, good gifts."

We already know. We simply have to look within the problem, find the opportunity and the artistry that dwells within each of us, and then craft this time in our lives with a wisdom that will sustain us, all of us.

We will likely be called in ways we cannot yet know. Let's not rush to assume our tasks. We know the impact of this virus will be inequitable. Try as we might, we will not solve all the world's ills this time around, though we must do what we can.

The poet asks:

Is there within us each  
Such artistry forgotten  
In the cruder tasks  
The world requires of us,  
The faster modern work  
That we have  
Turned our life to do?

Indeed – and as we listen, and attend, we will discover it.

I am so grateful for all that so many of you have already been doing to keep us connected and cared for. There is a new page on our website to curate all the ideas that you are generating and sharing – it is a Google doc that you can each add to as you discover things that might be useful – labeled Covid-19 Resources in the header.

And this week, on Thursday, we will begin a Vespers service at 7 p.m. where you can bring your joys and concerns, remembering that joys are doubled and troubles are halved when shared.

The words of a classic come to mind, bringing us to our closing hymn, that I hope you will join Michael in singing . . .

For though they may be parted  
There is still a chance that they will see  
There will be an answer, let it be

**Closing Hymn**          Let it Be

At end of everything –  
It's in Every One of Us (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xd1QnNBZQ2A>)