

YOU HAVE ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD
The Rev. Julie Stoneberg
Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
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OPENING WORDS #435 ~ *Kathleen McTigue*

We come together this morning to remind one another
To rest for a moment on the forming edge of our lives,
To resist the headlong tumble into the next moment,
Until we claim for ourselves
Awareness and gratitude,
Taking the time to look into one another's faces
And see there communion: the reflection of our own eyes.

This house of laughter and silence, memory and hope,
is hallowed by our presence together.

Come, let us rest in these precious moments together.

STORY FOR ALL AGES *Silence* ~ *Lemniscates*

(In this picture book, a young person explores all the things they can hear in the silence.)

READING *from The Brain and The Now¹ (adapted)* ~ *David Eagleman*

When you are in a life-threatening situation, when everything is really hitting the fan, the amygdala [part of your brain] comes on line, acting as a secondary memory track, laying down memories... [this means] you've got much denser memories about what's happening, and when you read that back out, it seems like [that life-threatening situation] must have taken a longer time. In other words, time and memory are intertwined.

So when you're in a car accident and you remember all the details...the hood crumpled, the rear view mirror fell off, and I was watching the face of the other guy, and so on...it's because you're laying down this density of memories on a secondary track [in your brain.]

The way that we judge the passage of time has something to do with the density of memory. So when you [remember an intense experience], the only conclusion that you can make is that it must have taken a much longer time...

What's going on is a trick of the memory. It has to do with reading out much denser memories and making the assumption that [more] memories must equal a longer time...time and memory are inseparable.

And why does time speed up as you get older? When you're a child, you're figuring out all the rules of the world. You're figuring out how to operate in the world...what's

¹ <https://soundcloud.com/longnow/brain-and-now> 41:30

culturally appropriate, what's socially appropriate. Everything is novelty. When you get to the end of a childhood summer, you've had so many experiences are really new to you, that when you look back, it seems to have lasted a really long time because you have so many memories to draw on.

When you get to be old, and you look back at the end of a summer, you've (probably) been doing the same stuff, so when you try to remember what you just did during the last few months, you've only got a few little highlights, so what you assume is that it must have taken a shorter time. But that's because of the intertwining of time and memory and how we make judgements about time...

So how you can make it seem as though you live longer, is to seek novelty. Drive different routes home every day. Rearrange your office so that you see things differently. This allows you to inject novelty into your life, and that makes things seem to last longer. The more novelty the better.

MESSAGE

All the Time in the World

~ Rev. Stoneberg

David Eagleman, the neuroscientist that Marion quoted earlier, says that, "Time is one of the most common nouns in the English language."

As I sat at my computer preparing yesterday, I was so very aware of the pressure that time can exert. I remembered a commercial from many years ago...I can't recollect what it was for, and I had no success googling it. What I remember is a series of vignettes in which people approached check out counters and drive through windows and in the same way that one orders from a food menu, asked for some version of more time. They earnestly requested..."Could I get a couple more minutes?" "I need a two more hours today." "Can we make it next Friday instead?" "Give me just a few seconds."

I suppose I remember that commercial because it resonated with how I feel...I am someone who often wishes there were 8 days in each week, 30 hours in each day, 70 minutes in each hour. I would love to simply be able to order up a bit more time.

Now, logically, of course, I know that that extra time would soon be filled and I would only want more. Like any kind of addiction...getting more leads to needing more.

A few years ago, "The Mindful Revolution" was Time magazine's cover story.² That story read:

"If distraction is the pre-eminent condition of our age, then mindfulness...is the most logical response. Its strength lies in its universality. Though meditation is considered an essential means to achieving mindfulness, the ultimate goal is simply to give your attention fully to what you're doing. One can work mindfully, parent mindfully and learn mindfully. One can exercise and even eat mindfully. Chase [Bank even] ...advises customers on how to spend mindfully."

² <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,2163560,00.html>

Distraction is the pre-eminent condition of our age. The article goes on to say:

“Researchers have found that multitasking leads to lower overall productivity. Students and workers who constantly and rapidly switch between tasks have less ability to filter out irrelevant information, and they make more mistakes. Many corporate workers today find it impossible to take breaks. According to a recent survey, more than half of employed American adults check work messages on the weekends and 4 in 10 do so while on vacation.” I doubt that’s much different in Canada.

Distraction is the pre-eminent condition of our age. One Harvard study concluded that we spend 47% of our days in a scattered mental state – and that the more our minds wander, the more we experience unhappiness.³

Perhaps the means and intensity of our distraction has increased, but I don’t think it’s anything new to humankind. For example, Thoreau thought that the trappings of nineteenth century existence - the cycle of exhausting work to support property ownership - forced people to live as if they were sleep-walking.⁴ Slumbering through life, he called it.

I get that. Multi-tasking and hurrying from one thing to another is no recipe for being present to what is. No recipe for happiness. No way to enjoy each moment of life.

There’s a big difference, don’t you think, between wanting more time in order to meet deadlines or to get things done and wanting more time in order to live and experience each moment. And it is the latter...the experience of really living...that I want to talk about today.

Still, there’s a relationship between these two things; one needs to be able to let go of the demands to accomplish and produce in order to be fully present. And, being here now, really here now, is a way to let go of the stress that the limits of time place on us. And so, whether you are looking for a way to expand and enhance your experience of life, or whether you want not to feel so controlled by the constraints and demands of time, the practice of mindfulness might just be the answer.

Why? How is that so? Well, I’m no mindfulness expert...I’m learning about it along with you...but what I understand is that mindfulness is really about exercising the muscle of our brain to pay attention. It is about re-training our distracted minds to be able to focus and be present. Several articles I read were from people who had tried mindfulness exercises, were skeptical, and experienced being both frustrated and unable to focus during the exercises, but later felt and realized the results of mindfulness practice on their ability to be present and de-stress. Apparently, mindfulness is rather sneaky that way.

³ <https://www.mindful.org/3-simple-steps-stop-mental-time-traveling/>

⁴ <http://www.gradesaver.com/walden/study-guide/themes>
<https://www.mindful.org/3-simple-steps-stop-mental-time-traveling/>

For example, while meditation is not the only way to practice mindfulness, one study⁵ found that even for people with no prior meditation experience, a single 10-minute meditation resulted in the sense of expanded time. The researchers believe that this means that when we feel short on time, practicing mindfulness can slow things down and help a person gain some control.

Thich Nhat Hanh's book, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, which I highly recommend, is chock full of exercises one can do to practice this. Many of those exercises contain the use of triggers or reminders to help us return to mindfulness. It could be the ringing of the phone, or the moment of waking, or standing in line, or sitting at a stop light, or whenever walking stairs. Use those moments to simply pay attention...to your breath, to your sensations, to your surroundings. Then, savour that time. Staying in that mindfulness for just 15-30 seconds will help hardwire a new mindful neural pathway. Every moment of mindfulness contributes to our ability to become more mindful.

It's a beautiful thing that these triggers and reminders are already part of what one author calls the "everyday landscapes of life."⁶ To be mindful, we need nothing more than what is happening right here, right now. (Shall we take a mindful moment together?)

The reading Marion shared from David Eagleman was part of a podcast that Ben Wolfe recommended to me. In Ben's memory, the podcast suggested that intense noticing offers us the experience of immortality, or eternal life. And it is true that Eagleman's research shows that the stronger our memories, the longer the time that event seems to have spanned. Intense, strong memories are formed in life-threatening moments, and they are formed whenever we do or observe something new and different, and they are formed when we pay attention, with intent and purpose. So, paying attention, being mindful, will make it seem like we have a lot of time, but because by paying attention to here and now means that we can only be in the present moment, mindfulness also brings the feeling of timelessness into our lives.

We have all the time we need, right here, right now, to fully experience this moment. And that will be true in the next moment and in the next. If we are mindful.

If we are mindful. Would you like to be more mindful? One of the questions in our theme packet suggests we reflect on someone we consider to be a mindful person, and to identify the qualities they possess. Some of our covenant group facilitators reflected on this question together, and described people who are serene, calm, unhurried, compassionate, composed, present.

⁵ http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/Short_on_time_try_mindfulness

⁶ <https://www.mindful.org/3-simple-steps-stop-mental-time-traveling/>

Rather the opposite from the distraction, hurriedness, and multitasking many of us feel. For me, all that scatteredness comes with a feeling of being out of control. Of myself, of my to-do list, of the expectations placed on me. For that reason, I love this story told by Will Kabat-Zinn⁷...who while the son of mindfulness guru Jon Kabat-Zinn, is a dharma teacher in his own right.

He tells of a day when he was home with a sick 4-year old, and they spent the day playing "three little pigs." His son always wants to be the same one of the three little pigs, so they made a fort out of couch pillows and a sheet which the boy then crawled into, and then 'the wolf' yelled, "Little pig, little pig, let me in". To which his son yelled in response, "House of bricks!" As Kabat-Zinn says, his son wants to be sure he knows that no matter how much the wolf huffs and puffs, he won't be able to blow the house down.

Kabat-Zinn goes on to say that where our attention is concerned, we all want to be the house of bricks. But since our attention is untrained, we are more like a house of straw, easily overwhelmed, easily distracted, giving our attention to the past and the future, rather than the present. Things huff and puff at us, and we fall down.

They say that time doesn't exist...that it is simply a construct. And yet it plays a huge role in our lives, and has unwarranted control over us. Mindfulness practice promises to bring a certain sense of stability and strength to our minds. And in that state, we can find more richness in each moment of our everyday experience. From our breath, to the sound of chirping birds, to the feel of the warm sun on our bodies, to the smell of overturned rich earth in the garden. A timeless and vivid world surrounds us and offers itself to us.

How we spend our hours is how we spend our lives, says Annie Dillard. And, how we spend our moments is how we spend our hours. In order that the word 'time' becomes obsolete, may each of us, you, and I, become increasingly more mindful. That we may live our lives with both intention and attention...attending to the present moment. It is, after all, the only moment any of us truly has.

And so say all of us. Blessed be.

RESPONSIVE READING *These Roses* #556

These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God today.

__There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence.

Before a leaf-bud has burst, its whole life acts; in the full-blown flower there is no more, in the leafless root there is no less.

__Its nature is satisfied and it satisfies nature in all moments alike.

⁷ <https://www.mindful.org/a-house-that-wont-blow-down/>

But we postpone or remember. We do not live in the present, but with reverted eye lament the past, or, heedless of the riches that surround us, stand on tiptoe to foresee the future.

__We cannot be happy or strong until we too live with nature in the present, above time.

***CLOSING WORDS**

~ Mark Mosher DeWolfe

With what benediction shall I leave you?

This: In your life, may you know the holy meaning, the mystery that breaks into it every moment.

May you live at peace with your world and at peace with yourself.

And may the love of truth guide you in your every day.

Amen.