

WHAT ARE WE WILLING TO RISK... TOGETHER?

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OPENING WORDS *Invitation to Join the Journey* ~ Lyn Cox

Come you accidental pilgrims, you who find yourself on a journey of surprise and wonder.

Come you who emerge into this place as an act of liberation.

Come you who seek a life of mindfulness and a place to test your thoughts. Come you who bring hearts of all kinds: heavy hearts, rusty hearts, hearts broken open in revelation, hearts full of love to share.

Come you who seek courage, and you who have more courage than you realize.

Come you who stand [back,] gathering up the resources to claim your truth. Come you who have been in a bubble, you who are poised for transformation.

We begin our story again, gathering courage, love, mindfulness, and a sense of purpose.

We gather as people of all ages, of different abilities, different backgrounds, and different perspectives. We share a covenant, a direction for our shared journey, and a commitment to encourage and challenge one another to spiritual growth.

This path will ask much from us. Let us move forward with love. Let us move forward with appreciation for one another. Let us move forward knowing we are not alone.

Whoever you are, whatever your gifts, you are welcome to join this journey.

STORY FOR ALL AGES *If I Never Forever Endeavor* ~ Holly Meade

(A yellow bird considers whether or not it is worth getting out of the nest to attempt to fly.)

READING *Map of the Journey in Progress* ~ Victoria E Safford

Here is where I found my voice and chose to be brave.

Here's a place where I forgave someone, against my better judgment, and I survived that, and unexpectedly, amazingly, I became wiser.

Here's where I was once forgiven, was ready for once in my life to receive forgiveness and to be transformed. And I survived that also. I lived to tell the tale.

This is the place where I said no, more loudly than I'd thought I ever could, and everybody stared, but I said no loudly anyway, because I knew it must be said, and those staring settled down into harmless, ineffective grumbling, and over me they had no power anymore.

Here's a time, and here's another, when I laid down my fear and walked right on into it, right up to my neck into that roiling water.

Here's where cruelty taught me something. And here's where I was first astonished by gratuitous compassion and knew it for the miracle it was, the requirement it is. It was a trembling time.

And here, much later, is where I returned the blessing, clumsily. It wasn't hard, but I was unaccustomed. It cycled round, and as best I could I sent it back on out, passed the gift along. This circular motion, around and around, has no apparent end.

Here's a place, a murky puddle, where I have stumbled more than once and fallen. I don't know yet what to learn there.

On this site I was outraged and the rage sustains me still; it clarifies my seeing.

And here's where something caught me – a warm breeze in late winter, birdsong in late summer.

Here's where I was told that something was wrong with my eyes, that I see the world strangely, and here's where I said, "Yes, I know, I walk in beauty."

Here is where I began to look with my own eyes and listen with my ears and sing my own song, shaky as it is.

Here is where, if by surgeon's knife, my heart was opened up – and here, and here, and here, and here. These are the landmarks of conversion.

MESSAGE

There's a story being told in many places today; a story of a man riding a donkey through the gates of a city, and being welcomed there by crowds of supporters, even worshippers. You, I expect, can easily envision this scene...a simple stone-paved street, where common folk have gathered waving palm branches in homage and hope. And, perhaps you also know that most often this story is told in the light of sacrifice...that this man, Jesus, entered Jerusalem knowing that in doing so, he would be captured and crucified, and that his death was necessary in order that he might save the world.

Let me put that story into a different perspective...one that is not as often seen. About five years ago, theologian John Dominic Crossan wrote a reflection for the Huffington Post¹ in which he suggested that Jesus entered Jerusalem not to die, but to protest...to offer resistance to Rome's control over both the "City of Peace" and the Temple of God. This protest happened during the time of Passover, when in a show of egotistical power, the governor Pontius Pilate had come to Jerusalem with extra troops in the name of needed security. (Anything sound familiar there?) Crossan suggests that Jesus entered from the east on a donkey as a non-violent action in counterpoint to the raging stallions of the Romans entering from the west. To do so was indeed very risky...but like many who stand up to power and injustice...he did it anyway.

These are times when there is much to protest and much to resist. There are forces at work that would take all power away the people and put it in the hands of a few rich folk. There are those who wish to dominate our minds and our pocketbooks with consumerist impulses. There is a culture of fear that works to have us believe that we are not safe and that we don't have a voice. There are messages of inadequacy and self-doubt getting through to our

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/john-dominic-crossan/a-death-in-jerusalem_b_1391563.html

children every day. There are systems of oppression and colonialism that have been imbedded in our culture that would have us turn a blind eye to the ways in which we continue to contribute to those systems. Yes, my friends. There is much to protest and much to resist. And it all seems to be rushing in on powerful stallions, impossible to overcome.

I take hope in these words of Edward Everett Hale, a Unitarian minister of the 19th century:

I am only one,
But still I am one.
I cannot do everything,
But still I can do something;
And because I cannot do everything,
I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.

And so today, I want to do the something that I can do. I want to follow Jesus' example. I want to listen to that little voice within that says... "See that little donkey over there? Go untie it. Take a ride on it."² I'm going to get all personal and take some humble risks with you today, entering the gates in service of something greater.

Now, I'm very tempted to put all kinds of caveats on what I'm going to say, but instead, I've decided just to trust that you will see and hear what I'm sharing in all of its fullness...all of its meanings...all of its consequences...to whatever extent you're able. I do ask for you to treat me and what I share gently and with respect...and again, I'm just going to have to trust you. I'm not sharing in this way in order to elicit your advice or your pity. I'm sharing this in the interest of something greater...I'll get to that in a few minutes.

Something you may not know about me...or perhaps it's incredibly obvious...is that I am not very comfortable in my body, and I carry shame about this. I have not lived an embodied life; it's easy for me to vacate and exist only in my mind, or even as a disembodied presence. I've had years of therapy, hundreds of massages and treatments, and experimented with countless ways to change and/or understand myself. For a while, decades ago, I even considered being a surrogate mother because I thought the experience of being pregnant might bring me fully in. Of course, there have been moments in my life when I've been able to be in my body...it's just that they are few and far between, and I suspect that the power of those few experiences even contributes to me exiting again just as fast as I can.

Let me put all this in a bit of context...I live alone, I am single and have been for most of my life, I am geographically distant from family and friends, and I work in a vocation that establishes something of a boundary between the professional and the personal. It's really a perfect way to live an unembodied life.

Well, you know how you start down a path and it leads to unexpected places? About a year ago, I said to myself, "Oh my gosh, Julie, you are in your 60's. If you're going to have the

² Story found in Mark 11

experience of being in a body before you REALLY have to leave your body, you'd better get to it." And I made a commitment to myself to try harder...be more willing to take risks for the sake of being present...because I could not stop hearing the wisdom in claims that being fully present is the only way to really experience life in its fullness. And I want that experience.

Then, last summer I had two encounters that led me to hope that I could access my body if I could more fully access my voice. (There is, you know, a wonderfully symbiotic connection between physical voice...that is, speaking/singing/ breathing... and metaphorical voice...saying one's truth and finding the courage to speak.) I came across a great quote yesterday...from someone named Zwaantje de Vries, who is a teacher with the Roy Hart Centre in France. She said, "There is nothing that gets you closer to yourself than your voice, [and] there is nothing that gets you closer to the Other, (capitol O) than the voice."

And so, during my sabbatical, I chose to go down that path...I went to NYC to work with the Linklater Center, and I took private lessons in the Roy Hart method from a teacher in Minneapolis, and I seized every opportunity I could to sing with others.

And on I went...and the 'voice' theme started to weave itself into things that seemed beyond embodiment and voice...and into the other work that I was doing, which included some Intercultural Competency Training and a workshop on visioning the final chapter in one's ministry...and I found that the thread of voice and speaking my truth kept showing up.

[Are you still with me? Maybe you heard me say, a moment ago, 'the final chapter in one's ministry.' I don't know exactly what that means for me, but I do know that time marches on, and that one day I will retire...and so the time is ripe to reflect on that 'final chapter.' More about that another time.]

And so I kept following the path, the stone-paved street ...and I realized that what I'm being called to do is to use my voice to more clearly articulate what I desire and what matters to me ...that is, to show my heart, to show the most tender places in myself...by being willing to speak, which includes being willing to be present, which includes being willing to be vulnerable, which includes being willing to be hurt.

Of course, this is complicated by the fact that since I have pushed down my voice for most of my years, and I'm not completely sure if I can even find it, or my heart's desire, let alone recognize it as authentic. Still, I plan to share of my 'desires' next Sunday. And, just saying that is scary.

I enter through these gates cautiously and a bit fearfully ...this is a place of vulnerability...this path of speaking and living my truth. In part, because as a minister, all that I say and do must be in service of this faith and of this community, and I take that very seriously. And because, of course, inherent in risk is danger...I mean, people die because they take risks!

But here's the rub...what if we don't take risks? What if we don't resist the stallions of power? How can we possibly live into a better kind of existence without risking something? How

might I call you to be vulnerable or ask you to step into deeper relationship with yourself and with others if I cannot, or do not, do that myself? I have to be willing to take that journey too, and as Victoria Safford eluded to in the reading earlier, to be able to learn all along that path, learning made possible because I was present and willing to show up.

What I really want to do today is to make a commitment and a promise to you...that I will do my best to show up, to be present, whenever we are together, and that when I speak, I will speak plainly and truthfully from my heart. Let me say that again...I am making here a promise to you...to show up, to be present, whenever we are together, and to speak plainly and truthfully from my heart. And I ask for your help in reminding me of this promise, because I know I'm going to break it again and again.

And I make this promise, I believe, in the service of something greater, in service of the Other (capitol O.) It is not about me claiming space, or making it all about moi. I want to enter the space we are in together on a donkey, willing to take some risks in the service of the beloved community that we are working to create here together. I expect that means that my failures and shortfalls will be even more evident. But since I truly believe that we each have within us an incredible light, I also choose to trust that by risking something of myself, my own light will be able to glow a bit more brightly.

The service title today is "What are We Willing to Risk...Together?" and so I need to say a bit about the 'together' part. I've already said that in order to take the risks I am here and now committing to, I have to choose to trust you. I choose to trust that you will receive my voice with love and care. I choose to trust that you will respect my truth and my story. And I choose to trust that you will try to stay in relationship, with me, and with this community, even when it gets painful and hard. You have my trust, and I hope that I have yours, and this is what we can do together.

This promise is the something that I can do. I can resist all the powers and principalities that tell me that I am not enough, that I have and am nothing of value, that my voice doesn't matter...by claiming my voice and my truth and using them in service of a community and a world where we are in it fully present, together, holding each other in both vulnerability and strength.

And in order to be in these risks together, I ask that you consider making a commitment to show up in the same way. With all of who you are. With all of your cracks and patches. With all of your gifts and your insecurities. With all of the learning you've acquired and with full knowledge of the learning you've yet to do. With all of your doubt and all of your light. Because if each of us does the one something that we can do, however risky it may seem, we can truly resist and re-direct power in order to create an incredible force of love and beauty and joy. I believe this vision is worth the risk.

So be it.

READING *All That We Have Been, All That We Will Become* ~ Leslie Ahuvah Fails

All that we have been separately
and all that we will become together
is stretched out before and behind us
like stars scattered across a canvas of sky.

We stand at the precipice, arms locked
together like tandem skydivers
working up the courage to jump.

Tell me, friends:

What have we got to lose?

Our fear of failure?

Our mistrust of our own talents?

What have we got to lose?

A poverty of the spirit?

The lie that we are alone?

What wonders await us in the space
between the first leap
and the moment our feet, our wheels
however we move our bodies
across this precious earth
touch down softly on unknown soil?

What have we got to lose
that we can't replace with some
previously unimaginable joy?

Blessed are you, Spirit of Life
who has sustained us, enlivened us
and enabled us to reach this moment.

Give us courage in our leaping,
and gratitude in our landing.

And share with us in the joy of a long
and fruitful ministry together.

CLOSING WORDS

~ Robert Mabry Doss

For all who see God, may God go with you.

For all who embrace life, may life return your affection.

For all who seek a right path, may a way be found ...

And the courage to take it, step by step.

Blessed be. And Amen.