

Rev Brigid Beckman A Time for Every Purpose Under Heaven 8-8-21

Thank you for inviting me to share this morning's service with you! I'm honored and delighted to be here, and especially grateful to Roger for both his invitation, and collaboration. When Roger reached out to me, I realized pretty quickly that I wanted to talk about transitions and change. "We teach what we need to learn!"

I recently moved back to Albany after spending the last four years living, teaching and ministering in the North Shore/Boston area, and for the past few months change, transitions and threshold moments have been intensely front and center in my life. My move is prompted in part by the stark way the past 18 months have pushed many of us to reassess our priorities.

Moving back to Albany means being closer to much of my family and many longtime friends, and also closer to the sweet gift of two grandbabies arriving this August and September. But this opening also came at the behest of very loud and clear-- and sometimes painful-- messages from the Universe about my life and work, and where Spirit was leading me next. Perhaps you can relate?!

I recently heard the phrase "me-search" on a podcast, where the researcher talked about how her questions about herself and her own life often made her curious about other people's reaction to the same concerns. Her curiosity stemming from self-study in turn has long fed her career as a behavioral science researcher. That movement from the personal to the communal resonated as it speaks to my own sense of how my spiritual data collection often unfolds.

I know my individual, personal-world life changes are merely a faint echo of those wrought in our world at large today by the ongoing pandemics of Covid-19, systemic racism, climate change, political and societal divisions, and even simply a pace of life that sometimes feels daunting. I cannot remain in my own little bubble-- ideally my

“me-search” for answers, for peace, for deeper connection to the Oneness and Great Mystery leads me from *my own heart back into the heart of the world*, which are ultimately one and the same, no matter how often I forget that!

So with those personal and communal realities in mind, let me assure you with great confidence...that I do NOT have a roadmap of neat, tidy, new, mind-blowing solutions to the challenges we face today. Instead, what I have and hope to offer this morning are pieces of wisdom and insight that I’ve gained over time, from sources that circle me back to trusting in that Great Mystery and Source of all Love.

Before I share the rest of my talk, I’d like to begin with a short centering practice. Then Roger and the wonderful music ministers will lead us in song before I offer a guided meditation. And I offer an invitation as we journey together this morning; call to mind and hold gently, a time of transition or a change *you* are facing.

Whether you are here in person, joining the livestream, or watching the recording, I invite you now to shift and settle as comfortably as you are able. Sense your feet resting on the floor and notice all the places where your body is supported as you sit...and, taking a deep breath in... and out...allow yourself to arrive gently and fully in this moment...

As I breathe in, I let go

As I breathe out, I let go

As I breathe in, I sense the slightest pause before breathing out

I breathe in and breathe out

and sense the ending of this breath that holds the beginning of the next

I breathe in and breathe out

and sense this threshold time of sacred pause together, just as it is

Welcome to *this* threshold moment, just as it is.

John O'Donohue was an Irish poet, theologian and philosopher. He reminds us that the root of the word *threshold* comes from the act of threshing cereal grains to remove the husks from the seeds that feed us. As I spent time this last week reflecting, reading, praying, journaling, and meditating in preparation for giving this talk today, that image sometimes felt all too literal!

I could feel the mental thrashing of reflecting on my own experiences, the twists and turns and changes of my life as I contemplated the questions that I wrestle with: How have I found roadmaps for being open to the changes in my life, and what insight might I share about our lives in community? How have I recognized-- either gracefully or with resistance--the gifts found in moments of transition, especially if those “moments” stretch into months, or longer? How can I welcome in the liminal spaces, the thresholds of transition between what has been and what will be?

O'Donohue's writings weave in a deep compassion for our human experiences with a mystical, lyrical understanding of our relationship with the divine-- and he is one of my most often reached for soul-guides. To explore the idea of threshold moments, I'd like to share a few passages from his book, ***To Bless the Space Between Us***:

“It remains the dream of every life to realize itself, to reach out and lift oneself up to greater heights. A life that continues to remain on the safe side of its own habits and repetitions, that never engages with the risk of its own possibility, remains an unlived life. There is within each heart a hidden voice that calls out for freedom and creativity. We often linger for years in spaces that are too small and shabby for the grandeur of our spirit. Yet experience always remains faithful to us...”

He continues: *Looking back along a life's journey, you come to see how each of the central phases of your life began at a decisive threshold where you left one way of being and entered another. A threshold...is an intense frontier that divides a world of feeling from another. Often the threshold becomes clearly visible only once you have crossed it. Crossing can often mean the total loss of all you enjoyed while on the other side; it becomes the dividing line between the past and the future. More often than not, the reason you cannot return to where you were is that you have changed; you are no longer the one who crossed over....*

And finally, he writes: *In a culture governed by speed... the exterior rate of change is relentless...Our culture has little to offer us for our crossings... This is where we need to retrieve and reawaken our capacity for blessing. If we approach our decisive thresholds with reverence and attention, the crossing will bring us more than we could ever have hoped for. This is where blessing invokes and awakens every gift the crossing has to offer."*

"Looking back along a life's journey"... part of my mental thrashing this week was that looking back. At the ripe old age of nearly a grandma, I look back and see with blinding clarity the big, decisive transitions in my life, and I see with wonder the hand of God in it all. These are the moments where I may have sensed the intense frontier that was around the corner, but I certainly had no idea of what the cost or blessings would be in each of those crossings.

I see that saying yes to the unexpected timing of becoming a mother meant leaving college at the end of my sophomore year. I see how my sense of self and possibility expanded when I returned to college, years later, when my spirited, lively now four children were teens. I see how being a mother to those teens shaped my sense of being a teacher. I look at leaving public school teaching in 2008, exhausted to my

core from unwinding 25 years of marriage, and I see how that leaving grew into a whole new life, a life that eventually led me to ministry.

I see how those twin callings of teaching and ministry led me to uproot my life in 2017 to take a chance on a new all girls high school, 30 minutes outside of Boston. And now, 4 years later, back again for this next threshold-- a space in time infused for me this summer with the sweetness of new life on its way to our family, and a feeling of homecoming. Yet infused as well with an ever deepening awareness of the call to step into the broken places in our world and be of use, to be of service, to be part of healing.

In my own awakenings, I recognize in each of these instances there came a moment of saying YES. Then came the day to day, moment to moment living out of what the yes would *really* mean. Stepping up to the threshold may have taken months or years, and the thrashing was not always easy or gentle. But it was often my own resistance and my illusion that my growth happened solely by my own efforts that made it harder for me to let go and let god...

In the familiar wisdom from Ecclesiastes we heard earlier, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven” we are reminded to trust in the unfolding. Whatever changes we are facing in the seasons of our lives, we are invited into the rhythm as Mark Nepo shared several weeks ago, “that things always come together, and they always come apart.”

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

3:1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

3:2 a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

3:3 a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

3:4 a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
3:5 a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
3:6 a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
3:7 a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
3:8 a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace...

In my thrashing, threshing review of my life this week, I felt again that trust in the unfolding. In my own unfolding, and in the unfolding of all this world needs from me. I remembered again that the hidden voice in my heart that was calling out for freedom and creativity in those liminal moments-- that voice is the voice of God within. What I remembered this week, in every fiber of my being, is that *time in silence* is crucial for me to hear the hidden, still voice of my heart, the voice of the universe, the voice of God calling.

And yet I also know in every fiber of my being, that there are times when I can only recognize that God-voice through the sound of YOUR voice. As I move from "me-search" into the blessing of "we-search," I feel the Oneness that binds us to each other, and to the rest of creation. As we gather in prayer to surrender to the flow of Love, individually, and in community, we are strengthened in that Oneness to rest in Spirit, to feel the powerful grace of God that is ALWAYS present, and that calls us into the fullness of our being.

Ecclesiastes teaches me over and over again, that "in the rhythm of creation, I sense the divine order and flow of all that is within and without." As Love prepares me to be a sanctuary, I surrender to where Love calls me. And Love always calls us to *be love in action* to each other, to bring peace and healing and presence to the world around us wherever and whenever we can.

I'll close with a poem by Jan Richardson that compassionately invites us to recognize our "thrashing" minds and hearts in times of transition, change or loss, and to stay...

Stay

I know how your mind
rushes ahead,
trying to fathom
what could follow this.

What will you do,
where will you go,
how will you live?

You will want
to outrun the grief.
You will want
to keep turning toward
the horizon,
watching for what was lost
to come back,
to return to you
and never leave again.

For now,
hear me when I say
all you need to do
is to still yourself,
is to turn toward one another,
is to stay.

Wait

and see what comes
to fill the gaping hole in your chest.
Wait with your hands open
to receive what could never come
except to what is empty
and hollow.

You cannot know it now
cannot even imagine
what lies ahead,
but I tell you
the day is coming
when breath
will fill your lungs
as it never has before,
and with your own ears
you will hear words
coming to you new
and startling.
You will dream dreams
and you will see the world
ablaze with blessing.

Wait for it.
Still yourself.
Stay.

May we stay in stillness, pray in confidence, and *be* the blessings ablaze in the world.
Amen.