

Whose Shoulders Do We Stand On? Sunday, February 20, 2022
Rev Brigid Beckman

Let's begin by taking a good deep, cleansing, energizing breath together...

Looking ahead on Tuesday to today's Daily Word was *my* inspiration for this talk. This line jumped out as a way to weave connecting threads from the past few week's messages: **I admire and respect the sacred calling and work of innovative and groundbreaking thinkers and leaders. The work they have done to forge new paths and lead humanity in new directions inspires me.**

Rev Ogun's reflections on MLK continue to cause me good, holy discomfort. Last week, I shared the work of two groundbreaking thinkers who inspire and challenge me.

Rereading passages from Andrew Harvey, and drawing on the teaching of Rev Chelsea, lit a fire in me. *Their* holy fire of sacred activism opened a window of inspiration that pushed my holy imagination open.

Yet as the week wore on, my messy familiar practice of think, pray, write, pace, write, think... couldn't quite lift the heaviness that lurked in my heart. The world and its heartbreaks left me feeling way more sad, worried and tired than *inspired*: the looming large-scale geopolitical fears and heartbreaks of this unsettling time we live in; those close to home heartbreaks, like the death of our much loved friend Cathy; worries about the health of dear friends, and stunned at how their experiences shed light on the state of our exhausted healthcare system; even the seemingly inconsequential worry about car repairs that took longer and cost more than expected; and just these days of winter cold winds... Can you relate?? Have I inspired you yet?? :-)

"I've heard inspiration described as the breath of God, an inner quickening. "One of the definitions of "inspiration" is to draw in a breath, to inhale. Let's take a deep breath together one more time! And as we pause to breathe in the very breath of God, here's the heart of my talk, the heart of my prayer: pause, breathe, repeat. Feel my own breath as God breathing life in me. Pause. Breathe. Repeat. Now do that in the company of beloved spiritual friends and family, and see what happens.

INSPIRATION: I am grateful to those who inspire me. I am grateful to *you*, my beloved Unity family. Because I have to show up for *you*, I then also have to show for *me*. Inspired by your presence, over and over again, I get to turn to quiet prayer and meditation, turn to writers who rekindle my insight, turn to heartfelt conversations that stir and soothe my soul. Each time I wrestle with these talks, hoping to inspire us to live into our sacred purpose as a community, I renew my own commitment to walk with God through every moment. I stand on your shoulders, while offering mine to you.

Who are the voices that have led you to a new, or deeper understanding of your path? Whose shoulders do you stand on? Take a moment to bring those people to your heart-mind.

\My own list of shoulders I stand on includes some of the “biggies:” Rabbi Jesus, The Buddha, and it includes teachers inspired by them: Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, Matthew Fox, Dorothy Day, Richard Rohr, Mirabai Starr, Henri Nouwen, Thich Nhat Hanh.

My list includes writers and poets I’ve encountered over years, whose words changed the way I see myself and the world: Virginia Woolf, Rosemary Wahtola Trommer, Emily Dickinson, Toni Morrison, Naomi Shihab Nye, Sue Monk Kidd, Lousia May Alcott, Mary Oliver, Ross Gay, Jan Richardson, Krista Tippet.

My list of inspiration includes Brigid of Ireland, the ancient Celtic triple goddess-- maiden, mother and crone; and the 5th century abbess (and according to some stories, bishop), St. Brigid of Kildare; and my mother’s grandmother Brigid Mahoney, whose cells and name I carry and whom I never met; and the fierce and sweet little being, my granddaughter, Keeley Brigid.

Thich Nhat Hanh writes in *Present Moment Wonderful Moment*:

If you look deeply into the palm of your hand, you will see your parents and all generations of your ancestors. All of them are alive in this moment. Each is present in your body. You are the continuation of each of these people.

Take a moment to look closely at the palm of your hand: you are not only a continuation of all those generations, you are a miracle. Think for a moment about what it took for your soul and spirit to be born into this exact moment.

We may not know many or any of those past generations, yet they are a part of us, and we stand on their shoulders. I have a friend from One Spirit who for years mourned that although she was a beloved adopted child, she had no knowledge of her birth ancestors. Until one day as a group of us talked, she came to the sweet insight that her birth ancestors *knew her*, and she was doubly blessed by the ancestors from her adoptive family as well.

We may be inspired by the goodness we received from the shoulders we stand on in our families. We may be inspired by our family legacies of what *not* to do, of how we want to reimagine that legacy.

I've heard inspiration described as the breath of God, an inner quickening. This quickening is mine as I forge new paths and boldly journey forward, creating my life anew.

Growing strong in generational love. Healing generational trauma. We forge new paths and boldly journey forward, by coming into the present moment, alive with the mystery and wonder of the miracle that *we are*, as we co-create our lives walking with God.

Look again at the palm of your own hand. In this moment, what is your legacy? How have you inspired those around you, simply by being you? This afternoon, Cathy Williams's friends and family will gather to celebrate her life. Cathy inspired us by her courage and her openness on her cancer journey, but she also inspired her family and friends by her love of books and storytelling and line dancing and mermaids. By her deep thirst for spirituality. In her courage to reshape her life in ways that fit her innermost being. That is a truly inspiring legacy.

This passage is attributed to Dorothy Day in the book *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion* by Robert Coles:

“We are communities in time and in a place, I know, but we are communities in faith as well--and sometimes time can stop shadowing us. Our lives are touched by those who lived centuries ago, and we hope that our lives will mean something to people who won't be alive until centuries from now. It's a great “chain of being,” someone once told me, and I think our job is to do the best we can to hold up our small segment of the chain. That's one kind of localism, I guess, and one kind of politics – doing your utmost to keep that chain connected, unbroken.”

Cathy did her utmost to keep that chain connected, unbroken. My list of visionaries, luminaries and poets, (a list which to me sounded somehow like the “begats” in Genesis, but with far more women!) are lives that did, or are doing, their utmost to keep that “chain of being” unbroken. What will we do with our “one wild and precious life?” (Thank you Mary Oliver) In our own local lives, how are we called towards “what is mine to do?”

To keep divine inspiration flowing I make time to rest in contemplative stillness. I begin each day with a prayer for a receptive mind and heart. I pray for the courage and clarity to release my rigid expectations. I live in a state of gratitude for the inspiration that flows from God and the opportunity to share it.

Starr Regan DiCurccio writes in *Divine Sparks: Interfaith Wisdom for a Postmodern World*, in the chapter titled “A Prayerful Life:”

Life is a mystery that holds much we will never understand. Our particular role is part of that mystery. Why was I born? What am I meant to do with my life? These existential questions can be difficult to answer, but they are rewarding to contemplate and work with over the years. Answers vary and change but the beauty of the gift of life never does. We can enter that mystery and experience awe at our own manifestation and all of creation. This wonder is always available if we wish to tap into it. Sitting with it in meditation and prayer can lead to what is termed “absorption” in Buddhism, or “mystical union” in Christianity.

Often when we pray, we are seeking change...A crisis can bring us to prayer after years of silence. but there is another reason to pray. Prayer changes us. When we become prayerful, meditative people we increase our awareness of our circumstances and relationships. We come to know ourselves more deeply. Our true selves emerge and we can live with well-considered intention. Ultimately, all our aspirations may be based in love. Our divine sparks are fanned. This alone is reason enough to lead a prayerful life.

We are a praying community. We pray in trust that all we need to do is settle our bodies, our minds and our hearts into the stillness, into the presence of God, and we will be empowered with the blessings of courage, clarity, discernment, peace, abundance, faith, hope... no matter how hard it is at times to understand this mystery of life.

From Genesis 2:7 Then the Lord God formed them from the dust of the ground and breathed into their nostrils the Breath of Life; and they became living beings.

We are living beings, enlivened with the very breath of God. In every moment of our human journeys we are invited into the Presence of the Source of all LOVE: we encounter our holy heartbreaks, our holy imaginations, our holy discomfort, and our holy healing. We ARE Divine Sparks, holding each other up when inspiration fails us, walking each other home, spreading our light into the dark corners of a hurting world. We are called always into the stillness, as individual sparks, and then called into community, to grow the world we long to see.

And so we pray:

Sweet Spirit, Mother-Father God, we walk and move and pray in You. We offer our grateful hearts in thanks for this time together in sacred stillness. As we listen to Your voice within, may we feel the quickening of Your breath in us, inspiring us to live fully in your Divine flow of grace and goodness. Bless us with the courage and clarity that we need in order to transform the world by our love and service. May it be so. And so it is. Amen.