

“Another Morning”

A Sermon by Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull
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Cohasset, MA
May 6, 2007

You wake up, glance at the clock, look out the window and begin once again to sort out what's happening. What happened yesterday or last week? What's on your agenda for the day? Do you have a spouse or partner next to you? Are you missing a spouse or partner next to you? Are you glad to connect or would you rather be alone with your thoughts? What is yesterday's imprint on your state of mind? What is your anticipation for the next hour? Do you have children to tend to? Do you have children out of the nest or perhaps no children at all? What is your state of mind, your state of heart? How are you faring? Is this sunrise welcome or dreaded or of no special interest to you?

How many times we have awoken to what seemed like just another morning. Then events of the day, coupled or not with our own choices, pulled us around a corner that changed everything. Where were you on November 22, 1963 or September 11, 2001 or maybe even December 7, 1941? Our associations with these dates carry feelings personal and historical. No matter how far we were from the core events of those days and even if we weren't here at all, our lives are intimately and permanently transformed because of the pivotal events we associate with those times.

Then again, maybe it's January 30 or August 27 or September 15, dates with no particular significance to you perhaps, but each marks the birthday of one of my three daughters. The morning of September 15, 1970, for example, I awoke and thought, "Well, it might be today," and in a few hours was decidedly hopeful that it would be today. At 11:09 PM I welcomed Shana into the world, and here she is this morning. I love you, Shana!

Then there was that late December day – December 23, 1975 to be exact – when my stepdaughter, Lisa, landed at Kennedy Airport in the giant womb of an aircraft from Korea, to be scooped up into the arms of her new parents!

When a child is born or arrives in such a wondrous form, nothing is ever again the same. The morning of such an event can be portentous or nondescript, but we seldom forget it when it becomes a day of birth or adoption or marriage or yes, departure, separation, or death.

Who among us will forget that blue-sky September morning, the outbreak of a seemingly perfect day, and then...? Who among us will forget a particular Christmas or Thanksgiving or Passover when a family dynamic kicked in with ferocity or unfettered exuberance that engraved into the hard wiring of our memories the feelings that followed? Yet there was that Christmas morning, that Thanksgiving morning, that Passover morning when we leapt out of bed, anticipating every possible blessing of the holiday at hand.

Morning is a mixed blessing. That not exactly Pollyanna poet, Robert Frost, knew this well.

Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold,
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only for an hour.

Then leaf subsides to leaf,
So Eden sank to grief,

So dawn goes down to day;
Nothing gold can stay.

Dawn's early light holds deeply rooted vacillation for many of us. Daybreak carries freshness, new light, another chance. Sunrise invites us to wake up, stretch, take action, and venture forth. Morning whets the appetite of our curiosity. What will happen? What can happen? Depending upon what has happened, we tend to greet dawn with the countless options that occupy that space between anticipation and dread. The voice of morning says: "Who knows what the day will bring? It's too early."

For some of you here this morning, you may be summoning such mornings of the past week. You rose with no particular expectation. Then the phone rang. You rose with no particular expectation, took your children to school, then picked up the paper only to read that ... You rose with no particular expectation, went off to work, and before day's end were broadsided by a summons from your boss. You rose with no particular expectation, went downstairs to start the coffee, and a neighbor knocked madly at the door. You rose with no particular expectation, lived out the day, and nothing rocked your boat except the waves that surged alongside your commuter ferry. It was "just another day."

Then there are the good dreams and bad that linger from the night before or the bitter and the sweet that linger from our yesterdays. With a few drops of gloom in the eyelids of soul and psyche, we anticipate the worst. With a few drops of contentment, we hope for the best. How readily can we invoke that psalm that proclaims:

"This is the day which the Lord has made;
Let us rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalm 118:24)

With what degree of gusto did we sing just moments ago:

"Mine is the sunlight! Mine is the morning,
born of the one light Eden saw play!
Praise with elation, praise every morning,
God's recreation of the new day!"

Context matters. The night before, the day before, matter.

Yet each morning, no matter what night held or yesterday brought, offers another chance to do and to be. Our senses are quickened for better or worse, compelled by light made visible by the turning of our earth-home. No matter how many sunrises we have known, we are taken by surprise – magic in a golden orb that stretches ever so slowly as we lean toward the light. Carried by the earth itself, we are drawn into a brand new day. We are drawn into the new.

Judeo-Christian Scripture is filled with references to the new – the new covenant, the new Jerusalem, a new heart, a new spirit, a new world. Paul Tillich, who stirred the foundations of 20th century Protestant theology, bid us to heed the "words of the Old and New Testaments which speak of the new that God makes in life and history." Why, he asked, do the writers of these texts – even the ponderous Preacher of Ecclesiastes – hold the new above the old? "The new," he answered, "is hidden in the profound mystery which veils every creation, birth as well as rebirth."

"Nothing," he continued, "is more surprising than the rise of the new within ourselves....The new being is born in us, just when we least believe in it. It appears in remote corners of our souls which we have neglected for a long time.... It shows a way where there was no way before....[and] it appears when and where it chooses.... Readiness is the only condition for it ... "

No matter what the day holds, no matter what the level of our expectancy or dread, the newness of a fresh day calls us to be ready for whatever. The sun rises and lights our way, however gnarled the way might be. The night passes and releases us to the morning, however dearly we cling to the night, however fiercely we claim our visions of yesterday. The sun rises and surprises us utterly, whatever surprises the day holds.

How has it been with you? With what readiness did you greet this day? What are the joys and concerns, the hopes and hurts of your morning?

How has it been with us? With what compassion, with what deep listening, have we greeted one another? How open are our hearts for the state of heart of our Meeting House companions who sit right next to us in these pews? How open are our hearts for our far-flung neighbors who churn in the realities of war and genocide and yes, once unimaginable truth-telling and reconciliation? How open are our hearts for our near-flung neighbors who celebrate and suffer? With what readiness are we greeting the morning of a world that turns I swear by the hybrid fuel of possibility and perseverance?

Morning is a mixed blessing, but a mixed blessing is a blessing too. In that deliciously quirky syntax of e.e. cummings, can we also say, no matter what the morning holds,

“I thank You God for most this amazing day...”

With the psalmist who sang on that ancient morning amid long-forgotten particulars, can we sing:

“This is the day which the Lord has made;
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.”

Gathered here a spare breath away from the open ocean, can we see with the poet, Pablo Neruda, that:

“...every day on the balcony of the sea,
wings open, fire is born,
and everything is blue again like morning.”

For each of us, it is another morning, another day. Hal Borland reminds us of the

“temptation to say, as May spreads the leaves and opens the blossoms, that spring has come again just as it has come for untold aeons. But the fact is that no two springs are exactly alike.... Another May, another spring, eternal but unlike any other that was or shall be.”

So too we can say that day breaks as it has “for untold aeons,” yet no two days are exactly alike. Another dawn, another morning, another day, “eternal but unlike any other that was or shall be.”

How many more will we greet? One morning, one day, will be our last. Can we lean into the arc of the rising sun mindful that it is never just another morning, never just another day? It is now. It is today. Amen.

Sources:

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