

CONSIDERING EMOTION

A Sermon by the Rev. Janet L. Abel
Preached on Sunday, August 9, 2015

“Seat of the Soul”

For the next three weeks, I’ve decided to do a series of sermons because Art will be on vacation. I’m focusing on spiritual growth, with my ideas based on, but not exclusively, a book that the Spiritual Book Group just finished, titled *Seat of the Soul*. The author, Gary Zukav, was the first thinker whom Art reviewed in his sermon series on Modern Mystics and Spiritual Leaders.

Some people liked the Zukav volume, some didn’t, but we had good discussions, and from that book sprouted an on-line document called “Guidelines for Creating Authentic Power,” containing keys to spiritual growth through: (a) Commitment, (b) Courage, (c) Compassion, and (d) Conscious Communications and Actions. The benefits of Authentic Power are listed as: (1) Deeper love for yourself; (2) Meaning, purpose, and freedom in your life; (3) the Joy of conscious co-creation as you discover your unlimited creativity; (4) Equality that allows you to experience not being separate from others; and (5) Development of real courage to be in integrity.

How Do We Do That?

We come to church for similar reasons, but Zukav has some practical suggestions, so we’re going to focus on his first step, which centers on emotion, leading me to entitle this sermon “Considering Emotion.”

Thinking about emotions, obviously we all have them. It’s just that some of us are more in touch with what we’re feeling than others. We know this to be true.

According to Zukav, and I agree with him, our emotions are the road to our souls and to emotional growth. Our intellect, on the other hand, can at times get in the way of our emotions. Considering, as I do, how difficult it is to speak of something as ineffable as the soul and what it is, how much better it would be to get in touch with our soul, let it grow, and let it impel us to greater awareness of our emotions and how they can assist us in the daily grind of living a good life.

Here Is Zukav’s Step Number One

We need to know what we feel and learn from what we feel instead of judging or blaming others or ourselves for our emotions. I ask myself, “Where am I today?” But more importantly, “Why am I there?” To repeat, we need to learn from what we’re feeling instead of maybe experiencing something negative and feeling guilty about it. Or I tell myself I really shouldn’t be feeling like this, so I need to stuff it down, along with all the many ways we bury emotions or allow ourselves to go into denial.

Here I am in church, supposed to be spiritual, so I need to feel that way, and

instead I'm thinking bad thoughts. Instead of judging or blaming or being guilty about ourselves or others, we can learn from what it is that we're really feeling.

So I Have a Question for You

This is an old question, based on an old book called *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*. But are men truly from Mars? And are women truly from Venus? A lot of it was about emotions and how we express them. How we communicate them. Communication is important, right? Some people, maybe a lot of us, think this might very well be true. Not all men and not all women follow the author's pattern.

I'm going to generalize here because this came from the internet. Some of it's true because I did a very scientific poll. I read this statement, and then asked a couple men at lunch, saying, "Is this true? Do you hate it when somebody asks you, 'What are you thinking?'" When a guy goes quiet, does he particularly dislike it when he's asked "What are you thinking?" And the two men I questioned replied, "Yes, I do hate that." So why would that be?

When we stop talking, women in general would say that they go quiet when they're hurt or when they think they're being lied to. Men go quiet when they're working through a problem, when their minds are busy. Nothing may necessarily be wrong when a man goes quiet, but women, because something's usually wrong when they go quiet, assume something's wrong, right? And that's when you start asking, "What are you thinking? Are you hurt?" The men, however, tend to flee.

Flee-ers and Chasers

Another friend of mine has a general theory about relationships and just being in a relationship, all kinds of relationships. She says that usually she breaks people down into two groups. This is a generalization too, obviously. There are flee-ers, and there are chasers. Bear with me.

You know how I've been a chaser and a flee-er, depending on what's going on in the relationship, the dynamics. Am I going to be chased? Am I going to get out of there when things get hot or we're about to have an argument or I'm bugged or whatever? Am I going to run away? And is the person going to chase me? "How are you? What's wrong? Talk to me. Talk to me." And then you want to flee farther and faster.

Or you can become a chaser. When anxiety builds, and the person's quiet or you can't read them or something's wrong and you know it but they won't tell you. Then you become a chaser and they become the flee-er. And there's the woman's response. When she's asked how she's feeling, and she says, "I'm fine," does that mean "I'm fine"? I think most men and women too, would like to think, "Oh, they're really fine. Good. I can relax."

Don't Count on What they Say

But don't relax, according to the experts I read on the internet. What does "fine" mean? It depends on tone. We know this. But it can mean many things, right? "I'm fine" can mean it's a test. "What's really wrong with me?" You have to know. "I'm tired. I don't want to argue. I'm mad. I'm

starving. I don't want to talk about it. I want comfort. Well, maybe I'm really fine."

But maybe you can't count on that equivocal statement. We'd like to though, wouldn't we? Feelings can be quite complex, and we're not always sure what it is we're feeling. There's a lot to learn about why we're feeling a certain way. So instead of feeling bad about what we're feeling – insecure, anxious, jealous, mad, sad, nervous, whatever, why not focus on what we can really learn about ourselves instead, which I do believe is a spiritual process.

Sometimes I think that, in spiritual environs, as in church, we're supposed to feel good. And it's great when we do. I'm normally joyful or happy. Sometimes I'm nervous, depending on what it is I have to do. I used to be very nervous about preaching. I've gotten better over the years.

They Threw Hymnals at Me

I used to have out-of-body experiences. My first time preaching, I had a dream the night before. You know I take great stock in dreams. And my dream was that I was preaching and people were starting to yell and they threw hymnals at me in the dream, and I was ducking. Thank goodness for pulpits.

Finally I woke up and thought, "Well, it can't be that bad. We're Christians! And we're not going to throw books. We might want to, but that's not going to happen." So nothing that bad has ever happened to me. I've gotten all kinds of responses, and one man walked out once, but mostly no one's

ever thrown a hymnal. So that dream did not come true.

But emotions, all kinds, are a part of us. Sometimes we bring them along with us to church, and it happens, right? We know what we're supposed to feel, and we preach about it a lot, don't we? Love, harmony, unity, and we all want to feel that way, but sometimes we're not quite there.

"The Age of Aquarius"

I am *not* going to sing this song! You can thank me later!

"When the moon is in the Seventh House | And Jupiter aligns with Mars, | Then peace will guide the planets | And love will steer the stars. | This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius." |

And some feel that we're really at that dawning of the Age of Aquarius. This is the new age where ...

"... Harmony and understanding | Sympathy and trust abounding | No more falsehoods or derisions | Golden living dreams of visions | Mystic crystal revelation | And the mind's true liberation. | Aquarius! Aquarius!" |

At first I didn't know what all those words were. The music was fast in that part of the song, so I had to look them up. But isn't that beautiful, if that's what we want to attain. It's where we're going, I believe. But we may not be fully there.

We may as human beings be subject to more emotions, whether you believe that they are based on fear and love. But there are many

emotions that manifest themselves in our lives.

In David, Many Conflicting Feelings

The David story before us in scripture today contains many feelings, and many of them are conflicting. Because I preached about David a couple of weeks ago, I thought we'd have one of the ending stories about the life of King David, one of the greatest kings of Israel there ever was, and he was also a king of war.

Things never settled down for David, as they did for his son, Solomon. Solomon inherited a kingdom at peace. He built the temple, and he had lots of money and a huge harem. And he was wise. We remember Solomon for all that, but first a lot of battles had to be fought and warlords brought into the fold.

Even family matters had to be settled down because David inherited the sword. He was a man of war. He was a warlord when he finally inherited the throne from King Saul. Here we have the throne taken away from Saul through death. This is the way it was back then, and now too in many places of the world.

But David is beloved of God. He's a great king, has many wives, a family, and a nice big house. But one day his commanders go out into the field to fight. It's spring, the passage tells us, when kings go out to war.

Uriah Is the Problem

David is lounging on his roof, and he looks over and sees Bathsheeba. This is when things really fall apart for David because he

decides he's tremendously in love. We don't know what Bathsheeba is thinking, but she's taken into the palace. She becomes pregnant and uh, oh, she's married, so David has to get rid of her husband, Uriah.

He's a problem. David sends Uriah to the front line, where he is killed in battle. Nathan the prophet comes to David to tell him that God is not happy with him. The deity still loves David, but God says the sword will never depart from David or even from his house or family.

And here we have this story of the later years of David when his beloved son Absalom, noted to be vain and handsome with a big head of hair, decides he doesn't want to wait for his father to die. He wants to be king right away.

Now Absalom Is the Problem

Absalom revolts and leads a whole army of people in battle so that they all die and the son of David, Absalom, ends up dying very vividly. He is hung between heaven and earth by his hair. His vanity led him to be riding on a mule and getting stuck under a tree. Then Joab, the commander – he's the one who does David's dirty work – comes up and kills him.

David had said, "Deal gently with my son Absalom for my sake." David had not said, "Save his life," had he? He had said, "Deal gently," but we don't know what he meant. David is very conflicted. He is guilty, but he loves Absalom.

Now Absalom is a problem. He is revolting. He is trying to grab David's kingdom. Absalom has to die, but David is not sure

what he wants. He is torn. Absalom, of course, does die. And the Cushite gets the bad job of having to give the king the news.

David moans an obviously grief-filled cry, “O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!” How many parents have said as much when they have lost children? One of the hardest losses there is. My son, my daughter. Would I had died instead of you. But David is relieved and he’s sad and he’s guilty and he’s full of shame. He’s full of all kinds of emotions. It’s not a simple tragedy.

Mourning Is a Time of Strong Emotions

Mourning is generally a time when we experience a great many emotions. In the old days everyone knew you were in mourning. The house would have black wreaths on it. You would wear black. For a long time you would put on a black armband.

In some ways I think that’s good, even though we’ve gotten away from that outward expression of grief. And after the funeral, we’re expected to get right back to normal, right? Our clothes don’t tell people what we’re going through. We know mourning is a process and it goes on, sometimes for a very long time.

Inside Out

How many of you have seen this movie? Did you like it? I did. It’s all about

emotions and how complex they really are. The role that sadness and sometimes anger and sometimes disgust play in life remind me of those characters in the head of a young girl named Riley. If you haven’t seen it, I really recommend the movie. It’s a cartoon, though, and some people automatically don’t want to go to the movies to see cartoons,

But *Inside Out* has some profound things to say. Especially what parents can do to their children because this story is about parents who move. For the dad’s work, they move from the Midwest to San Francisco, and Riley, the little girl, for the first time in her life is dealing with some really big emotion.

That’s not joy and happiness. She’s sad and mad, and she’s disgusted. And she’s scared and she’s nervous, and the movie plays that out. Her parents keep asking, “Where’s our happy little girl? Where is she?” And that makes it harder for Riley to express what she’s really feeling.

Working It Through

We can do that to each other, can’t we? Riley and her parents learn that life is a mix, and sometimes we’re much happier than at other times, and sometimes we’re sad, but we have to feel that in order to work it through. We can learn from emotion rather than judging or blaming ourselves or others.

And it is the way to spiritual growth.

Amen