

A Density of Readiness

A Message by James R. Newby

Text: Matthew 18:1-4

As most of you know by now, I believe that our main purpose in this life is to grow spiritually. I believe that growth in Spirit will inevitably issue in transformation, or to an awakening within that will move us to see life from a new and transformed perspective, a perspective where our hearts are softened, and the pain of others becomes our pain as well. Such transformation is the result of a “teachable” or “awakening” moment that cannot be prepared for fully. So many of these transforming moments are the result of pain and chaos that cannot be predicted. I do believe, however, that what I call developing a *density of readiness* can help us to prepare for such moments. This morning, I want to ask the question, “What does such a *density of readiness* look like?” and offer a few responses that have helped me, and will hopefully be of help to you.

First, we can prepare by *seeking to live in a spirit of patience and simmering*. We are, by and large, an impatient people. We want

what we want yesterday! We want to be the first to move over when Fifth-Third Bank opens a new line. We speed up and cut-off as many cars as we can before we exit off Interstate 71, just so we can reach the stop light at the top of the ramp before the next person. Developing a spiritual density of readiness requires a slower pace of patience and simmering. *Simmering*, as many of you know, is one of my favorite words. It is a word that is born out of meditative silence but has more to do with *life rhythm* than with lack of sound. Being in tune with the spiritual rhythm of our lives is to care for our souls. Simmering and patience are basic to the development of a density of readiness.

Secondly, a density of spiritual readiness requires *immersing ourselves in silence*. As the son of a Quaker minister, silence has been an important part of my spiritual development. The words, “It is time to center down and mind the Light,” were instilled within me from a very young age. I learned that in this experience of quiet, the Sacred and human could meet. It was hallowed ground. “Silence

itself has no magic,” writes Rufus Jones, a Quaker from an earlier generation. “It may be just sheer emptiness...an occasion for slumber, or it may be a dead form. But it may be an intensified pause, a vitalized hush, a creative quiet, an actual moment of mutual and reciprocal correspondence with God.”

As Friends we believe that silence is an important vehicle for continued spiritual growth and reflection. It is a means to a deeper relationship with God, and an important element in the development of a spiritual density of readiness.

Third, we help to develop a density of readiness by *growing through our pain*. I first read Frederick Buechner’s book, *The Sacred Journey* while sitting by the ocean near Atlantic Beach, North Carolina. As I read, I found myself underlining and writing, “Yes!” in the margins. In each painful experience that Buechner described, from the death of his father by suicide, to his alienation from his mother, he writes about the spiritual growth which followed, always asking himself, “How is God working here?” And

“What spiritual lesson am I to learn?” He writes, “The question is not whether the things that happen to you are chance things or God things because, of course, they are both at once. There is no chance thing through which God cannot speak...even the moments when you cannot believe there is a God who speaks at all anywhere. God Speaks, I believe, and the words he speaks are incarnate in the flesh and blood of our selves and of our own footsore and sacred journeys. . . ‘Be not afraid,’ says Jesus, ‘for lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.’ He says he is with us on our journeys. He says that he has been with us since each of our journeys began. Listen for him. Listen to the sweet and bitter airs of your present and your past for the sound of him...”

Finally, we can help to develop our density of readiness by *living in a spirit of child-like expectancy and wonder*. Jesus said, “Let the little children come unto me,” and that we must become like children to enter the Kingdom of God. Calling to him a child, Jesus tells his

disciples, “Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.”

In his novel, *By the River Piedra I sat Down and Wept*, Paulo Coelho reminds us that “human wisdom is madness in the eyes of God. But if we listen to the child who lives in our soul, our eyes will grow bright. If we do not lose contact with that child, we will not lose contact with life.”

Last week a group of us were talking about storytelling, as we look forward to celebrating the 20th Anniversary of *Faith and Play Stories* on Sunday, September 21. I mentioned *The Storytellers Creed*, by Robert Fulghum, which I have hanging on a wall in my study at home. I believe it summarizes beautifully what is important as we seek to live in a spirit of child-like expectancy and wonder. Fulghum writes:

Imagination is stronger than knowledge...

Myth is more potent than history...

Dreams are more powerful than facts...

Hope always triumphs over experience...

Laughter is the only cure for grief...and

Love is stronger than death.

Developing a density of readiness for an “awakening” or “teachable” moment of spiritual transformation. In my experience it means *living in a spirit of patience and simmering...immersing ourselves in that deep spiritual silence where we can connect with the Inner Light of the Living God...by growing through our pain and suffering, and by living in a spirit of child-like expectancy and wonder.* Friends, may such a density of readiness open us to a world of new spiritual beginnings. For we believe in a God of new beginnings, and of these new beginnings there is no end.