

White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church

A Pregnant Pause

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Selections from 'Transitions' by Julia Cameron

Transition creates vulnerability. The safety of the old life has been set aside. The safety of the new life is not yet in place. The passage between the two feels perilous and threatening. Our feet move unsteadily on the rope bridge slung across the jungle chasm. Optimism in the face of uncertainty is a difficult art. The terrain of life is varied and mysterious. I cannot always see the path ahead. At times my view is shadowed by doubt, constricted by fear. The open vistas of optimism are closed to me.

These are the limbo times, the grey days that fall in between. These are the transitional times when I am not what I was nor am I yet what I am becoming. In limbo times, I must live with alert attention to my feelings of vulnerability. In limbo times I must learn to simply be. Soon enough life will move me onward.

All beginning is an ending. I both celebrate and grieve. As I choose to start anew, I choose to believe in my own resilience. This means I say "yes" to opportunities for new adventures and acquaintances to enter my life. I say "yes" to unexpected doors opening. Rather than cling to my known life, I allow that life to alter and expand. I choose to take positive risk; I step out in faith despite my misgivings.

It can be a change in perception that can be as radical as turning on the lights in a darkened room. Suddenly we see what we could not see before. Our eyes are opened. Our necessary path becomes clear.

From 'Finale: Children Will Listen' from Into the Woods by Stephen Sondheim

So into the woods you go again,
You have to every now and then.
Into the woods, no telling when,
be ready for the journey.
The chances look small,
the choices look grim,
But everything you learn there
will help when you return there.
Into the woods--you have to grope,
but that's the way you learn to cope.
Into the woods to find there's hope
of getting through the journey.
Into the woods, each time you go,
there's more to learn of what you know.
Into the woods, Then out of the woods— And happy ever after! (I wish)

A Pregnant Pause – Rev. Sara Goodman

“I’m becoming a fan of ‘the pause. Between notes and pages and words and breaths, between thought and voice, between action and reaction. In that momentary stillness, in that space between before and after, there is possibility, a myriad of paths that can be taken, a dozen different versions of me.” -Judy Clement Wall

Here we are in this odd in-between place. A place to pause. Between two major holidays, two days that, exactly a week apart, span a week of no school, and often a good excuse to take off time from work. A time of lowered expectations, where it seems time has slowed down to a crawl.

Here we are in an in-between time, the old year passing, the new one yet to come. A reflective time when the hearts and minds of many are turned toward how to make 2019 better than 2018. This pause is pregnant with possibilities – the silence is loud with them.

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You know how sometimes you go into the other room for something and then can’t remember why? Scientists believe that the reason we forget what we’re doing is *because* we walked through a threshold. Something happens in our brains when we pass through a doorway, the threshold tells our brains that we’ve moved on to a new thing and to store the memories in the long-term memory bank. The arch over our heads, the change of light, tells our brains that we’ve passed from one place into the next. Moved from one state of being into the next. We are transformed.

That place in-between two rooms, the threshold between here and there, a time in-between two times, is what I call liminal space. And it’s where transformation happens.

Liminal space is what we aspire to create here, and in all houses of worship, a place you go to come out changed. So, here we are in this in-between place, this pause, this sanctuary, this place and time is set apart from the rest. A time to worship - to consider what is holy, to find the possibilities in the pauses, to transform.

Transformation, though, is *hard*, especially when it means giving up what came before. Like a trapeze artist, we must let go of the bar, swinging untethered through space, trusting that the next bar will be there.

It’s that in-between, that pause, that takes our breath away. The uncertainty, the possibility of failure, the fear of falling that makes the in-between so challenging, and transformative.

This is the theme running through *Into the Woods* by Stephen Sondheim. This Broadway musical seamlessly weaves together *Cinderella*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Rapunzel*, and *Little Red Riding Hood*, and it explores the theme of in-between. At the start of the story, the characters are all wishing for something. It turns out that to get their wish, they need to go into the woods. So they do, they go into the woods (hoping to be back before dark – ha!) and there they find adventure and danger and, eventually, what they were wishing for: happily ever after. But that’s only the first act.

At the start of the second act they’ve had their wish for a while, and the shine is starting to wear off. They start to wish for something new, as we humans always do, when their lives are interrupted by tragedy. A giant has come down from Jack’s beanstalk and is terrorizing the land. So they go back into the woods, to find a solution, to protect their families and to find safety. What they find is loss, destruction, infidelity and blame. This is the too real part of transition and change: It doesn’t always turn out happily ever after. But even through all of that there are good moments in the woods, and in the end the people who survive are stronger for the struggle.

This song, *A Moment in the Woods*, which we heard just before this sermon began has these lyrics: “Just a moment, One peculiar passing moment. Must it all be either less or more, Either plain or grand? Is it always 'or'? Is it never 'and'? That's what woods are for: For those moments in the woods... Oh, if life were made of moments, Even now and then a bad one--! But if life were only moments, Then you'd never know you had one. First a witch, then a child, then a Prince, then a moment-- Who can live in the woods? And to get what you wish, only just for a moment-- These are dangerous woods... Let the moment go... Don't forget it for a moment, though. Just remembering you had an 'and,' when you're back to 'or,' Makes the 'or' mean more than it did before. Now I understand-- And it's time to leave the woods.”

She’s started to understand the value of the woods it gives us experiences we can’t have in the safety of our homes. It gives us confusion and choices and eventually clarity. Transformation comes with leaving the common and everyday behind for a while.

Sometimes we choose to be in a transitional time – giving up an old job for a new one, and sometimes we have no choice. Sometimes violence erupts near our homes and we’re displaced. We go to refugee camps, or we travel on foot a thousand miles to find a better life. Families from Central America, Syria, places all over the world. Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced from their homes because of violence.

They *live* In-Between; in the woods, in the scary, dark, uncertainty of in-between. They have barely the illusion of safety and only a glimmer of hope that at some point in the future they may find some stability.

Refugees from a dozen different wars have made refugee camps their long-term homes, making the best of having lost almost everything. They live in-between, but some make stability out of the unstable. There are refugee camps in Kenya that've been active for more than 20 years, becoming more or less a city in their own right. There are *grandchildren* of the original refugees living in these camps. They have their own graveyards and schools. They've made lives for themselves, no matter how unstable.

They have learned the lesson that we try to forget when we set down our roots: life is uncertain. Sure there are times when things seem to be steady and whole and we find a temporary happiness in the safety of it all. But life changes in a moment. Natural disasters teach us this. Sudden illnesses remind us of this. The seasons in their endless cycles bring us in-between times.

We all have moments of in-between, though some of us have more than others. I've spent years in-between there and here, I left California to go to seminary in Aug 2010, and I've been in transition ever since. I am so glad that I've finally come out of the woods, here at WBUUC. For a while.

Because, in the end don't we all spend our lives in between? Rough times, smooth times, going into the woods, and coming out again. In a way life is transition: Between birth and death; that's In-between?

What are we but a thousand lost souls thrown together, in relationship, fretting about the inevitable end, wishing for a better beginning, but forgetting, constantly forgetting, that the point of it all is the journey, the woods, the in-between. Let us remember that in the dullest moments in our lives, in the down times, in the lost times, AND in the liminal, raging, standing in the doorways of our lives times, that these are the times that make a life. These are the times we are growing and changing, transforming into a new way of being.

And remember, a strong community, supportive people and a religious foundation can help us make it through the woods, back into the light of everyday.

A we are here together, We are in an in-between place:
one year is ending, another beginning,
a time to let go, to be present,
a time to allow in the new.

During this Pause, this quiet time, please feel free to come forward and place a pebble in the water.

Should you wish to make a promise for the new year, or let go of one, remember someone, release a bit of pain, or otherwise mark some important event or occasion, please step forward and quietly send your thoughts outward as you drop a pebble into the water, mingling the ripples of your intention with the ripples of other people in our community, creating a dance of inter-woven aims to strengthen them all.