

“May We Be Interrupted”

First Parish in Cambridge, Unitarian Universalist

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There is a pie recipe that I love very much. It involves a simple flaky crust made with flour and oil. You bake this crust and, once it's cool and fill it with fresh, uncooked fruit and a slightly sweet orange sauce. A fresh fruit pie filled with peaches and blueberries is one of my favorite summer things.

I made this pie in a hurry once – the crust came out of the oven warm and just golden. I had the filling ready. I just needed to cool the crust down. I had a schedule, expectations for when the pie would be ready. So as sometimes happens when reasonable people have expectations, I did a silly thing.

I took the pie plate and began briskly waving it up and down, hoping the air circulation would cool the crust faster. I was in a hurry so I also waved in a hurry. On one particularly energetic down stroke, the piecrust, maintaining its perfect pie shape, rose spectacularly out of the dish. The pie plate stayed in motion, moving down and the pie shell, now free sailed through the air, intact until it hit the kitchen floor, shattering into flaky, oh so flaky shards.

I probably said a few words that one doesn't generally say from a pulpit. And then, because it was, after all a piecrust, which is a delicious thing, I sat on the floor among the remnants, picking pieces off the floor and eating them. My frustration mingled with a new joy – eating piecrust with my hands, a picnic on the kitchen floor.

There are many lessons here. One, that haste, indeed makes waste – that plans and expectations that crowded schedules can result in reasonable people doing silly things – like waving pie crusts through the air at high speeds.

And the other lesson, that spontaneity – in this case my spontaneous kitchen floor picnic – can interrupt the blur of day-to-day life and allow us encounter wonder, in the words of Raymond J Baughan, to “turn our sullen sense toward marvel,” (SLT #485)

I started thinking about the need for interruptions a couple of weeks ago when I helped to lead an evening Unitarian Universalist Vespers service at Occupy Boston. I talked about worship as interruption, as a sacred time where, in Rev. Thandeka words – we “discover how to find and stay present to life again.”

As the bustle and darkness of December unfolds around us, I'm thinking again about interruptions. This month is a time of plans and expectations, of long nights and often, of hard times. My prayer and hope for all of us is that we may let our plans be interrupted by wonder and accident; that our pie catastrophes may become picnics, that we may let planning and expectation make way for wonder in this rich and complex season.

Could we create a month where, when someone asks us how we are doing, instead of saying “Good, you know this time of year,” we say “Good, you know this time of year?”

Can we have the courage to let beautiful and productive interruptions into our lives? Or will we choose not to have a picnic with our pie catastrophes, but instead to become bitter and resentful, ashamed at our inability to perfectly meet all of our expectations.

Can we invite spontaneity in to interrupt our well-laid plans and carefully formed expectations, our long nights and our tiredness?

I invite you to join me in this wondering – let’s take a moment. Take a breath and think of all of your plans and expectations for December.

Think of the various holidays and holy days – Yule and Hanukah, Kwanzaa, Christmas, New Year’s Eve. Think of how the nights will continue to lengthen and the days shorten as we approach the solstice. Think of all the things you should or could do this month. Think of the family and community you might experience. Think of the solitude you might experience. Keep breathing.

This, whatever just flew before your mind’s eye, are your expectations of December. Some of this might happen. Some of it might not.

And most importantly, we don’t know.

When I first began my unit of Clinical Pastoral Education, as a hospital chaplain intern at MGH, my fellow and interns and I were full of anxiety. What would we say to patients that we visited? How would we talk to doctors and nurses? What if we made someone cry? What if we didn’t make anyone cry? We we’re sure it would be awful.

My supervisor would often pause us in the midst of our anxiety, interrupt us, if you will, and ask, do you think you can predict the future? No, we would say. Then do you think you can predict that it will be awful, she would ask? No, we would say.

I can’t predict the future. But there is a very loud, stubborn voice in my head that thinks it can. Perhaps you have that voice in your head as well.

Perhaps that voice is making predictions about this coming month – perhaps this voice think it knows that this December will be this or will be that.

Part of intentionally allowing spontaneity to interrupt our lives includes talking back to that voice that thinks it knows everything, that thinks it can predict the future and that the future will be a disaster.

Sacred time is “being in the moment,” full presence, paying attention to what’s going on as it occurs. Sacred time is not the loud, stubborn voice that thinks it can predict the future.

For some of us December means solitude, for others community, for some connection, for others yearning.

Regardless of whether December for you means the joy or tension of family, evenings with best friends or co-workers or evenings alone, the wave of shoulds could's wants and worst of all – musts can threaten to engulf us.

These expectations come, tidal in their quantity: I really *should* send cards out this year; I really *should* send cards out earlier this year. I really *should* buy that; I really should *not* buy that.

Our schedules may become over burdened with important and emotionally taxing activities: budgeting for gifts or travel, wondering whether and what to give a new love or spouse or grandchild, navigating all of the dynamics of our lives with the heightened expectation that **THIS IS THE HOLIDAYS; IT HAS TO BE PERFECT.**

Spontaneity is a strong ally in this season where an expectation of perfection can turn the easiest going among us into planners with color coded to-do lists – it allows us to be encounter wonder and be open to beautiful accidents.

So this December when someone offers an invitation that isn't scheduled isn't in your Google calendar or that interrupts your expectations for the day, when someone says, to borrow words from the hymn we'll soon sing, come sing a song with me, come dream a dream with me, come walk in rain with me – it might be the time to say yes. It might be the time to let spontaneity rescue you, let it be a holy interruption.

Just as spontaneity, the very thing that can offer us ways to bring wonder and rest to our days, is often sacrificed in our busyness or in our exhaustion, worship also is often sacrificed.

When our moods sadden as often happens in the winter months and tasks like buying groceries and washing the sheets take up much of our energy, coming to church on Sunday morning or attending the monthly contemplative worship on Wednesday night can seem impossible.

When our schedules grown laden with tasks and people to attend to, worship can seem an easy sacrifice.

It is this very month that we need worship the most. We need an invitation to shift into sacred time. We need a structure that forces us to drop into a pause.

Worship disrupts our brains – much like lying on her bed listening to the rain quieted Tanya's mind, singing together, lighting candles and reflecting on our joys and sorrows, sitting in silence or the spirit of prayer, interrupts our busy minds. Worship is like the air in well-baked bread: a spaciousness that transforms the dense dough of our daily lives into deliciousness. Worship adds spaciousness to our lives by giving us a weekly time to stop whatever else and be here.

Earlier this morning we sang together about this practice of gathering the spirit to witness the mystery of this hour we spend in worship.

Our souls need to gather – gather in peace, gather in thanks, gather in hope, gather to celebrate once again!

The holidays that are celebrated in December are, all in some way interruptions of the darkness. Though they may celebrate the gifts of the holy dark, they also interrupt that dark, letting the light shine in! Whether in the form of glowing candles on a menorah or kenora, twinkling Christmas lights on an evergreen or the colorful smattering of city sponsored, secular holiday lights that appear above roads and wound around lamp-posts, the light sparkles, promising warmth, energy and the eventual return of spring.

In this season of celebrating interruptions, may we, too be interrupted by spontaneity and seek out the spirit-filled interruption of worship.

Shane Claiborne, leading thinker and writer about social justice and the movement of intentional, spiritual community called New Monasticism, reflects from the Christian tradition. “Interruptions are a theme in Scripture,” he writes, “We have a God who is continually interrupting us-interrupting our routines, our patterns of inequity, the status quo. Abraham’s life was interrupted. Moses’ life was interrupted.”

Claiborne turns to the gospels for stories of Jesus being interrupted: Jesus at a wedding in Cana when his mother interrupts him; Jesus interrupted by the cries of a demon-possessed man; Jesus on the way to visit a sick child when a touch on His sleeve interrupts Him.

“The incredible thing,” writes Claiborne, “is that Jesus was always available and attentive to the interruptions and surprises, like someone who stops to fix a flat tire for a stranded motorist.”
(from *Follow me to Freedom: Leading and Following as an Ordinary Radical* by Shane Claiborne and John M Perkins)

This December we have the ability to let spontaneity and worship be in our lives in a way that will nourish us, that will turn us from the blind blur of busyness or exhaustion, to wonder and full presence.

May we join with Raymond J Baughan who prays, “Teach me to turn/My sullen sense toward marvel/Let green and red/And dark and day/ Concur with the returning life/I am,” (SLT #485).

May we recall the wisdom of Jesus who was available and attentive to interruptions – even in his fullest moments.

May we let spontaneity and worship interrupt our plans and expectations.

May we be interrupted.

Amen and blessed be.

Benediction:

May we be blessed with interruptions.

May we have the richest December that is possible for us.

May we give ourselves the gifts of full presence, of spontaneity and of worship

May we turn our sullen sense toward the great marvel of this life and all creation.

Amen and blessed be.