

## Simple Things

Rev. Adam Lawrence Dyer – March 22, 2020

Earlier this week I came out of the elevator on my floor to the strong smell of curry. My neighbors were fully embracing the practice of social distancing as an opportunity to stay in and cook and enjoy each other's company. I could hear the laughter. It made me think of many things but most of all it brought me back to the childhood memory of Jamaican patties and the little shop near my grandparents' apartment in Brooklyn where we used to get them. The shop and the hallway had the same smell of browned oil and paprika. An old smell like cooking from another time. Being brought back to that moment in my childhood, which is one that is nothing but joy, I realized that in this time that may feel like loss, isolation or quarantine or distance for some, there might be some really bright spots.

The other day, I found myself looking at my dog Olive. Not with any purpose, but just looking at her and appreciating her. She came into my life through a relationship that is still important to me even if it didn't work out and she opened a whole world of caring and play to me that I hadn't had since I was a very small child. I watched her sort of doing that dog "resting" thing which meant she was watching me as well and I think she must have thought I had lost it. I'm sure she's confused as to why I'm around so much right now, but at the same time, I know she loves it and so do I.

I have a dishwasher, but I pretty much always do my dishes by hand. Its odd I know, but I feel like an hour-long dishwasher cycle is somehow a lot less efficient than a little bit of muscle and chapped hands for 10 minutes. Funny thing about hand washing dishes...besides the drudge of it, it can also be a kind of a spiritual practice. There's a rhythm like prayer to it, cleaning, rinsing, arranging on the drying mat...then putting them away. I notice right away when something is missing because I purchased everything utensil, plate and cup and in a weird way, each one has a story. It is part of my rhythm of life.

I'm someone who is very lucky right now. I'm used to living alone. I'm used to making my own fun and pacing myself in terms of media, and electronic input and actual rest. Toward the end of seminary, I thought seriously about becoming a monk. I spoke with several orders and even explored this with my spiritual director. There is part of me that is very attracted to monastic life. It doesn't feel like a loss to me but a deepening.

I know however, that most people don't share my ease with life in solitude. Most people are hungry for contact and interaction and ways to use their energy. In many ways I envy those people. I try to learn from them how to be more "in the moment" and spontaneous, and I've appreciated being pushed in that direction at times. But right now, I wonder if maybe I and my fellow introverts and lone wolfs have something to offer them in this moment that we find within ourselves and that restores and nourishes us every day.

I go back to the curry smell on my floor. It wasn't just about what I smelled in the moment, it is what I let the smell do to me and where I allowed it to take me. Smell is one of the easiest ways to transport oneself and it is so simple. We are connected to smell in a way that we are not connected to any other sense we have. Smell can bring strong emotion without us realizing it. But the practice of *letting* ourselves smell as an *experience* as opposed to *using* smell as a tool for determining if something is good or bad or attractive or spoiled is another thing altogether. I mention smell because it is so very simple and accessible to most of us.

And this is my point; we have in our bodies and in our places of dwelling and in our relationships be they with partners, children, pets or ourselves...we have whole worlds of exploration if we choose. I think we miss these opportunities because they are so simple and our world asks us to be so complex. The challenge is that simple things often require slowing down, refocusing on the experience as opposed to the result, relinquishing control and giving ourselves over to wonder and imagination.

I know that what I'm experiencing as peace and my natural rhythm, represents frustration, disruption, pain and tragic loss for others in this moment. It is irresponsible to paint the suffering of some in this world as simply a vacation or an extended retreat for others. There are many who may hear this message who are consumed by anxiety over dwindling finances, lack of privacy, stir-crazy children, loneliness, and yes, even illness. These are all real and not to be dismissed or ignored. And so, this invitation to appreciate and be present with simple things must also be an invitation for all of us to share responsibility for this moment as a time when all of our world is being changed. For the sake of those suffering today, we

must be different humans in the future. And that will not be reflected so much in what we do, but how and why we do it.

As this world changes, and as we are changed by our experience in it, we can find resilience, we can find entertainment, we can hold grief, we can find joy, we can know peace by embracing a practice of letting simple things take us to places of gratitude and appreciation. Maybe we can be transformed by our experience today so that we bring with us better ways of human *being* instead of just human *doing* tomorrow.

Smell the curry.

May it be so.

Moment for Meditation (:30)

### **Spirit of Life (English/Spanish)**

Spirit of Life, come unto me  
Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.  
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;  
Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.  
Roots hold me close; wings set me free,  
Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me.

Fuente de Amor, ven hacia mí.  
Y al corazón, cántale tu compasión.  
Sopla al volar, sube en la mar,  
Hasta moldear la justicia de la vida.  
Arráigame, libérame  
Fuente de Amor, ven a mí, ven a mí.

### **Sending:**

Grace is not something you can demand  
Nor can you turn it away...  
Grace is a simple package  
Delivered to each of us  
As we are welcomed into being