



The Unitarian Church in Westport

SERMON TRANSCRIPT:

A Hidden Wholeness

By the Rev. Dr. John Morehouse

Sunday, October 25, 2020

I spent much of my high school years at a private school in the Delaware River Valley in Pennsylvania. My entry into this world had been very difficult. As a shy and socially awkward teenager, I was even more lost than usual. So, with a mixture of teenage angst and possibly clinical depression (although that is not what we called it back then) I thought I would just go into the woods for a night and see if anyone noticed I was gone or if I could find that part of my soul which seemed so lost. So, I hiked up into the woods behind the school leaving a note on the RA door that I would be back the next day.

During that long and rather cool night, I made a little fire and sat staring at the dying embers. What was I looking for? What did I think I would hear among the sounds of the night? I don't remember much of any realization that came from my night of solitude except a sense of loneliness, brokenness and a sore back. The next morning, I hiked back out of the woods in time for breakfast.

The Quaker Parker Palmer has termed this search for the soul as a Hidden Wholeness. Hidden because everything else in our lives seems to get in the way of us hearing that still small voice within that informs who we are above the fray of money, relationships, news and the apocalyptic times in which we live.

Parker aptly uses the metaphor of the soul as a shy animal who is hiding in the woods. We can't go crashing through the woods if we have any hope of hearing its soft cries for companionship. Crashing as we do through the world with our opinions and our worries. Crashing on through this anxious march of days.

Like any sophomore youth, I thought that the soul I was listening for was out there, a thing to be had. Gotten, and decoded. But what we learn is that the God that is without is also the God that is within.

The God within, by whatever name you call this reality, is ironically found only in our brokenness. Perhaps nothing a 16 year-old boy wants to hear, but a lesson we are all feeling so poignantly right now.

Mark Nepo writes: "The truth is that once we are turned inside out by experience, we're opened to the life of others and challenged to enter the endless river of feeling. Those who think they can skip over life by never showing their insides take a different road. Wholeness demands opening up and feeling. With those who won't accept this,

there is less and less to share.” (From Inside the Miracle: Enduring Suffering, Approaching Wholeness, 2015)

No, we can't go crashing through the woods, but we can listen for the soul which is already inside of you. Inside you, you the imperfect, the incomplete, the less than we hoped for, you and me and all of us.

And here is a hint: you won't find your wholeness in perfection. Really? But I spent the first half of my life thinking that was where I would find it. Striving, sometimes thriving, and sometimes conniving. There was no soul in the pursuit of perfection.

As Palmer says: “Wholeness does not mean perfection; it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life.”

In the Jewish Hasidic tradition, the rabbis talk about the placing of Torah on your heart. The Torah, the word of God's love and perfection placed upon your heart so that you might become whole. But a student asked “Rabbi, why does God put the Torah on our hearts? Why not put the Torah in our hearts?” And the rabbi said “Moshe, our hearts are closed because we think we are so much bigger than God, no? God puts the Torah on our hearts so that when our hearts break, the Torah can fall in and make us whole.”

Who here has felt this happen? When everything can go wrong and does, and there in the wreckage we see a shiny glint of light, that treasure, that love, that acceptance and we pick it up and we press it to our chest and we are, despite it all, we feel whole again, as least for a while.

Embracing this truth *is* the light, the wholeness, the way forward. Even now as we await the salvation of the world. But embracing that truth through our wholeness can lead to a dark side. In the midst of this surrealistic world in which we live, there are many conspiracy theories that promise truth and wholeness. Conspiracies that if you enter into them with others who can “see it all as it really is” gives you a sense of belonging and acceptance. QAnon is one such false wholeness. Started as an online series of prophecies or truth tellings by Q, an anonymous source who posts on the edges of the web, sharing updates on the deep state of the Democrats that run sex rings of children and will take over the world with brain washing. Hilary Clinton is still a target of this large and dark community, as was Barack Obama and George Soros. One of their more bizarre claims was that a pizza shop in DC was running a child sex trafficking ring in its basement. When one Q follower stormed the shop with his automatic weapon, he found no such ring. The building didn't even have a basement. When he realized his mistake, he put down his gun, put his hands by his head and waited for the police to arrest.

(<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2016/12/04/d-c-police-respond-to-report-of-a-man-with-a-gun-at-comet-ping-pong-restaurant/>)

QAnon believes that only Donald Trump can save humankind. Trump not only refuses to disavow them, he encourages their theories. QAnon has morphed into a dark religion of millions of followers who think that their personal wholeness and the sanctity of the country depends on keeping Trump in the White House. They have taken the brokenness of our society -- the pandemic, the racial unrest, the recession -- and made them a sort of prophecy of the end times. "Nothing can stop us now" is a popular Qdrop as they are called. Who is Q? Some think an ex-intelligence officer, others say a prophet, some think he was just playing a fantasy game online and it got out of hand.

I am not telling you this to scare you. No. I am telling you this to illustrate what we are capable of if we look outside of ourselves for the wholeness we lack. Of course, we can listen to all sorts of messages in search for wholeness from MSNBC to the pursuit of money. But we will only find our hidden wholeness when we hear the voices of our better angels and match them to our actions in the outside world. It's less about how we got in this mess, and more about how we, starting with a me, can live a more authentic life.

This is where transformation comes in. In the midst of this apocalypse we, and me and you and all of us, can hear that song of our souls when we build and maintain circles of trust. Palmer talks about these circles as places where we find our souls. Our congregation is one large circle of trust, but then so are our various small group ministries. Room to hear together.

While it is our individual breakthrough we long for, it takes a community of souls, a circle of souls to bring our inner better selves forward from our woundedness to our wholeness.

Parker writes that "Formation may be the best name for what happens in a circle of trust, because the word refers, historically, to soul work done in community. But a quick disclaimer is in order, since formation (does not mean) a process in which the pressure of orthodox doctrine, sacred text, and institutional authority is applied to the misshapen soul in order to conform it to the shape dictated by some theology.

"This approach is rooted in the belief that... we don't need authorities to form us... formation flows from the belief that we are born with souls in perfect form. As time goes on, we are subject to powers of deformation, from within as well as without, that twist us into shapes alien to the shape of the soul. But the soul never loses its original form and never stops calling us back to our birthright integrity." (From [A Hidden Wholeness](#))

Friends, beloveds, dear ones, I know there is much we are frightened of. But hear me. The wholeness that we yearn for personally and collectively is still in us and it is still upon our land. There is a gentle blue wave coming to wash over all of us. It won't solve all our problems but it will call us to a new healing.

When I came down out the woods after my night of solitude, I noticed nobody had really missed me except my roommate, but he figured I had hooked up with the girl I had a crush on, (O' how I wished that was so.) At first, I was hurt and angry that no one seemed to care. But as time went by I realized that I wasn't looking for their attention, I was praying for my own soul to find its way home, to sing in my heart, softly but surely, the muse of my better self. It would take me a long time to find that wholeness but slowly it has come out of hiding and broken open my heart to the love that holds us all.

In the words of our poet laureate Mary Oliver:

"Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention.

Be astonished.

Tell about it."