

Sell Your Certainty
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My spouse Nancy and I are binge watching the Amazing Race during this pandemic time. There are 31 seasons- 12 episodes per season- so we have 372 episodes to keep us occupied. For those who don't know the Amazing Race is a reality show where people travel around the world competing in various culturally related challenges. Over the years we have watched all these episodes before, so this is our second time around. What has struck me this iteration is the degree to which certainty gets the teams into trouble. "Oh no the clue box can't possibly be over there – I am certain it will be this direction – over the objection of their partner who is proven to be right. Much of the certainty is over directions – "don't ask anybody it will slow us down; I know the way" only to get hopelessly lost. Most of the fights between team members are generally when one is certain and the other is equally certain about the opposite option. It gratifying and painful to watch the "certain" person learn the hard way they were wrong- sometimes by being eliminated from the race.

Of course, this show is edited to highlight these dramatic moments, but it is not unlike real life – just a bit hyped. Our certainty can block us seeing the best path, or lead us down the wrong path, or cause us to have arguments with our loved ones. Or close us off.

Certainty of course, is in the cahoots with judgement. It's our judgements that help make us certain – they are the basis for certainty. Such as judging someone not smart enough to understand something or judging an idea as too radical – certain that the idea would never work. Or judging a culture and being certain that some of their practices are either good or bad rather than different.

I chose the story of the little girl in Maritamia as an example of letting go of certainty. She had the wrong ideas about the Muulafa but was able to see through to a deeper understanding. But here is the other message – some of us are stuck too, stuck in the certainty of our judgement of women who wear veils and head covering stuck in our judgments of their culture and how it treats women. Perhaps it is deeper than we know, more complex. Our certainty can keep us stuck in binary thinking – it's all one way or all the other way. Certainty can block us from deeper understanding. The author of the book wanted the reader to consider that some women enjoyed wearing the Mulahfu as a form of cultural and religious expression as a statement of faith.

So the title of this sermon is sell your certainty. Of course, certainty has its uses, especially now. We are all desperately needing some certainty in this troubled world. Certainty is often a response to fear – fear of the unknown fear of things going in a way you don't understand. Fear of an outcome that you think you can't live with.

But when we are stuck in certainty we can miss out on possibility - miss out on connection. I found Larry's reflection heartbreaking. His youthful certainty over what he now sees as a trivial matter – led to a lifetime of estrangement.

It's human nature to seek certainty. No one is naturally comfortable with uncertainty. Those of you who are parents may see this pattern of getting stuck in certainty in their children. But I think that many of us can see it in ourselves in our choices in our attitudes. In our actions.

So now we come to the point of this sermon. If you are stuck in your certainty you won't be able to see something that may open you up to a different way of being. You can only see one path, and yet the path to liberation – for you, for our country for our world, may be calling from a different direction. You may miss that first step because it came from a place that you never thought to look.

Our broken down, cracking open world is ripe for transformation, and transformation requires us to let go of our certainty to look at things with more openness and possibility. To consider options that challenge us.

We are not going to get through this doing the same things that we have been doing. Albert Einstein said – we can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them. Or to put it in the context of institutional racism and misogyny, Audre Lorde says the master's tools will never dismantle the master house.

Some of us are certain that the idea to abolish the police goes too far. Some of us are certain that Trump will succeed in appointing a new supreme court justice. It's all very anxiety provoking. The truth is Maybe or maybe not. But if you are stuck in certainty you will not be open to a way forward except on an old well-worn path.

In our world right now politics- requires maximal certainty - it's all absolutes. But certainty leaves no room for engagement, for finding the possibilities of shared goals. In political discourse it's not OK to be uncertain – we are forced into our corners.

We need the opposite of polarization now, need it critically. And not just with our politician – with each of us, with everyone.

We are in a Liminal space – a time in between the letting go of something that is known – and the emergence of whatever is to be. This can be a time of tremendous awakening and creativity – if we can tolerate it. This time is fraught with both danger and opportunity. One of the Pixar animators said of this time – There is a sweet spot between the known and the unknown where originality happens. The key is to be able to linger there without panicking. “

We are waiting in liminal space for the election – waiting liminal space for the end of the virus. We are waiting in liminal space for racial justice to unfold. Liminal space can be a time of possibility and transformation – if we allow ourselves to let go of our certainty.

This sermon was inspired by a quote from the Sufi Mystic Rumi “Sell your certainty and buy bewilderment.” It was on the wall at my seminary. But at this time, I don’t need to buy bewilderment –there is so much present in every day I am having a hard time staying on my feet. In preparing for this sermon I found several interesting books with challenging titles – how about Comfortable with uncertainty- I could possibly do that or Embracing uncertainty - yeah that’s not going to happen right now.

I don’t know about you, but I am not ready to embrace uncertainty and I am not asking you to do that this morning. You don’t have to embrace uncertainty- I am just asking you to put down your certainty. Just put it down. Put down your need to know, your need to control, your need to have everything be clear. Put it down.

And then find something to hold onto - your family, your faith, your pets, your hobby, eating carbs, binge watching your favorite TV show – whatever it is that help you to stabilize. This community can be stabilizing – this morning together.

And after you have put down your certainty, I ask you to see the world with an Easy focus. This is something we learn in Interplay – to have an easy focus. Your focuser is right here – We tend to default to forward, limited focus – like when you are on the computer.

Slow down –your focus from you device or whatever has consumed you and look around. Take deep breathes. Try shifting your visual focus from the front to the center of your head. Try it. See how it expands your peripheral vision? A small thing, but a reorientation that expands your perception. Easy focus. Holding it all but without strain.

So, you have put your certainty down – the next things to do would be to maybe sit in the room with uncertainty – just let it be in your presence a bit. You are not embracing it, you are just being in its presence. I am not even asking you to be comfortable with it.

Try on the idea that something you are certain is wrong, might actually have some piece of right in it, some piece of truth, or love or justice. Hold onto the idea that something can be both/and rather than either/or. Set your certainty down and replace it with wonder, with curiosity, with exploration.

I know that the stakes are high – our fear is high; our despair is running high. When I read that Ruth Bader Ginsberg had died I was in a state of despair and filled with certainties of doom. But I stabilized myself so that I could clear out the certainty and create room for the possibility for what is waiting to be born – in us - in the world.

Her death could spark great transformation – if we are paying attention. If we are open and willing.

I am trying to sell my certainty and be more open to new paths and possibilities. To sit in the presence of uncertainty and not be fearful or despairing.

And what has sustained me in this practice is a centering prayer. In this practice you pick an inspirational or supportive phrase and repeat it in a meditative way. It could be something as simple as – I have everything I need.

Just picking the phrase is a spiritual practice in and of itself because you have to consider what stabilizes and encourages you – you have to consider what it is you need for your spiritual food.

I resonate strongly with the divine feminine, the great mother of all life and nature in whatever form she takes. So of course I would be praying to her. I know I can image that Ginsberg is part of that great divine feminine with all the other ancestors who strength, love and encouragement.

But what do I need? Like many of you I desperately want to know what I can do make a difference. I want to see the openings that can lead us to a new world. I want to be a changemaker for the better. But I don't know where to start.

And so my prayer is - Great Mother, help me see the way.

I pray this now multiple times a day when despair and uncertainty overwhelm me. Great Mother help me see the way. Help we see the way out. Help me see the way that I can make a difference in our hurting world. help me see the way to justice and compassion. Help me to see the beacon that will lead us all forward.

I am not expecting a blinding light of realization, but a spark that helps me find the first step
It's lots of people doing small things, you know that changes the world.

So I encourage you to sell you certainty and buy possibility, buy connection. Open your mind to
new ways of thinking and being, to ideas that seem impossible or preposterous. This is the
time. Don't waste it. Open your eyes to the sparks of the divine that are calling us to midwife
this transformation of our world.

Put down your certainty. Don't wait, don't put it on hold, don't expect someone else to do it.
Each of us must do whatever we can. Keep your eyes and heart open, easy focus, presence of
mind, feet on the ground. Present.

These are times of tremendous upheaval and the possibility for transformation is revealing
itself to us in a myriad of ways. I don't want you to miss it.

Benediction

Our coming together is powerful – even though we can't see each other, I know that you are
there. Even though we can't touch each other, I feel your presence. I know that you are
striving to find a path out of this chaos. With intention and commitment, with love and
kindness. We are all in this together.

I love you all.

Blessed Be