

The Reenchantment of Our Lives  
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There is a French word *Retrouvailles* (French): It means: The happiness of meeting again after a long time. There is an NPR program about 10 words that aren't translatable into English. Each of these words describes love in some way. One of them is this word *Retrouvailles*. I realize that I feel this way about the word enchantment, that is in this sermon's title this morning, the reenchantment of our lives. Finding the word enchantment is like this meeting again after a long time, meeting something that I have loved for most of my life but that I have not thought about or focused on for a long, long time. I think that is one of the great joys of being a minister.

The necessity of leaning into a sermon so often that it forces you to really linger on life until you find so many forgotten treasures and memories and you have to dust them off and polish them up and in offering them to others, you end up restoring them to yourself. So thank you all for reenchanting me with life.

So many of us are lonely, we feel cut off from each other as technology fills in the spaces between us that we used to occupy with human contact. And we do not know how to ask for friendship. We are no longer young children who share our lunches, who trade brownies or treat and write notes and ask for friendship. Do you remember those days? I do.

I remember when I made friends because the children in my class loved my mother's brownies and she would bake enough for the class and the young people would flock around me, wanting those lovely brownies and I would feel so loved. Now what do we do when we find ourselves without friendship in our lives? Where do we go if we don't feel comfortable in bars, if our work does not put us in contact with many other people or if we are retired?

There have been many times in my life that I have been alone. There have been many times that I have been without friendship. Without partnership and without my deep friendship to the world around me, I would have been lost. As some of you know, I gave birth to my daughter in Germany and left Gina's father, my former husband, when Gina was only 3 months old. I brought her up in this country by myself.

I worked a few jobs at that time and when I was home, spent my time close to Gina, and we both found peace outdoors, in nature, at the ocean, in the woods, in the parks and on the benches of the city. We found peace in dance and movement, in breath and bicycling.

If I had not known a connection to the world around me, an ability to sustain myself in nature, understand myself as held and seen and reflected in the natural world around me, I do not think I would be here now in this way: in compassion, with mind and heart open. We all have mentors. Nature which must include my own embodiment has been my most steadfast mentor.

Science long ago taught us that we as human beings sit above the world, masters, orchestrators, puppeteers...looking into the fishbowl of life as ultimate observers who do not affect what we observe unless we choose to.

We are god's final creation and all else is created for our use, our pleasure, our sustenance, right? And the acceptance of this belief has caused us an isolation from the world that has been costly.

And now this very science is relieving us of this misconception through Quantum Physics. Quantum physics tells us that the observer affects what is being observed in all cases, to the extent that what is being observed changes its quality. For example, an electron will shift from a particle to a wave under observation, and the closer the observation the greater the shift leaving some physics to go as far as to say that there is no phenomenon until it is observed. The implications of the 'Observer Effect' are profound. It suggests, among other things, that there is no such thing as objectivity.

We no longer live in a world in which we are observers who observe without affecting what we observe or without being affected by the act of observation. We have fallen or perhaps been pushed is a more apt metaphor, into the fishbowl.

In his book, *The Spell of the Sensuous*, Dr. Abram, an ecologist and philosopher, writes about how we are changed by being in the world, how we are part of the fabric of the world around us, how we are an organ of this world, flesh of this world, one with all that is around us.

He writes, "My life and the world's life are deeply intertwined; when I wake up one morning to find that a week-long illness had subsided and that my strength has returned, the world, when I step outside, fairly sparkles with energy and activity: swallows are swooping by in vivid flight; waves of heat rise from the newly paved road smelling strongly of tar; the old red barn across the field juts into the sky at an intense angle.

Likewise when a haze descends upon the valley in which I dwell, it descends upon my awareness as well, muddling my thoughts, making my muscles yearn for sleep. The world and I reciprocate one another. The landscape as I directly experience it is hardly an unresponsive object; it is a realm that responds to my emotions and calls forth feelings from me in return."

We live in a world that we are in constant relationship to, that we are inside of a constant, intimate friendship & partnership at all times that we do not stop to name, to celebrate, to announce, to raise a glass in honor of. We would not feel so isolated if we recognized that we are not in the world, we are of the world.

Again from Dr. Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous*: "The breathing, sensing body draws its sustenance and its very substance from the soils, plants and elements that surround it; it continually contributes itself, in turn, to the air, to the composting earth, to the nourishment of insects and oak trees and squirrels, ceaselessly spreading out of itself as

well as breathing the world into itself, so that it is very difficult to discern, at any moment, precisely where this living body begins and where it ends."

This calls us over and over again, Abram's tells us, to give birth to a philosophy that explains the world not from a position from outside of it, but from a position immersed within it. We are all participants and not the kind of participants that can walk away. There is no place to go. We move and are moved by the world around us. We move in tandem with the world around us, in response to it, in step with it.

The next time something aches inside of you, something really hurts that you just can't shake, a loneliness or a memory that is of long ago or just a few minutes ago, sit on a park bench or watch out of your window at the birds and rabbits and trees and sun and grass and just imagine yourself, your very flesh, as part of it all, as among it all, as inhabiting the same environment, as breathing in what the trees and plants breathe out, as needing so much of what the animals and birds need: food, shelter, protection, comfort. Know yourself as part of this great landscape and that everything you do influences this landscape, changes it, affects it, like the observer changed the electrons from particles to waves, we are a finger on a hand of the world, we are a cell on the skin of the world, what we take in and put out matters, changes everything.

Notice how things change as you walk and move through the world. Notice how the grass bends, the breeze shifts, the leaves change, the birds' song moves in and out, up and down, watch, listen. This recognition is enchantment.

You are not alone.  
You are not alone.

As Dr. Abram writes, "We can perceive things at all only because we ourselves are entirely a part of the sensible world that we perceive! We might as well say that we are organs of this world, flesh of its flesh, and that the world is perceiving itself through us, the world is perceiving itself through us."

Now there is a word that it becomes necessary for me to use here that I know UUs struggle with but nonetheless it presents itself as necessary. And that word is MAGIC. Now I am using this word in a particular kind of way and not in another way so before you storm out of the doors, let me explain myself. A demonstration would be best. If I could have a volunteer from the congregation for this this demonstration that would be perfect. Is anyone willing to come up for this short demonstration? Dan! Can you confirm that in my hand here there is an ordinary quarter? And now, I'm going to put the quarter in this hand and ask you to blow on my hand. Good. And, voila, the quarter has disappeared, but wait, what's this, here it is behind your ear Dan! Now what do you know!! Thank you Dan for your help and you can keep the quarter, after all it did show up behind your ear!!

So, that is the kind of magic I am not referring to. I am not referring to magic that is outside of reality, that separates us from what is real, that through the force of will or

trickery makes us doubt the real or doubt what we know to be real. I am referring to a kind of magic that brings us back to the real, that reawakens us, that reconnects us to all that is. I am referring to the magic of enchantment.

The kind of magic I am speaking about, when we allow it to affect us, shakes us from the comfort of our beliefs, and opens doors into ways of knowing that we have kept sealed for too long. The kind of magic I am talking about nudges us out of our sleepwalking and whispers, you are not alone, you are not separate from all that is around you including your very body. You are part of the fabric of all of life.

*Einstein's God* written by Krista Tippett who is best known for creating and hosting the public radio program *On Being* is a series of interviews Tippett had with scientists about the places science intersects with faith and the human spirit. One of these interviews is with Sherwin Nuland, who is a clinical professor of surgery at Yale University and who also teaches bioethics and medical history. Here is some of what he says during his interview with Tippett:

"There are pathways in the brain that have survival value. So when a stimulus comes in and the brain has 50, 000 ways of responding to it, some of those are for survival.

And the human brain, in classical evolutionary pattern, will pick the one that is healthiest, that gives greatest pleasure. So I think of this as natural selection in an emotional form.

When you're talking about selection in the brain, there are processes of choice. The brain has a way of evaluating what is best for the organism. And what is best for the organism is not just survival and reproduction but beauty, and aesthetic sense."

In other words, we have survived this long not only because we are rational but because we love beauty, because we love that which we cannot touch or see, our very connection to all that is and our brains chose more of these experiences because this is how we go on.

This is what I hear this scientist saying and the scientists who discovered the observer effect and Abram who wrote *The Spell of the Sensuous* and this is what I hear when I listen to my heart, "The mystery is always with us, is literally within us, is always speaking to us, from inside of our bones, and on the very wind, howling, dancing, cascading in the water, chattering in the mouths of chipmunks, singing in the throats of the swallow and the warbler and the finch.

When we recognize the very friendship of our body, the very friendship of our cells, the music of enchantment plays. Listen, listen to it, the symphony for it is playing all the time, all the time. Our very cells seek the wonder and pleasure of life. Our very cells seek the harmony and beauty of life.

The words of Mary Oliver come to me, "Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting- over and over announcing your place in the family of things."

There is no separation. You are not alone. Come my friends, come my dear friends and know the friendship all around you.

Amen.