

How Dare You?—Proverbs for When the World Begins to Lose Its Marbles
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Good morning and good Sunday, I hope that this new day finds you well. Today is Sunday, February 5th and the title of this morning's reflection is How Dare You?—Proverbs for When the World Begins to Lose Its Marbles.

Well, the moon is in the ocean
And the stars are in the skies
And all that I can see
Is my sweet Maria's eyes
Sarah, Sarah Maria...Sarah Maria
Well, you know about the sugar cane
That comes from way down south
She's got one end in her hand
She's got one end in her mouth
Come on, Sarah, Sarah Maria...Sarah Maria

—Sarah Maria, James Taylor

Playing the bass is very challenging. My teacher tells me that the acoustic bass is among the most physically demanding of musical instruments. Like all instruments, it requires incredible subtlety but unlike most, it is also very physical. It requires a great deal of strength and flexibility. For long months, my hands would cramp. They still do on occasion but less frequently now.

I committed powerfully to the study of this instrument and I will continue to commit powerfully as my relationship with it deepens. Having first played guitar, the acoustic bass seems strange to me. It's upright for one thing (aside from being just enormous). It's fretless, so the placement of the fingers needs to be precise. The scale length is different. So, the intervallic relationships are all new to me. The order, theory and logic of the fret board is the same but the size of everything is new. Bass playing is a different order of magnitude...and this change means that I am having to reassess everything. Does that make sense? My bass is making me do all of that. [to bass] How dare you!?

It's really a lot of work and you just can't do it all without a strength of heart...because we get it wrong along the journey of learning...because we need of ourselves, forgiveness. Over time, I'm improving but I don't focus on that. I focus on my body and on my spirit and on my journey. I focus on strengthening my heart.

But how does one do that? How does one strengthen the heart? If I were to ask my friend and colleague, Joan Javier-Duval, the minister of the Unitarian Church of Montpelier, I think I know just what she'd say. I think that she would say absolutely nothing. Instead, she would show me something. She would put her right hand over her heart. She would support her right hand with her left. She would

coordinate her breathing with these actions intentionally. Will you try this exercise with me? We can do it informally, just to give us an idea about the practice.

1. Breathe fully and breathe deeply
2. Allow yourself to settle
3. Place your right hand over your heart
4. Support your right hand with your left
5. Check in with yourself and release whatever tensions you may find in your body
6. Turn your right hand over to face your left and allow them to grasp themselves
7. Focus your attention, your light, your grace, your energy on your heart
8. Gently increase the tension in your hands by pulling them against each other
9. Gently release that tension, slightly ungrasp your hands but hold the energy—your grace, your light, the focus of your attention
10. Offer this light to the world like a gift
11. Offer it to one another like a treasure
12. Offer it to yourself and receive it as a blessing

These are twelve quick steps to strengthening the heart. One can do this as a practice musically.

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|----------------|----------------------------|
| A | Breathe deep and full |
| D | Allow yourself to settle |
| G | Hold safe your heart |
| C | Support yourself |
| F | Release the tensions |
| B ^b | Turn and face yourself |
| E ^b | Focus on your heart |
| A ^b | Gently increase of tension |
| D ^b | Gently release of tension |
| G ^b | Offer the gift |
| B natural | Treasure one another |
| And E | We bless ourselves |

It all gets very complicated and complex. The theoreticians refer to this musical exercise as the Cycle of Fifths and the artists are more creative. Sometimes, they don't even have a word for it. The theologians know that the artists and the theoreticians are both right, even though they can't stop arguing with one another. Both of them have their own good work to do.

And that good work requires strength. It requires a strength of heart that we call courage. And courage can be a very daring thing. Overcoming fear requires courage. In a song called Inconsolable, Jonatha Brooke sings about this idea. She sing,

I never knew what enough was
Until I'd had more than my share
And I let the darkness in

It was then I lost the dare
It was then I lost the day

There will always be challenges around us. There will always be too much and not enough. How do we find the courage—the strength of heart we need—to survive the challenges? How do we not let the darkness in? How do we not lose the dare?

How do we do these things? We do them by cleaving to our values. We do them by blossoming into the fullness of who we are and who we can be. We do them by gently overcoming our deepest fears. It was Marianne Williamson who said,
Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our Light, not our Darkness, that most frightens us.

Do you know this quote? She continues,

We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the World. There is nothing enlightening about shrinking so that other people won't feel unsure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. As we let our own Light shine, we consciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

This is a very famous quotation. Unfortunately, I think it's famous because it is misattributed to Nelson Mandela. It's been misquoted by astronauts and educators. It was misquoted by Hilary Clinton and subsequently, by every commencement speaker and valedictorian who was so inclined for thirty years or so.

We'd like to think that Nelson Mandela said these words but he didn't say them. Marianne Williamson did...in a book she published in 1992 called [A Return to Love](#). I'd like to think that we are all groovy enough to quote a new-agey, self-help, energy-healer from Los Angeles but we are not that groovy. This quote isn't famous because we believe Marianne Williamson wrote it. It's famous because we want to believe that Nelson Mandela said it. It's important to be honest about these things...because this isn't bad. It really isn't. It actually says something beautiful about us. It says something beautiful about how daring we are and how daring we can become...that we would want to put such peaceful and hope-filled words in the mouth of the man who fought so tenaciously and so whole-heartedly against apartheid in South Africa.

This is the first Sunday of Black History Month, a celebration that traces back more than a century to the efforts of Carter G. Woodson and others to amplify the stories of race have been glossed over, marginalized and banned. In 1976, the year of the American bicentennial, President Ford "officially recognized Black History Month. [He] called upon the public to 'seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor

throughout our history.”¹ And these efforts continue on today...but not without attacks, not without disparagement. I learned from the news this week about...
...the controversy surrounding the College Board’s decision to revise its curriculum for an Advanced Placement African American studies course.

Have you heard about this? It might sound remote from us but it’s not. You see, The revised curriculum removes Black Lives Matter, slavery reparations and queer theory as required topics [in the course of study], and it adds a section on Black conservatism. Many prominent authors and academics have also been removed from the AP curriculum, including James Baldwin, Frantz Fanon, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, June Jordan, Angela Davis, Alice Walker, Manning Marable, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Michelle Alexander, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Barbara Ransby, Roderick Ferguson, [E. Patrick Johnson and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor.]

Learning of this, I think to myself, “How dare you?” I mean, this is akin to revising a musical course on The History of The Beatles by removing the sections on John Lennon, Paul McCartney and three-fifths of Ringo Starr while adding a section on the music of Rev. Billy Graham. Rev. Graham is the one who said who that The Beatles should...

...get a haircut because [fads] have a way of passing—like Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley and different ones who have attracted teenagers by the thousands in years past.²

While I may argue theologically, I have real respect anyone who—honestly, non-violently and whole-heartedly—gives their life to prayer. No one of us gets it right. No one of us can. But I can say without the slightest hesitation that I am very happy NOT to have learned about the history of rock and roll from Billy Graham.

We are living through a strange time right now. There are so many lies and so many thefts and so many foolish conspiracies. It can leave us tired and feeling defeated sometimes but beauty always helps me. Poetry always helps. Grounding ourselves back in reality after time away...it heals us. It helps us come back home to ourselves—remembering, recovering, rediscovering the daring feeling of being alive. We can get displaced from ourselves...without even knowing it sometimes. We can laugh ourselves right out of the garden.

Remember how they used to deride environmentalist by calling them tree-huggers and the like, self-appointed saviors of the Spotted Owl? Do you remember that? It’s so easy to trivialize the holy—it’s so vulgar, so average and so commonplace and mundane...and also so effective—and when the trivial takes over, it sits the seat of the sacred and drives us apart from one another. We turn away

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<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/bcc/bhm-history/#:~:text=In%201976%2C%20President%20Gerald%20R,of%20endeavor%20throughout%20our%20history.%E2%80%9D>

² <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2qog6e>

from ourselves and we turn away from community, scattered by shame and cackling laughter. We find ourselves laughing at a wounded part of ourselves, a part that we no longer recognize. I hate that BS. I hate it...and it is so common in the world today, so abundant and so banal...which is why it's so important to stay courageous and tenacious. It's so important not to lose the dare.

I wonder if Greta Thunberg would describe herself as daring? I wonder if she sees herself as a tree-hugging savior? I don't see her like that. I see her differently. I see her as one of the few remaining, rational human beings on the planet. She just seems so normal to me, normal in a world gone half insane.

I think that she said it best. I just pray that we were listening. She was so compelling and only sixteen years old at the time. Bravely, she stood before a gathering of world leaders at the United Nations and she said,

This is all wrong. I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet, you come to us young people for hope!!! How dare you!?

How dare we, indeed!! She was right. How dare we? How dare we burden younger generations with the consequences of our behavior? Greta Thunberg was right raise the question but what do we do now? Where do we go from here? I ask this question as a theologian and as a public intellectual. I ask this question because righteous indignation is not the answer. Laughter, mocking and derisiveness won't save any of us.

In 2019, a man named Dr. Jordan Peterson was a panelist on a late night talk show on cable TV. Bill Maher was the host. Bill Maher is a Democrat, clearly partisan. He doesn't hide it. Dr. Peterson is not a politician. He is a psychologist from Canada. At one point, the conversation between them became a little awkward.

At the tail end of a liberal tirade against the president at that time, Dr. Peterson tried pretty hard to get off of the Left-bound train and had trouble doing it. He said,

I've been listening to all of this about Trump and to how these conversations go in the U.S. I have one question about it. There are all of these people in who are on the conservative side, who are aligned with Trump for all sorts of reasons. And there's all of this tension around his presidency and attempts to pull him out of his office.

1. What do you think will happen if that comes to pass?
2. What do you think will happen to these people who have identified with Trump?
3. How is it that democratic types, for example, are holding out their hand to these conservative types [as if to say], "Welcome back into the fold"?

He said that he had one question but in truth, he really had three...and he raised them all...and he did not pause for an answer to any of them. He just kept going. He just kept talking. He kept sharing a perspective as an outsider.

Dr. Peterson wanted to get off the train. That's hard to do, really hard. It's hard to head off in a new direction when you're on a Left-bound train. It's hard to

head off in a new direction when you're on any train of any kind as it departs from a true sense of community.

How dare we? Regardless of our politics, how dare we turn away from one another? This is what I hear Greta Thunberg saying—imperfectly, perhaps, she was only sixteen years old at the time...and perfectly, perhaps, because she chose not to turn away. She fully embraced a sense of soul, a sense of self and a sense of courage (or whole-heartedness) that clearly sees the incredible crisis that we're all in. Most of us don't this clearly. Most of us have forgotten what seeing clearly is like. Joy is there, not sorrow. Grace is there, not grief. Peace is there, not righteousness. Hope is there, not despair and all conjoin together. We no longer need to turn away from wholeness. We need to overcome our deepest fear. "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure." We need to be powerful now. As Joni Mitchell reminds us,

We got to shake our fists like lightning now
We've got to run like forest fire
We've got to spread our light like blazes all across the sky
Because they're going to aim the hoses on you
You've got to show them you won't expire
Not until you've burned up every passion
And not even when you die

The precious question before us is not 'Who are we to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' The precious question before us is 'Who are we not to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Don't turn away from that question. I pray you, don't ever do that. When we do, terrible things can happen.

Last month, on the 10th of January, five men turned away from the precious question that was before them. They were not brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous. In the words of Memphis Police Chief C.J. Davis, these men were "heinous, reckless and inhumane." Last month, on the 10th of January, five men took the life of a 29-year-old, Tyre Nichols, and when they did, they killed something in all of us. Something in all of us died. Something precious. Something tender. Something holy. Something special. And we need to name that loss and we need to grieve that loss. Tyre was a father, a friend, a lover, a skateboarder and good man. How is that it was possible to lose sight of his humanity...over the course of a routine traffic stop?

Robbie Blish is the Chief of Police here in Woodstock. I am very grateful for his service. I called him this week because I was angry and broken-hearted about what had taken place in Memphis, TN. I called and I left him a message about my heavy heart and when he called me back, we had a discussion about all of this—about the complexities of race and class and power and violence, the complexities that lay against the simple fact that Tyre Nichols should still be alive. I called Chief Blish to begin to engage in a public conversation that will allow us to grieve our losses and guide us to choose a better way.

I can't imagine what that family is experiencing right now...what they're going through. I suspect that even they cannot imagine it. I know I'm right because RowVaugh Wells, Tyre Nichols' mother, said so herself. At her own son's funeral, she said,

Tyre was a beautiful person. And for this to happen to him is just unimaginable. I promise you, the only thing that's keeping me going is the fact that I really, truly believe my son was sent here on an assignment from God.

Vice President Kamila Harris spoke at the ceremony in Memphis. And Benjamin Crump spoke, too, the leading attorney in these days of crisis. The Reverend Al Sharpton spoke that day as well. He spoke directly to the parents of Tyre Nichols. He said,

The reason why, Mr. and Mrs, Wells, what happened to Tyre is so personal to me is that five Black men that wouldn't have had a job in the police department, would not ever be thought of to be in an elite squad, in the city [in which] Dr. King lost his life... [they] beat a brother to death. There's nothing more insulting and offensive to those of us that fight to open doors, that you walk through those doors and act like the folks we had to fight for to get you through... You didn't get on the police department by yourself. The police chief didn't get there by herself. People had to march and go to jail, and some lost their lives, to open the doors for you. And how dare you act like that sacrifice was for nothing?

[] It can rekindle something in us...if we allow it to. All of this great weight, the oceans of sorrow, the failure of broken systems, the callowness of men and women and weapons and bad ideas, the confluence of fear and strife and inequality and the holy thought that we can overcome all of this.

When we say the words, "How dare you?" let it be for truths that are higher than righteous indignation. When we say the words, "How dare you?" let it be for truths that are more refine than sorrow, death and suffering. We are the children of God. Our playing small does not serve the world in which we live.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. As we let our own Light shine, we consciously give other people permission to do the same.

There is something beautiful before us. There is the chance to live out our values. There is the opportunity to grow out of our sorrow and grow into our promise of coming days, the days that have our names written upon them, the days that know the simple sweetness of life.

Well, we know about the sugar cane
That comes from way down south
We've got one end in our hand
We've got one end in our mouth
Come on, Sarah, Sarah Maria
Sarah Maria

May the new life we make possible by knowing the best within ourselves become the heart-strengthening practice of each new day moving forward.

May it be so. Blessed be and amen.

