

“For it is not what happens to me that makes me great, but it is what I do.” That’s quote number one. “For he who loves God without faith reflects on himself, while the person who loves God in faith reflects on God.” That’s quote number two. These are the words of Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher of the 19th century. In a book called *Fear and Trembling*, he asked, “When you were called, did you answer or did you not? Perhaps softly and in a whisper?”

I don’t always know the spiritual question the lies before us. I don’t often know that spiritual question. One might think that a minister should know these things but knowing is not the nature of ministry. Knowing is the nature of plans and plans often suggest security. ...and so, they are quite popular. Sometimes, plans are more popular than Jesus. Do you know what I mean by that? I’m being a little bit cheeky. That happens when my passion gets the better of my in times of uncertainty. It’s not something that I want to “correct.” Its appearance is important to me. When my cheekiness shows up, I’m usually trying to send a message to myself—a message from my spirit, from my unconscious to my conscious self. So, “Business is often more efficacious than God”...

Not long before The Beatles broke up, John Lennon got a little bit cheeky. Dismayed and a bit disheartened by his own spectacular popularity, John Lennon remarked that The Beatles had become more popular than Jesus. His comment changed the nature of their lives. Television journalists, newspaper reporters, documentary filmmakers and the like became preoccupied with the comment that John Lennon had made. They peppered him with questions. They peppered every member of the band with questions. And John and the rest of the group responded as gracefully as they were able but the dare of Lennon’s cheeky comment—the dare and the danger of it—resonated long after the many questions and the many answers. For years, since they first got famous, The Beatles were known as loved for their boyish innocence. After the gaff about Jesus, that boyish innocence was gone. In order to move forward with integrity, The Beatles had to reinvent themselves.

On a strategic level, his comment was not the best decision he had ever made but on a spiritual level, I think John knew exactly what he was doing. He was making ready for the journey ahead. As a child in Liverpool, he knew the realm of poverty and want. As a rising star in the music business, he knew the realm of fame and fortune. He reached the place in his life where he was seeking more—the unknown, the mysterious. You can’t always plan for the unknown. You can’t always plan for the mysterious...because life is tricky and one must have faith. That’s not a platitude. It’s sage advice.

If you were a traveler moving overland, moving through time, how would you make ready for the journey? What gifts would you notice along the way, in each passing month and in each passing year, in every passing day, in every waking moment? How would you make ready for the coming ups and downs?

Good morning and good Sunday. I hope this new day finds you well. Today is Sunday, January 15th and the title of this morning's reflection is Make Ready for the Journey Ahead. It is about the act of preparation and it's about the journey itself...both of which require of us resilience.

Speaking of resilience... I found a lovely gift in my office the other day. On an icy Saturday morning, as the Shambala Yoga class was drawing to a close and right before my meeting with Mary and Kathy, as they step into the leadership of the Board of Trustees here at North Chapel, I noticed that there was a small gift wrapped in a beautiful way and left on a comfortable chair. When I opened the wrapping, I found a book. Matthew Friedman had decided to give it to me after one of our conversations about how one responds positively in times of crisis. The title of this book was Resilience—The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges (ten key ways to weather and bounce back from stress and trauma). It was written by Stephen Southwick and Dennis Charney, both medical doctors. According to them, there are ten elements of resilience:

1. Optimism
2. Facing Fear
3. Moral Compass
4. Religion & Spirituality
5. Social Support
6. Role Models
7. Physical Fitness
8. Brain Fitness
9. Cognitive and Emotional Flexibility
10. Meaning, Purpose and Growth

These are the ten elements of personal resilience, individual resilience. As I learned from my follow-up conversation with Matthew, collective resilience is a different animal—one that may or may not understand these ten elements to be prerequisite.

Now, this news blew my mind a little bit. I couldn't believe what Matthew was saying. I thought that he was wrong at first. I really thought that he was tripping...and my disbelief led me to reflect on the difference between a journey and a trip, a trip in quotations and so to speak. So, not like a road trip over to Boston or a trip over to West Leb to pick up some groceries. I mean a trip, like a departure from reality, like flight of fantasy that blows your mind.

I remember when I first learned that Elvis Presley grew up in the black part of town—Elvis, who sang the music of Big Mama Thornton (her song called “Hound Dog”) and made a lot of money even though Big Mama Thornton did not. That was trippy. And I remember when I realized the Paul Simon grew up in Queens, not far from where I lived as a child. So, back in the 1990s, when he released the Graceland album and caused a stir and was accused of appropriating the culture of South Africa because he relied so much on Joseph Shabalala and the music of Lady Smith Black Mambazo. Do you remember that? It was a trip to realize that things are not always as black and white as they seem to be...even as Elvis and Paul make a lot more money along the way in life.

I remember when I first started learning more about the realities of the South. As a black kid out of Queens who grows up in New Jersey, I didn't know a lot about the South and what I did know terrified me—because of the legacy of slavery—and it made me wonder, if I had been a white kid out of Jersey who grows up in Manhattan, would I have the same fear and trembling about the South? The racial anxiety of our time leads us to answer, “Probably not” but philosophy and faith say otherwise. Søren Kierkegaard asked, “When you were called, did you answer or did you not? Perhaps softly and in a whisper?” He called us beyond ourselves, it seems to me. That what I hear when he says that one who loves God in faith reflects on God and not oneself. We are racial beings. God is not...if it is true that we are racial beings. We have like we are. We live and die like we are but life is complex. Things are not always as black and white as they seem.

I took Matt's gift book called Resilience home with me and I started looking for another. I looked for a book called Way Up North in Dixie but I couldn't find it. The title was surging in my memory. I really wanted to find it but I couldn't. I had to looking it up online to make sure that I was remembering its thesis correctly. Here's what I found:

This book traces the lives of the Snowdens, an African American family of musicians and farmers living in rural Knox County, Ohio. [The authors] examine the Snowdens' musical and social exchanges with rural whites from the 1850s through the early 1920s and provide a detailed exploration of the claim that the Snowden family taught the song "Dixie" to Dan Emmett--the white musician and blackface minstrel credited with writing the song.

Real life is complex. Things are not as black and white as they seem.

I think of that time from time to time. I think back to the 19th century, back to the time before the Civil War, before Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. I think back and I take a journey. I travel, as if through time and I try to remember what that was like. I look for insight in its waters and I listen to the wind...

Randy

This is Randy Leavitt. Randy, would you introduce yourself? [...] Would you tell the story of Ashokan Farewell, the song that we just played together?

The January Man by Randy Leavitt (transcription not available)

Closing