

“Starting the New Year: Let’s be Honest”

With Pastor Dan Harrison and Poet Matt LaFreniere (Church of the Covenant, January 5, 2020)

Deuteronomy 8:2-3; Matthew 5:3-10

Prologue by Dan Harrison:

There are probably very few times where we stand on the precipice of change (a watershed moment—if you will) along our personal journey, where we actually recognize it in the present—not in hindsight. Looking back in life we can more easily see where we made critical decisions that sent our life barreling down specific paths, but it is much more rare to realize it in the present. Often we are simply reacting in real-time, not always seeing what may come as a result. But let us pause for a moment and contemplate our current reality... each of us is at a decision-point. We can turn right, or we can turn left. Some of us believe if you turn left, but are destined to turn right, you will eventually course-correct or as fate would have it, destiny itself will make it right in the end. Others of us believe that if we turn left, well we simply turn left—so then, confidently live into the decision, find peace in its actualization throughout the journey, don’t worry about whether it was the correct decision or not. And then there are many of us that find ourselves between these two philosophies, bouncing back and forth, living into the mystery itself with hope and faith. But I tell you, even today, we are each at moments of decision for our lives. How we speak to another, how we act in response to another, all of which have ramifications that we may not fully understand yet. Only time will bear it out.

When Jesus gave his famous “Sermon on the Mount,” notice the prevailing theme in those verses of the Beatitudes (the-blessed-are-the’s...). Who does Jesus commend? Who does Jesus favor? He creates images with his words, such as “the poor in spirit,” “the mournful,” “the meek,” “those who thirst,” “the merciful,” “the pure hearted,” “those who make peace,” “the persecuted.” Jesus makes it clear that these are the types of people that God seeks, that God wants, that God needs! In other words, the humblest of people, and perhaps the most important: The most **honest** of us. Each of these images that characterize humanity which Jesus so carefully paints with his words follows a pattern of authenticity: A human in the raw. They seem to be the most stripped down, bare, genuine versions of humanity itself. If this does not serve as a heart cry, a call from Creator to Creation with a simple ask: Be honest! —then I don’t know what else is. Jesus taught us that God does not seek Jews, or Christians, or Hindus, or Buddhists, or Muslims—God seeks simply those who “worship in spirit and in truth.” The Aramaic and Hebrew word Jesus would have used for “truth” is with the three letters E-M-T. And its meaning does not signify big “T” Truth, but instead “authenticity,” “genuineness.” My hope is that as we enter into a new decade we purposefully approach our lives and our journeys, and each other, as well as the world in which we live, with brazen honesty. May our words speak truth to power in love. May our actions be honest reflections of our heart. May we return to a deeper understanding of who we are, our place and role in the world. Our role in each other’s lives. May we become love incarnate for one another, living, breathing, examples of what love is in this world. But it starts with honesty. And that’s why God gave us poets, one version of our modern day prophets.

There is often nothing more honest than poetry. As our guest poet LaCroy so authentically shared with us through Spoken Word just a few weeks ago, his own story; he reminded me of what poetry is to the poet, it is the act of stripping naked in front of others and simply being. And it is uncomfortable, and often painful, but it is honest, and through the poet’s act of courage we are then in turn each challenged

to come into our own rawness, our own truth. With this in mind, I am honored to give space for one of our inhouse poets, Matt LeFreniere. You may have gotten to know him and his lovely wife Mary Ellen, and adorable kids Lola and Jude, over the past couple months as they've joined with us for community fellowship. Mary Ellen is an artist, a floral designer and runs her own business out of their home, and Matt is a poet, and is also Assistant Dean of Faculty at VES, while also teaching poetry there. It has been wonderful getting to know them and their family little by little and we will all excitedly continue to do so, and that's why it's a treasure when Matt agreed to share some fresh works he has composed; having read a few of his poems before—I must admit, I don't remember reading someone with such insight into his own self in the most seemingly mundane moments of life. Matt has a gift for introspection and clarity, honesty and care. May we take in his private moments shared with us, single glimpses into his personal space this morning with absolute absorption and reflection, with a hope that we can be inspired to start 2020 with equal attention to depth of self, and authentic desire for personal growth.

Poetry by Matt LaFreniere:

14 Lines for Parenting Anxious

Jack likes to sit on the sofa's armrest.
I warn him not to over and over,
as I often do in my parenting,
as if an admonition like *Jaacckkk, you
be careful*, would actually compute,
influence the way he looks at me
now and 20 years from now, his back turned
and teetering on a precipice.
I'm out of the room when he falls,
and when I find him, belly up screaming,
all I feel is rage. But I scoop him up,
and maybe he'll never remember
how I gripped him tighter than I should've,
and maybe he'll always know why.

14 Lines for the Frumpy

Fitting, lately, the way Esme
says *thanks*. She shoots her eyes away
from mine and leans hard on the "k"
as she busies herself with the smoothie
she makes, or the wrangling of Jack
to get him in his underwear.
These days, my parting words are dressed
in hope, garments that hide the nakedness
of what I mean, my love suddenly
ashamed of its form, shrouded in layers
to obscure its frumpy shape. I'm half out the door,
then turn: *Hope the meeting goes well today*.
She looks at me while Jack steps into the pants
her thumbs hold open. *Thanks*, she says.

14 Lines for Breakfast

I let Jack crack the eggs. He taps each one softly on the bowl's edge, makes a little divot, looks at what he's done, then crumples it over the bowl, his fingers a mess of slime and yolk and shell. My anxiety bubbles. He shimmies his hips with pride, gyrating on his stool, and I stand behind him, pin him with my belly to the counter's edge. *Daddy, no, no, what are you doing,* he pleads. I'm fishing out shell fragments, gritting my teeth as the shards evade my thumb and middle finger. *No, Daddy, nooooo,* he continues, swiping at my movements. *Daddy, stop, you're ruining our breakfast.*