

## The Power of Being

Sermon by Dan Harrison, Pastor at Church of the Covenant, Lynchburg, VA (USA) 8/9/2020

There is something revealing about the idea of existence: *We all believe it!* We all believe we exist, confirmed each morning when we wake up and our consciousness reconnects with our body in a state of self-awareness, right? As we open our eyes after a night of dreaming, a time in which our mind enters various states of decompression where we lose ourselves into the imaginings of our cerebral center as our brain processes things for us throughout the night while the cells of our body largely rest and replenish, but our eyes suddenly open and the sounds of our environment focus into reality—and I would argue that we now enter into a state of conscious being. We suddenly become present with reality as we can see, touch, smell, taste and hear it all around us—the very things that were oddly missing from our night of dreaming (well usually, anyway). But here they are suddenly converging, crashing in on us one by one, telling us one thing, “You are alive.”

This kind of self-awareness is important to make decisions outside of what we would consider routine. To think through the consequences of our actions, while often our routines supersede conscious decision-making, we can get lost in the everyday mundane, the minutia of life. If every morning when we wake we use the bathroom or make the coffee or simply get dressed, and fail to think through the experience itself, then we have perhaps lost moments of true transformative change that we could have otherwise experienced. We miss out on the actual power of *being*, and replace it with simply *going*.

There is precedence for simply “being.” Think of Moses when he was being sent back into Egypt where his people, the Israelites were enslaved. God was sending him back to liberate them, but wanted them to know that their God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob was with them. Moses asked God, “Who shall I say sent me?” Then God told him, “Tell them I AM sent you.” God’s answer to Moses’ question was simply the “being” of oneself—in Hebrew it was the first-person conjugation of “haya” or “to be.” What does this mean? This power of simply being?

I think the answer is anchored within the concept we were just exploring, the idea of stepping out of automated routine and choosing to live in and through the moment(s) that we’ve been given. Thich Nhat Hanh calls this “mindfulness.” In “The Miracle of Mindfulness,” he says, “*In mindfulness one is not only restful and happy, but alert and awake.*” What if this state of mindfulness or “being” was anchored in a connection with the Divine somehow?

Thomas Keating in “Open Mind, Open Heart,” says that, “*When the presence of God emerges from our inmost being into our faculties, whether we walk down the street or drink a cup of soup, divine life is pouring into the world.*” In both cases, these wisdom teachers are alluding to the idea that there is something inherently transformative happening when we choose to be aware and live into that awareness—diving headfirst into “being.” How can this not be a Divine act in and of itself? Even God’s answer to Moses couches the idea of being (state of “I am”) as being ultimately Divine-connected.

This concept of being rather than doing has cultural implications. Many of us who have taken simple sociology courses are aware of some of the obvious cultural differences in regards to the concept of *time*. Our dominant culture in this country greatly values punctuality. We often begin our meetings now days with a phrase, showing participants who've gathered that we are starting on time and ending on time because "I want to honor your time." It is a cordiality that is rooted in the culture of chronological, well calculated time. This cultural norm hails from its Germanic roots and is pervasive to the point that it has become the majority standard, so much so, that to break from it is "dishonoring" or "inconsiderate." But in our sociology classes we learned that not all cultures are like that, and in fact the native cultures of this hemisphere time is of little importance when it comes to the experience itself. So, people arriving to a birthday party after the appointed time, for example, among Native Americans in Oklahoma or even the Latinos (who are Natives too) of El Paso, Texas, is generally not considered "dishonorable" or "disrespectful" because the cultural expectations are different. These people groups represent more "event oriented" cultures versus "time oriented" cultures. Cultures which are more recently earth-born or tribal tend to lean towards a more experiential expectation than critical start-stop times. This is true among Africans and Arabs as well.

In Jesus' time, there were differing views of time as well, differing views of living into one's "being." It can be seen by the authors of the Gospels who would later write out Jesus' stories in common Greek. And the authors would distinguish in those stories between chronological time, *kronos*, and moments of transformation, *kairos*. Most instances that refer to time in the Gospels the word "kronos" is used, the measure of time, calculated, precise—but then there are moments where time means something much more immeasurable and transformative in which "kairos" is used: For example, in Luke 12:56 when Jesus says, "You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and sky. How is it you don't know how to interpret this present time (kairos)?" or in Mark 1:14-15 "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time (kairos) has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near.'" Kairos refers to a much deeper, consequential moment in time, an awareness or divine-connected mindfulness that extends beyond simple chronology or routine. It is the experiential and transformative. I believe all of these point to a great understanding of the power of "being." You were not born onto this earth to simply follow an automated routine, but to breathe in life with the idea of transforming, blossoming and living into who you really are.

But to live into our being, to feel its power realized fully in our lives, we must pause and be aware. We must stop, and listen, see, touch, feel, smell and taste. Let God's vitality make union with our own. When we become human we become I AM, we become self-actualized and fully grown into our beingness, our existence together on this earth. And only then can we love one another, once we've learned to love our real selves by accepting the power and authenticity of our actual being. Then I AM selflessly segues to YOU ARE.

Shalom