

New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario

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Overcoming Fear in 2019!

Seneca, Roman philosopher and politician and contemporary of the historical Jesus, in his letters to Lucilius, wrote these words: "Wild animals run from the dangers they actually see, and once they have escaped them, worry no more. We however are tormented alike by what is past and what is to come."

Edward is serving time in the Don Jail for a securities fraud. Even so, he is still loved by his father David. One day, David writes Edward a letter: "My dear Edward: I am so afraid that I won't be able to plant anything in the garden in 2019! I fear that I am growing too old to dig it over without your help. I am so looking forward to your early release. Love from your Dad"

Edward replied: "Dearest Dad: Please don't dig up the garden - that's where I hid the money and the securities. Be patient. Wait until I get out. Love as always Edward."

At 4am in the morning, the police showed up at David's house and dug up the entire garden. Two days later, David received another letter from Edward: "Dearest Dad, Now the soil has been dug over it should be easier for you to work. Now, you can start to plant your garden. It's the best I could do from here. Your devoted son Edward."

From St Paul: "Nothing that exists, nothing still to come, nor any power or height or depth, nor any created thing can ever come between us and the love of God."

This morning I wish to share with you some ideas that you may not necessarily agree with. I definitely have some reservations myself. At the end I will share with you what I personally believe, but in order to get where I think we need to go, we need to first assess the validity and truth in these ideas. So here goes!

According to David Richo, psychologist, our major fears are: "Fear of loss, fear of change, fear of letting go and going on with life, fear of self-disclosure, the fear of other people, the fear of other's feelings, fears of rejection, the fear of giving and receiving, the fear of comings and goings and the fear of being alone."

Then he says these are the conditions of ordinary living!!

He says there are four main givens in life:

- We are ultimately alone
- Things are transitory
- Life is unpredictable and often unfair
- And suffering seems to be a universal experience

If the world is as David Richo says it is, then these are four things that cannot be changed. Accepting that this is the way things are on earth would be an **adult reaction** to the world, he believes. So, what is the problem according to Richo? When we confront these realities, he says that we tend to behave like scared children, not adults.

We are ultimately alone

I was talking to a friend of mine some time ago whose husband had left her. What was the fear? That no one would want to be with her. She was looking for a way to fill up the loneliness, so that she wouldn't have to feel it. She did not believe that she could do this for herself, so she was afraid!

1) Things are transitory

The same kind of fear can happen in romantic love. If things in this world are transitory a childish reaction to a love gone bad would be to try with all ones might and main to hang onto something that isn't working, or to search for another romantic experience with someone else with the thrill of being in love. Richo would argue that things rise, crest and decline and that bell- shaped curve seems to characterize all our experiences of life. He says that it is normal to go **from romance to conflict to a mature commitment**. The adult accepts that; **the scared child in us does not**. The child in us becomes afraid.

2) Life is unpredictable and unfair

The mature adult allows that things in this world are unpredictable. Take the world at present; The Trump White House, refugees on the march the world over, oil spills and garbage in the oceans, a yoyo stock market, real estate values all over the place, terrorism, and global climate change messing with the predictable weather patterns!

From the scared child's perspective, we try to find a safe harbor, something/ anything/ or anyone to hang onto; a religion, a guru, a belief system or an addiction that gives our life meaning. We only feel safe when everything is under control and somebody is taking care of us. Richo says that the adult, who lives past the feeling of fear, **comes to terms with the unpredictability of life and does not try to find a way around it**. The adult learns to say 'some things happen according to my plans and others don't. I accept this as a fact of life.'

He argues that a mature person realizes pretty early in life **that life is not fair. The child in us wants an all knowing just judge fixing everything up for us**.

But as the Hebrew Bible also points out the wicked can prosper and the good can die young. We can hold the belief that we reap what we sow, and that often is the case. That said, the wicked can still prosper and the innocent suffer and so the child in us wants to have a just balancing and judgment, after this life, by an all just God. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap."

According to Richo, if life is unfair and unpredictable then bad things will happen to good people and good things will happen to bad people. **It is the child in us that wants the predictability of fairness and punishment when life is not fair.** The adult perhaps might look for reformation and transformation. The child in us wants to hit back.

One look at the criminal justice system and we see the problem immediately. It is childishly about revenge and punishment and does not recognize mercy as an adult reaction, along with rehabilitation, restorative justice and transformation. Why don't we get there? It's more expensive to keep people inside.

3) Suffering as a universal experience

One of the dynamics in life is that suffering often has a role in building character. One mature perception could be that all the people who brought suffering into our lives somehow were participating in what needed to happen for us to grow.

I am sure that you can testify to that. The mature person seeks that perspective and thus finds a way to forgive. The child in us does not and holds resentment about the suffering and goes into the victim mentality.

4) Faith

Then Richo raises what for me is a crucial question: What is the role of faith in our ultimate understanding of the universe and the way things are? He says that adult faith happens in the **paradoxical gap** that opens within us when we are confronted with the apparent arbitrariness of nature and history on one hand, and on the other hand the revelation of a Providential God. The two facts, arbitrariness and Providence, seem irreconcilable but the combining word AND closes the gap. Simultaneously, he argues, we are held **and** not held; we are both at the mercy of circumstance **and** in the Grace of circumstance. Faith he says "never...simplifies our human story, it enriches it by the paradox of simultaneity, the combination of opposites."

So, if life is transitory, if we are ultimately alone, if life is unpredictable and often unfair, and suffering seems to be a universal experience, where does faith in a Providential loving God come in?

Richo's point is this: that faith is also in this strange bizarre mix we call Life, and faith can influence reality and change things. It is **'both and'** not **'one or the other'**! Faith needs to be factored in. How will that work?

In the native traditions they talk a lot about the medicine wheels. Lately a new wheel has been added called "The mistakes wheel." This wheel stresses self acceptance and acceptance of **what is**, in the universe.

In the north part of the wheel, the message reads 'learning from our mistakes.' In the west part it is "learning from the mistakes of others."

In the east it says, “learning from the mistakes of our teachers” and in the south part of the wheel it says, “be willing to make as many mistakes as it takes.” In the center of the wheel which represents the essence of the learning is a spiritual truth- a faith truth- “learning, that there is no such thing as a mistake”.

Barry Neil Kaufman therapist and author writes: If we open ourselves to the possibilities that **all** we encounter and do offers us opportunities for learning, **then we can make all circumstances useful and fruitful.** Certainly, a universe in which such a possibility exists would be “user friendly.”

But now I want to present something different. What if the universe is what we make it? Since our beliefs are powerful, what about us creating a vision of the universe that we want and then going about collecting evidence to support it?

This is Barry Neil Kaufman’s thesis. He says suppose we begin by painting a bleak picture. We will find tons of evidence to support a very negative view of reality. But then again when we did that, we would be excluding other parts of reality like love happiness and possible meaning in the world. There would not be much faith in God in that bleak view, except perhaps as a dark deity.

However, we could just as easily construct another view and look for evidence to support a “user friendly” universe. What about our growing knowledge, space exploration, renewal of decaying structures, resilience in nature despite oil spills and global warming and climate change?

Babies are born bringing new life. There is enormous technological progress. We are living lives where we experience the most amazing medical cures and breakthroughs. There is very beautiful music made in the world, glorious architecture, breathtaking scenery, the delights of love and laughter and amazing joy.

Which view of the world is the truth?

Kaufman says neither. Explanations and evidence do not constitute truth, **they merely uphold or verify someone’s position.** He says that in a court of law truth remains elusive, while evidence or proof becomes the deciding factor. The ultimate accepted truth is what the jury decides to believe.

For that reason, the innocent can be jailed and the guilty go free. Our perception of the world ultimately defines it and we feel and act accordingly.

Some of you will have read Lynne McTaggart’s work on the Intention experiment or read her book titled The Field. Her thesis is that there is a field outside of us that responds to our intentions. In short what we think about we tend to bring about. The universe responds to whatever we intend in some way.

If we have a negative view of the world then the world faithfully reflects back to us the negative. If we have a positive view of the world then the universe faithfully reflects back to us that positive view.

So, let's try and put all this together!

We have an arbitrariness in nature and also the possibility of a Providential God, **simultaneously**. We can support a view that life is suffering and seek deliverance by non-attachment, or we can support a view that life is an adventure; stimulating, hope filled, renewing and eternal. The so called 'truth' will be elusive but we will be able to find evidence for our position, because the universe reflects back to us what we put out. What we think about we tend to bring about.

In other words, life is amazingly complex and there are many players on the field that we cannot control.

When we want to overcome fear, I think a first step then, is to become **adult and accept things as they are**.

When we accept things as they are, we can move forward **to change the things that can be changed**.

This is where faith and intention come in and by **the power of our beliefs**, we can create our lives and change the world, hopefully for the better!

Our beliefs and feelings tend to **attract into our lives** what we are thinking about.

This is a hard lesson but is surprisingly neutral and fair. If we focus on the positive, then we bring into reality the positive. If we focus on the negative, we bring into our lives the negative. It is up to us. Attitude is all important here.

It works like this: If we think about loving others and act to love others, others will love us and act lovingly toward us. Reality is a mirror to our thoughts and feelings.

For me I do not entirely agree with the 4 so called realities that Richo puts forward as to the way Life is.

Here is what I believe from a Christian perspective:

- Are we ultimately alone? I don't believe that. I believe that God is always with us
- Are all things transitory? This is only an appearance when it comes to life. Life is not transitory, it is actually everlasting. We go on beyond death...
- Is Life is unpredictable and often unfair? Yes, but in that unpredictability lies our freedom to love, and love is the greatest reason for everything.

- Is suffering a universal experience? Although there is great suffering in life that is definitely not the whole story. We can also choose happiness as a world view, in a user-friendly universe.

Barry Neil Kaufman says: “I have chosen the user-friendly universe perspective including a belief in a happy loving God who is trying to make me be happy and loving.” He says that his early religious training championed pain and suffering as a necessary and inevitable ingredient of life and as a genuine curative and enlightening pathway to holding hands with a Supreme Being.

But although he says that he has learned from pain, he says **that he has grown much more from happiness.** He recognizes that his increased inner ease, self acceptance and happiness has allowed him a profound spiritual embrace, not available in the midst of his discomfort and desperation. Then comes this, what for me is a marvelous statement: *“In choosing a user-friendly universe, I have noticed more supportive action and opportunities around me. In choosing happiness, I have encountered a happy God. In choosing love, I have encountered a loving God.”*

I, like Kaufman, also believe in a loving God who works all things together for good. This is my faith. Is the universe closed or does life go on after death? Do we need to fear death? Is it the fear behind all fears? I think that life goes on. Listen to this true story which gives just a glimpse into what s to come after this life.

Austin Goodrich a veteran of the second world war was in an aerial bombardment of his company, when during a moment of silence, he heard the cry of a young rifleman called Marks. Marks called out suddenly “Mother!” It was not a cry of grief but a greeting. Austin questioned the company medic after the bombardment and asked whether the young Marks had survived? The medic said “no.” “But I heard him call out,” Austin said, “so did I.” said the medic “but I don’t know how.”

Many years later at a golden reunion Austin met a former close friend of Marks and asked him whether he too had heard the cry. “Yes” he said that he had. “He must have seen her in his minds eye and called out to her.” Austin suggested. “You know I have often wondered about that, the friend replied, because Walter never knew his mother. He has never even seen her.” “How’s that?” said Austin. “She died in childbirth when she brought him into this world.”

St. Paul says; “All things work together for good.” Why? Because the Almighty God loves us.

Believe that and let that belief change your life, in 2019!