

I Hope You Dance

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This morning's sermon topic selection was inspired by Ryan and Jessica Spaulding, who purchased it at last spring's auction. They asked me to talk about being engaged and committed in one's life and one's community; about showing up and saying "yes" to the opportunities that present themselves; and why it's important to express our caring and concern through action.

When I learned what they wanted their sermon to be about, I was reminded of the song Joe played for us this morning, I Hope You Dance, recorded several years ago by Lee Ann Womack. The words of the chorus are:

"And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance, I hope you dance."

When life gives you a choice, I hope you'll say "yes" – I hope you'll join in the dance and be all that you can be, all that you dream. I hope that you won't fall back into excuses and reasons that you can't or you won't. When you have the opportunity to be involved in a worthy cause, or if you want to make something happen in your community, I hope you'll step up and step in, offering your service, your insight, and your good intent to the cause.

Words from the song:

I hope you never lose your sense of wonder
You get your fill to eat, but always keep that hunger
May you never take one single breath for granted
God forbid love ever leave you empty handed
I hope you still feel small when you stand by the ocean
Whenever one door closes, I hope one more opens
Promise me you'll give faith a fighting chance

What keeps us from living a full life, from fully engaging as Thoreau talked about in his writing that Bert quoted this morning?

Sometimes, we just don't want to:

- For me: changing careers at 50, decided I probably wouldn't be pursuing that ballerina fantasy, choosing ministry as another of the ways I could express myself..
- Realizing that I COULD have followed the love and call of dance, IF I'd wanted it enough, I could, even at 50, have created some opportunity to be in the world of dance. But, frankly, I didn't want to do all that it would take.
- Passion – we all have things we love and care about, but not all of our interests need to become our life's work or even our avocation. Some things in life are better enjoyed as a hobby or a part-time pursuit.

- There are many ways to get involved in things we have passion for – the environment, the arts, making the lives of our fellow life travelers a little easier.
- If everyone took responsibility for pursuing something that they care about and want to help with, the work of the world would get done – someone would care for saving the seals, and someone would care for the homeless. Someone would make the coffee and someone would bring the snacks.

Maybe it just seems like too much of a risk:

#658 – To Risk

Fear that we will be inadequate to the task:

- Marianne Williamson quote (see card)
- There will always be people who tell you that you can't, and maybe you have to change directions or try another strategy sometimes. But, don't give up.

Words from the song:

I hope you never fear those mountains in the distance
 Never settle for the path of least resistance
 Living might mean taking chances, but they're worth taking
 Lovin' might be a mistake, but it's worth making
 Don't let some hell bent heart leave you bitter
 When you come close to selling out, reconsider
 Give the heavens above more than just a passing glance

Which leads me to the next possible reason that we might sit it out: Cynicism:

It's so easy to move away from our wonder and open-heartedness to a place of cynicism – so much happens to us that can shut down our joy.

We have access to so much information, and a hunger, it seems, to have even more. I was thinking about this this week in light of the revelations about Tiger Woods marital problems.

- #560 Dorothy Day/Commitment
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- #494 W. E. B. Dubois – shall make a life worth living

Words from the song:

Time is a real and constant motion always, rolling us along
 Tell me who wants to look back on their youth and wonder
 Where those years have gone

Sometimes, people ask me, as a minister, if there's an afterlife. I don't know the answer to that any more than you do. I do believe, however, that as I was apparently safe and

well cared for wherever I was before I was born, if I was anyplace at all, therefore, I'll be safe and well cared for after I die. That works for me – it's enough of an explanation to satisfy my need to know.

The only thing I'm sure I have, that all of us have, is the lives we are in the middle of right now. We get these spirits and these brains and these bodies to do something with these years that we have been given. And, I know I don't want to look back now or on any day of my life and wonder what could have been, if I'd only been brave enough, or curious enough, or passionate enough, or given myself permission to take the risk and get involved.

Big or small, whatever I'm given the opportunity to do, I want to be able to say I gave it my best shot – not perfection, but enthusiastic and engaged.

Life is a dance, one that we learn as we go along. We only learn that dance by being willing to get involved, by putting ourselves out there and participating. If you care about it, put your heart into it. If you can't do all of the dance, do as much as you can. Listen to the music of your heart and keep saying "yes" to life.

There's a great Zimbabwean proverb – "If you can walk, you can dance. If you can talk, you can sing." And, I would add, if you can't do those, you can still keep time.

I know that there are so many reasons that we can come up with to sit it out on the sidelines, to take a breather and then never get back up and out on the dance floor of life. I hope that as long as the music of your life is playing, we'll all be able to look over at you and see your feet moving.

May it be so. Blessed be.