

Theme for June: Destiny the Practice of Preparation

"All right, you win. You win. I give. I'll say it. I'll say it. I'll say it. DESTINY! DESTINY! NO ESCAPING THAT FOR ME! DESTINY! DESTINY! NO ESCAPING THAT FOR ME!"

-Friedrich Frankenstein, Young Frankenstein

You might be familiar with the film *Young Frankenstein*, amid the laughter and bawdy jokes, our protagonist must accept the mantle of his family, for you see he is the grandson of the titular character in Mary Shelley's classic. So long as he denies his destiny (continuing his grandfather's work) he is a fish out of water. But in the moment he accepts it, his life gets easier and his work becomes clear.

Literature is littered with stories of people fighting their destiny, only to accept it in the end and find fulfillment. Perhaps the most famous is the story of Jonah, asked by God to travel to the city of Nineveh, but instead goes to Tarshish--in the opposite direction. Jonah faces the hardships of the storm at sea and being swallowed by a whale, and it is only when he accepts the will of God that he is at peace again. But he again questions destiny--this time, the destiny of Nineveh and asks since God is merciful wasn't He going to spare Nineveh anyway? Why even travel to Nineveh in the first place? So Jonah stays to watch what happens to Nineveh and to his dismay, it is spared, making him angry (also due to the fact that Nineveh was an enemy nation).

In the object lesson that God prepares for Jonah, God asks Jonah "Nineveh has more than one hundred twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle too. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" From Jonah's point of view, there was no choice, it was an inevitability, it was destined. But from God's point of view, there was choice.

This month we explore the nature of destiny. Is it inevitable? Immutable? Or is destiny what you make of it? And how do you prepare for your destiny? Is it any wonder that in the King James translation of the story of Jonah, God prepared the storm, the fish (or whale), the gourd, and the worm, all to challenge Jonah? Preparation is the practice for this month. What does it mean to prepare for your destiny? What happens if you don't prepare for it?

Questions for Discussion and Discernment on your own, or with each other:

1. How are destiny and fate alike? How are they different?
2. If your destiny is your destination, is preparation buying the ticket, taking the trip, or packing your suitcase?
3. How can what you do alter your destiny?
4. What, if anything, have you experienced that felt destined?
5. How is preparation for very different things alike?
6. How do you deal with being unprepared?
7. Why is it that two people with very similar preparations can have very different destinies?
8. What is your destiny?

Quotes and short readings:

"I don't believe anyone's destiny is etched in stone... unless, it is carved on a stone that marks their death!"

— Jane Urda Detwiler

"Your destiny is shaped according to the combination of conditions pre-determined at birth and other factors that you are able to change through your own efforts."

— The Essence of Buddha, Ryuho Okawa

"What we achieve inwardly will change outer reality."

— Plutarch

"It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves."

— William Shakespeare

"Your beliefs become your thoughts,
Your thoughts become your words,
Your words become your actions,
Your actions become your habits,
Your habits become your values,
Your values become your destiny."

— Mahatma Gandhi

"A plan is the transport medium which conveys a person from the station of dreams to the destination of success. Goals are the transport fees."

— Israelmore Ayivor

"The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

A merchant in Baghdad sends his servant to the marketplace for provisions. Shortly, the servant comes home white and trembling and tells him that in the marketplace he was jostled by a woman, whom he recognized as Death, and she made a threatening gesture. Borrowing the merchant's horse, he flees at top speed to Samarra, a distance of about 75 miles (125 km), where he believes Death will not find him. The merchant then goes to the marketplace and finds Death, and asks why she made the threatening gesture. She replies, "That was not a threatening gesture, it was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Baghdad, for I had an appointment with him tonight in Samarra."

"Profound hearts, wise minds, take life as God makes it; it is a long trial, and unintelligible preparation for the unknown destiny."

— Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

"Destiny appears to those who are willing to hear and act with honest purpose and good intent. ... Fate, however, discovers those who have not prepared."

— Val Edward Simone

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