

“Falling Up”

Rev. Nathan Detering

Sunday, October 22, 2017

Reading

Ode To Gaiety

By James Broughton

Go gloom Begone glum and grim Off with the drab drear and grumble It's
time its pastime to come undone and come out laughing time to wrap
killjoys in wet blankets and feed them to the sourpusses

Come frisky pals Come forth wily wags Loosen your screws and get off
your rocker Untie the strait lacer Tie up the smarty pants Tickle the
crosspatch with josh and guffaw Share quips and pranks with every victim
of grouch pomposity or blah

Woe to the bozo who says No to tee hee ho ho and ha ha Boo to the
cleancut klutz who wipes the smile off his face Without gaiety freedom is
a chastity belt Without gaiety life is a wooden kimono

Come cheerful chums Cut up and carry on Crack your pots and split your
sides Boggle the bellyacher Convulse the worrywart Pratfall the prissy
poos and the fuddy duds Take drollery to heart or end up a deadhead at
the guillotine of the mindless

Be wise and go merry round whatever you cherish what you love to enjoy
what you live to exert And when the high spirits call your number up
count on merriment all the way to the countdown Long live hilarity
euphoria and flumadiddle Long live gaiety for all the laity

~ James Broughton ~

“Here is the world; beautiful and terrible things will happen.

Keep our hearts tender.

Keep our eyes soft.

Because this is what we are about:

We know there is no answer but to love one another.

We bear witness against unnecessary destruction.

We gather in community to practice being the person

The world is calling us to be.

We cannot do everything,

But we can do something, and that something is not nothing.

So forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack in everything

That is how the light gets in.”

Bag packed? Check.

Laptop closed and stowed away? Check.

Projector ‘borrowed’ from church with permission from the Senior Minister to show the group of mostly cranky clergy on Tuesday night a film to lift them out of any glum and gloom and glim? Check.

Audio version of book I was supposed to read before this aforementioned gathering of clergy,

particularly because I am on the 3-person committee charged with leading the 2.5 days of study and reflection on the book

that begins in two hours, which is just enough time to speed down 495

towards Centerville on the Cape where we will gather? Check.

Not enough time to listen to whole book, but will try to get as far as I can?

Check.

But first, this: just sit in the car, which sits in the driveway, and just stop.

You ever do this?

Just stop. Don't turn on the ignition. Don't plug in the phone.

Don't adjust the rear-view-mirror.

Don't check yourself out in the side mirror, asking: is that another new fleck of grey? And there, another one? And there, another one????

No, none of that. Just stop. Just breathe. Just look.

Parker Palmer, the Quaker teacher, says that inner work, work on heart and soul, can change the outer world.

Which is a good reminder to those of us who get to thinking that

We're either the kind of person who wants to savor the world or the kind

Of person who wants to save the world.

It's not either/or proposition, Parker is saying, but instead a dance in two steps,

One leading to the next and the next leading back to the first.

We get it? You with me?

So stop. Just Look and breathe in deep.

Because this monthly car payment doesn't come cheap

And there are windows all around you, and above, too...

Which cost extra, this sun roof, this slice of ceiling that glides back

With a one touch button and opens up to reveal a three by one-foot framed sky that is flaunting itself without any shame or humility,

so blue and true and deep that you know it is daring everyone and everything to just try, just try to look away,

Which I can't. Can you?

We can't seem to look away from accidents or the nightly news fear reel or the latest Trump tweet.

So how come we can look away so easily from autumn?

But then, like the shock of the first frost, this: "*Welcome to your audio book!*"

You are about to enjoy *author Scott Stossel's New York Times best-selling 2014 release of...(ready for it?): My Age of Anxiety: Fear, Hope, Dread, And the Search for Peace of Mind.*

Sigh. Seriously? Who chose this for our study group?

Who did that? After the year we've had?

After all the drab drear and grumble and grim?

Oh look, there he is...staring at you in the rear-view-mirror.

I did. I chose the book.

You ever curse your previous self?

No? How about now as you hear the narrator purr on,

The car now in reverse and then propelling forward,
the slice of sky in eclipse:

"My Age of Anxiety," the voice says, "is a riveting, revelatory, and moving account of the author's struggles with anxiety, and of the history of efforts by scientists, philosophers, and writers to understand the condition.

As recently as thirty-five years ago, anxiety did not exist as a diagnostic category. Today, it is the most common form of officially classified mental illness. Scott Stossel gracefully guides us across the terrain of an affliction that is pervasive yet too often misunderstood.

Chapter 1: A History of My Nervous Stomach."

I've done, you've done, this drive to the Cape so much now
That whole journeys get made without us ever noticing or thinking or feeling
much of anything,
Our glaze only interrupted when we hit the hump of Bourne Bridge
And get startled by the narrowing of lanes and everybody next to you
Swerving too close because even though we're all on a bridge
And the cables could snap at any moment and we could plunge down and
down it still seems okay for them to be scanning their phones
While they steer.
Yes, I'm anxious about heights, to name just one.

But something about fall interrupts the auto-pilot in me,
And the flare of color against the sky makes even Wrentham Outlet Mall,
and Exit 95, and the dog racing track on the right,
And the highway hotels look like little corner stores of heaven,
Which is the irony of the season, isn't it? –
How it reminds us like no other of another year gone, time underfoot,
Leaves falling, summer in rear-view, light getting low earlier
And earlier,
And along with that ache,
Everything, even the ugly and the broken along the road side,
And inside you and in me, just ablaze with light,
Just broken open from this world that can shine such beauty.

Chapter 2, the narrator says, *Worries and Warriors: What are you?*
Um, both?

And as I listen to the chapter, and watch the trucks pass me with “Get on the Trump Train” stickers on the bumper,
And go under the bridge where someone hung against the chain link fence
an American flag that is now tattered from the wind,
Next to the faded Hillary sign that says ‘*I’m with her...*’,
Next to “*Brad, you are in our hearts forever*” poster board,
Next to the blue **Hate Has No Home Here** signs,
next to the spray painted plea on the bridge
That says “*Colleen...prom? Please?*”
Next to the #2069 sign stuck in the ground, marking the number
Of opiate deaths in Mass. in 2016,
I’m reminded of why I suggested a book on anxiety for this small
Group of UU clergy to read.

Because as much as I try to be a warrior, I’m a worrier, too.
And these times we’re living in scare me,
Which I know because I’ve never had so many dreams as I’ve
Had this last year that have me falling.....
Down, down, down.....until I wake up into my bed next to Karyn ,
forehead glistening.

Says David Brooks, one of my more favorite culture commentators:
We’re living in an age of anxiety,
When many of us live with bewildering freedom,
Without many institutions to trust,
Unattached to compelling religions and sources of meaning,
Uncertain about lives.

*Anxiety is not so much a fear of a specific thing,
but a fear of everything,
an unnamable dread about the future.*

*People will do anything to escape it...like vote for someone who gives
Them a quick pass out of anxiety with promises of making things great
Again and blaming all their troubles on others...*

Before the Welcome to Cape Cod sign comes, there on the right
Comes first the cranberry bogs, pregnant with purple and juicy red,
And even as the anxiety narrator warbles on,
I've now got the tarte of cranberries on my tongue,
And cranberry sauce in just one month on that great sacred, secular
Holiday that is Thanksgiving,
My most favorite holiday of the entire year.
Why? Because there is, comparatively, so much less hype and hoopla,
And because I want to gather in the grace for the gifts I don't have to earn,
Like this autumn, this fall, whose beauty lifts me up and up and up
On the morning after I awake having fallen in my dreams down and down
and down.

"Chapter 3, narrator says: "Redemption and Resilience"

Now that's more like it.

And oh look, just in time, here comes Bourne Bridge,
All high and spanning and narrowing and speeding closer,
Not unlike the great gift that is this fall of 2017,
Together all of us suspended over the water of our lives –
Hope for kids there, worry for kids here,

work here, commute there,
Empty nest here, our hearts no longer in our chests but at college with the
kids who left,
Or parents or ourselves coming into autumn of life, with all the complexity
that brings,
And spouses and partners we learn to come back to again and again,
Nurturing a patient love,
Bodies flourishing, bodies failing, bodies growing, bodies dying...
here in fall of 2017,
My email so full this fall of your stories,
To say nothing of the world so full of fire and fear,
And so full of Blazing, fleeting beauty, too...
All that and so much more under the span of this bridge we cross
Again and again
Sometimes the dizzying height of it all
Making us feel like we're falling down and down,
More worrier than warrior...
You with me?

*“The most powerful answer to worry” says the narrator,
“is the courage to rest in anxiety and not try to quickly escape it...
Uncertainty and anxiety throw you off the smug island of certainty and force
you into the free waters of creativity and learning.”*

Which I try to do as I cross the Bourne,
Opening the slice in the ceiling and, with one eye on the road,
Tilt my head back to receive the blessing of blue from the sun roof,

That in this moment, in these times, is more like a redemption roof...
This autumn of holy holies redeeming me from a diet of too much
news, too many confrontations with what I cannot save,
And too little savoring of what I can,
too many tweets...
I feel out of balance, off kilter, inner life neglected too soon,
Too much,
Which is why I need more of such moments like those on
That bridge, redeeming and redemption from sky and water
And color and autumn. Am I alone?

I've been a UU for 20 years exactly this year,
Which isn't enough time to be an expert, but is enough time
To have opinions.
And one opinion I have is that our faith tradition, for all its gifts,
Can be difficult in times like these when we're all anxious
And moved by all we cannot save...
We say deeds not creed, faith as action, Protestant Work Ethic,
Let's fix everything....
And when we can't fix everything we get anxious.
Or at least I do.

Which is why when the worry grows in me, and you,
We need the reminder that the inner life needs tending
Just as much as the outer world.
Not for nothing does our faith tell us that religion is for this world
And not some other world,

And that God is a verb experienced in this life and not a noun
We're going to get closer to in some other life.
And God can this world be heart breaking open beautiful.

Today is a good time to practice.
Because in falling down times, we can use this beautiful fall
To help us fall up, get held up, get redeemed from all the worry
We carry around.
What, who do you want to fall up to?

Chapter 4: Peace of Mind, the narrator says.

And just as he does, I come up on the rotary, that circle of death,
That free-for-all of Massachusetts merging aggression,
And there, in the center, cleared away from the shining brambles
And purple leaves, is this sign: "*Tell Someone You Love them Today*"
So I did, and I do: I love you people of UUAC.
In falling in times, let's fall up together...."

Amen.