

Isaiah 40:21-31  
February 4, 2018

Maybe it's the upcoming Winter Olympics; watching athletes from near and far and entranced by the sheer power and beauty of the human body! I'm especially excited to follow the Canadian speed skating team this year. My former colleague's son, Ben, will be competing as part of the team at only 21 years of age. For me, watching the Olympics is to see poetry in motion and to celebrate the power and beauty of the human body, but it is also a reminder of the heavy discipline, sacrifice and determination a person needs in order to achieve dreams.

Maybe it was a book I read. Cheryl Strayed's book, *Wild* was a most memorable read. Cheryl wrote of her journey along the Pacific Coast Trail, covering a thousand miles one summer. She wrote about her solo trek into the wilderness, but more deeply, what walking meant for her and how it changed her life. This was another look into the magnificent human body and the courage of the human spirit, she was bloodied bruised and battered by her long walk, but also restored, redeemed and renewed. Her journey took her from dependence, grief, rage and bewilderment to power, joy, pride and gratitude in just a thousand impossible miles. The book almost made me want to walk out and camp out under the stars and even learn to carry a heavy pack through the wilderness one day. Yes, I said almost. Which is pretty good for someone who considers camping a hotel without a hair dryer....

Maybe it is my own recovery from the concussion I had this past summer. It's been a long, slow road – sometimes feeling like for every step I take forward, I take two back. As much as I am constantly reassured that healing is happening – I just have to be patient. This experience has made me frustrated, full of doubt, but it has also taught me a whole lot of humility, the grace that comes in help and support from others, and the beauty and mystery of the human brain.

Maybe it was all these things that made me want to just start a new way of looking at my life, a new way of living in the world, a new way of practicing the rituals of being a spiritual person in the world. I'd love to develop an everyday method of exercising, perhaps train for a long walk or pilgrimage. I'd like to read a book a week and attend a monthly Taize service. I would like to read the Bible through from cover to cover in a new translation. I would like to think creatively about the future and remember my dreams. I want to reduce my carbon footprint. Like almost everyone, I want to just start engaging, living my life with integrity, vitality and spirit filled energy. But like everyone else, I wonder, do I have the strength, courage and discipline to get started down a new path? How in the world, do we get started on all the things we would like to do with our lives? And, the deeper question; how do I deepen my relationship with God and others? How might I become a truer disciple of Christ, reflecting the life of Jesus in all I say, think, and do? Especially as we face the deep challenges of our time, are there signs, directives, and messages that we can glean from the stories of our faith that can help us to live more deeply and compassionately in the world?

As Cheryl Strayed writes in the opening lines of *Wild*, "there was the first flip decision to do it followed by the second more serious decision to do it and then the third long beginning of

shopping, packing and preparing to do it. But that is quickly followed by the grim realization of what it means to actually do it.”

Actually getting started on a life changing and reinvigorating moment may seem like an instantaneous one, but in reality, the seed of potential, spiritual potential for compassion, growth, and wholeness is in everyone and may take a life time to uncover, nurture and flourish.

As a community of faith, the spiritual journey is a tenet of who we are together. Our vision statement calls us to take seriously the spiritual search of all who come into this place, to nurture the spiritual journey of children and youth, and to practice it by reaching out to others beyond these doors. How will we nurture our spiritual vitality as a congregation? I am grateful for a colleague like Joe who pushes me to dig deeper into the gifts of spiritual practice; for leaders who care deeply about our worship and spiritual life, and for the ways that we will explore spirituality together in the weeks and months ahead, encouraging us all to have a “just start” experience.

In other words, we want to just start learning how to live a more deeply powerful and clearly compassionate life and I want to invite you to the journey as a congregation and as individuals as soon as possible—today is a good beginning!

But there are road blocks to getting started: the enormity of the world’s problems could paralyze us and make us shrink from our responsibilities; worse yet, we can get so caught up in our own busy lives that approaching something new feels exhausting—some of us may be feeling that we have contributed all we can and nothing has changed, so why start at all?

Where do we find the open space in our spiritual lives to dig deeper into our experience? How do we discover something new and refreshing about our faith and our calling, especially if there is already a lot on our plates? Is there really a possibility of breaking open this clay pot of our lives to discover again what God is calling us to be and do and live? Let’s not get stopped at the most important part of the journey—the beginning!

Isaiah’s people struggled with the same questions. Isaiah was in a bind—a crisis of nation and faith. Isaiah cries out: *Haven’t you known, haven’t you heard?* God the Creator never gets tired or weary, not only about matters of creation, but in relation to all Creation. God gives us the power and the strength we need to be about this great unfolding, the great adventure of living as God’s creatures in the world. Our strength for pursuing the life of compassion and love is provided by God who renews our strength so that we may be as strong as the eagle who flies in the skies.

Just start. As individuals and as a community of faith, let’s just start the journey of how we might face the crucial needs facing our world and commit ourselves to being the hands and feet of Jesus right now and right here, together. Let us build on the good work that you have already started – and acknowledge that paths that have led you to this time.

This morning, I invite you on a new journey. It doesn't matter if you are too busy or too tired or too important or not important enough to just start a new adventure. I invite you to just start down a new path of caring for each other and caring for the earth in deeper, more conscious ways.

Cheryl Strayed writes about what it was like to finish something she started. At the end of her long walk, she writes, "that it was enough to trust that what I had done was true. To understand its meaning without being able to say precisely what it was that had run through my nights and days. It is my life, like all lives, mysterious, irrevocable, and sacred."

Are you ready to take a walk together as we discover something new about our faith and God's faith in us? To do something true and real as we grow with one another and embody divine love for all whom we encounter? Let's start today!

Let us pray:

Gracious God, you give us strength and courage for the cost and joy of living a spiritual life each day.

As we start on a new adventure of faith, grant us your love and affirm within us your willingness to start and finish with us on the journey. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Rev. Heather Power