

***Love One Another (A Life of Lasting Happiness)* by Rev. Dr. Catherine Quehl-Engel  
Baccalaureate Sermon - Cornell College, May 13, 2017**

Judith Lasater tells a parable about a villager who lived in a small home with a spouse, six children, a mother-in-law, some chickens and a cow.<sup>i</sup> The little home was so cramped and chaotic that it was driving the villager crazy. So the person goes to the village rabbi asking for wisdom. The rabbi says, “You need to buy a goat.” So the person goes off to buy a goat. Now the villager lived in a small house with a spouse, six children, a mother-in-law, some chickens, a cow, and a goat. It was more chaotic than before. So the person returns to the rabbi asking for help. The rabbi said, “The solution is simple. Sell the goat.” Which the villager did. And in that home the villager sensed great a peace.

According to researchers, the greatest influences upon our happiness have nothing to do with job title, income level, or temperament. The three greatest influences on happiness are: 1) the ability to reframe your situation [a.k.a “sell the goat.”]; 2) your ability to experience gratitude; and 3) the decision to be compassionate and generous. According to neuroimaging research, even our brains are wired for these three guiding principles (49)<sup>ii</sup>. As Douglas Abrams notes in *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*, we have a brain circuit entirely devoted to generosity; “no wonder we feel so good when we help others or are helped by others, or even witness others being helped (Abrams, 49).”

Our being programmed for cooperation, compassion, and generosity is so powerful that just thinking about these actions increases a protective antibody used by our immune system. Other research shows how, for example, people with depression for whom positive-outlook brain circuitry burns out too quickly, can rebuild it relatively quickly through regular practice of compassion meditation, like the kind the Spiritual Life Offices teaches on Friday’s in Allee

Chapel.<sup>iii</sup>

In *The Book of Joy* two Nobel Peace Laureates, The Dali Lama and Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, speak about finding joy in the face of life's inevitable sorrows. It is a reality they've known, given the soul crushing oppression experienced by the people of Tibet, and non-whites in apartheid era South Africa. In the book these spiritual leaders describe how compassion toward others is a way to ease one's own sorrow and struggle. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu puts it "we have to take care of ourselves without selfishly taking care of ourselves....we need wise rather than foolish selfishness. By engaging in compassion for others, and helping others, we discover our own joy, and have a happy life. That is wise selfishness (47-48).

The Dali Lama speaks of such mind training, and how all dharma teachings agree on one thing—less self-absorption. "Obsessing about getting what you want, and avoiding what you don't want does not result in happiness," he says (48). Likewise, "We can put our attention on our own suffering," says the Dali Lama, "or on that of others[;]...on our own perceived separation or on our individual connection (48-49)."

To that I'll add what some of us have come to know: how our adversities help us more deeply appreciate life's preciousness. How from that hollowing out comes a greater capacity for joy, and sense of oneness with others. You and I all have burdens. Disappointments. Some of us have known sorrow and suffering. These experiences can weigh us down. And make us bitter. Or, they can make us stronger. More compassionate.

So, it seems that we've got both scientists and spiritual leaders saying that changing ones perspective, compassion, generosity, and cooperation, results in lasting happiness. But

there's a problem. Research also suggest we are hardwired for cooperation with those who look like our caregivers or own tribe; that we are inherently more wary of those who are different. Here, it is argued, we are getting a closer to the unconscious roots of prejudice; how it's part of our basic, unconscious level thinking even before we add in the prejudice, fear, and animosity consciously and unconsciously nurtured by society and those closest to us. But we can sell the goat. We can harness our innate wiring for compassion and generosity. We can keep expanding our sense of tribe, defying division, so that as a species—a human tribe on this beautiful, fragile planet—we can evolve. We can engage in wise selfishness so that by cultivating love for one another regardless of ethnicity, or religion, political view, or various other identities and orientations we can heal; we can find a more lasting happiness.

Your generation knows this better than any. So we need your help. We need your wise minds and hearts, and all you've learned not only in the classroom but also amid the good and even painful times we've experienced in our life together these past four years. We need your humility, cooperation and compassion to help heal this fractured nation and world. Whether it's through compassion meditation, or service, or your willingness to be vulnerable in difficult conversations be it on racism and other much needed topics we've explored through Sustained Dialogue or on the Orange Carpet, we're going to have to keep rewiring our brains, and our hearts. We've got to evolve. As Franciscan friar Richard Rohr put it in an interview with Krista Tippet<sup>iv</sup> *"It's amazing that we could have this many universities [and colleges] in this country and could have this many churches and synagogues and mosques and have so many people still at such a low level of consciousness that they read everything in terms of either/or. And that's why all of the world religions, not just Christianity, discovered that you needed a different kind of software.* So we need an upgrade on our thinking. We need to sell the goat.

In the meantime may we harness humility, graciousness, and compassion, especially for the outsider and those in the margins--those most vulnerable and powerless:

- “When foreigners reside with you in your land, you shall not oppress them” says the Lord in Leviticus. “The foreigner shall be to you as a citizen among you; you shall love the foreigner as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt (19:33-34).”
- “Did not God find you an orphan and give you shelter?” Asks the Prophet Mohammed. “Did God not find you in error and guide you? Did God not find you poor and enrich you? Therefore do not wrong the orphan, nor childe away the beggar” (Qur’an 93:6-9).
- Long before scientists said compassion and gratitude are good for us—the path to lasting happiness, the Prophet Isaiah said this to weary and grieving exiles. If you share yourself with the hungry, says Isaiah. If you care for the homeless and the poor; if you loosen the bond of injustice and let the oppressed go free. If you satisfy the needs of the afflicted, and put away the pointing of the finger and the speaking of evil against others, then your own parched places will be satisfied. Your light shall rise. Your gloom will become like the noonday. You shall be called The Repairer of the Breach (Is. 58:9b-12).”

The Good Samaritan story is familiar to more than a few of us. Same with the sentences of the Gospel right before this parable when, like Hillel and other Jewish sages before him, Jesus says how the summary of Jewish law is to love God and neighbor as oneself. We often assume that the take away message is that we are to be nice. But niceness isn’t enough. Let’s look at this parable and the other texts as being about something more, especially in light of our world you are inheriting to lead as Repairers of the Breach.

At the time this parable was first told, Samaritans and Jews held mutual contempt for one another. Samaritans were just as good at dishing it out. Earlier in Luke's Gospel, two disciples were so offended by the rude reception Jesus received in a Samaritan town that they asked Jesus if he'd like fire to come down and smite them (9: 51-56). Jesus told these disciples to take a chill pill. Then, as if to teach them as much as the lawyer who asked how one can experience eternal life, Jesus tells a parable. A parable in which the person portrayed as most compassionate and ethical is the outsider. The enemy. The person of the same ethnicity as the village which the disciples wanted to level. How might this parable be relevant for you and me as repairers of the breach? Or even for finding our own wellbeing and happiness? As Biblical Commentator Amy-Jill Levine notes

*to hear this parable in contemporary terms, we should think of ourselves as the person in the ditch, and then ask 'Is there anyone, from any group, about whom [I'd] rather die than acknowledge [to my friends and own kind that] she offered help' or [That he] 'showed compassion?' Is there any group whose members might rather die than help us? If so, then we know how to find the modern equivalent for the Samaritan story.'*<sup>v</sup>

Last fall I gathered with some 500 other religious leaders in solidarity with the Sioux Nation, and other Water Protectors at Standing Rock. It was the day after rubber bullets were fired at water protectors, and other violence that ensued. During our non-violence training before our day on the line, a young Navajo Water Protector named Lila June stood up to speak. Lila began by naming how many people at the camp have been severely wounded, both spiritually and physically. And how there is so much pain and anger across the country and world over what happened. Civil and human rights violations occurred, as well as hatred. Yet not only by the police, she said. Also by water protectors. Then she added how the world as

enough hatred. So she and other First Nation women were organizing a forgiveness walk that would end at the local police station. When asked why, Lila she said,

*When we fall into hatred we become the very thing that hurts us. ...All that keeps us down....Even though there are things falling apart around you, you are standing strong with your prayer to maintain that willingness and that effort to give compassion, even in the most difficult times. You hear all the angry, painful things. And yet ask one of the women on the front lines who got maced and beaten and she will tell you the world does not need more hatred. We have enough of that...Forgiveness is the strongest medicine in the world...Not everyone is ready to forgive and that's okay, because everyone forgives at their own pace. Some never forgive. We are just extending the invitation.*

The great spiritual traditions of the world all speak of how, when one delves deep into one's own spirit or soul, one finds the roots of a universal community. A oneness with all people and beings. Or as fellow contemplative and Episcopal priest, Cynthia Bourgeault puts it, to love ones neighbor *as yourself* "means that your neighbor is a continuation of your very own being." It's...seeing that your neighbor as you. This what Franciscan priest, Richard Rohr also meant. "We come into existence with a binary egoic operating system already installed. [But] we can make the choice to [get a mental] upgrade. We can sell the goat.

Like many indigenous spiritual traditions, contemplative Christianity, and other forms of mysticism, our Hindu wisdom text read earlier speaks of the illusion of our separateness. The Mandaka Upanishad speaks of healing from sorrow by recognizing the Eternal as one's own True or Deeper Self; the one life and Light of which you are part shining within you, and all. When we perceive this way we become humble. We find joy seeing and serving the Eternal in all people and beings. This non-dual thinking is also what is meant to put on the Mind of Christ. To get an upgrade on one's level of consciousness beyond either or/us vs. them thinking. Of

loving one another—not because we want to help others less fortunate than ourselves, but because we awaken to perceiving others as part of our own being.

I have hope because I've seen you do this. I have hope because I've seen us grow together. Be allies for one another. Learn to humbly listen to someone else's story. I have seen you love one another, expanding your sense of tribe. Just like Muslims and others in this nation helping to repair a vandalized Jewish Cemetery. Or like the way hundreds of us gathered from diverse religious and secular backgrounds last month in solidarity around the Mother Mosque of North America in Cedar Rapids, Iowa where Muslim immigrants have worshipped since the 1800s, and helped serve this area and our nation including in times of war including during WWI and II. I have hope because, like them, the world gets to have you help as Repairers of the Breach. If that job ever feels too big, that's okay. It's not all up to you. As the great Mishnaic sage, Rabbi Tarfon put it "Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. You are not obligated to complete the task of the world. But neither are you free to abandon it."

And if you ever don't know how to help, or if you make a mistake including within the little tribe of your family and friends, you can do what Chief Inspector Gamache in Louise Penny novels is always recommending to young cadets at the Sûreté du Québec. He tells these soon to be police officers about the four most important things they can say: 1. *I was wrong*; 2. *I'm sorry*; 3. *I don't know*; 4. *I need help*. Such humility is what people want in a leader, but these are often the last words our ego minds, and many leaders, are brave enough to say.

Maybe I've said too much about your helping heal the world, and not enough about your own needs. So let me end with this: It's something a former student recently said as we talked about her life since the death of her mother way back when this student was a freshman sixteen

years ago: In the face of life’s inevitable sorrows, she said, it helps seeing unwanted difficulties and disappointments—not as obstacles—but rather as life projects. I love that. I guess my take on that is seeing the hard times and challenges as life practice. Not only life practice to awaken greater wisdom and resiliency, but also life practice for awakening greater compassion. Tender mercy. Mercy not only toward others but also toward your own wounds. Toward your own mistakes, fears, frailties and flaws. Like the song Noah’s going to help us sing, when you find yourself in times of trouble, may you be humble, wise, and mercifully compassionate enough to ask for help—be it from the Divine, your Higher Self, and/or those around you. Maybe you’ll even dare to ask your equivalent of a Samaritan for aid. It just might be that the last person, or type of person, you’d ever want to ask for help turns out to be the one who is meant to save you. And in that moment—whether it’s in an AA meeting or ambulance, or on your child’s operating table, or whatever have you—may you, through that encounter, experience eternal life.

Class of 2017, with compassion, generosity, gratitude, and willingness to reframe life situations, may you experience many eternal life moments. And a life of lasting happiness.

Amen.

.... Noah, can you lead us in a song? [*Lean on Me*]

## **2017 BACC SACRED TEXTS**

### **ORDER:**

Mundaka Upanishad.....Carly Pierson  
Gospel of Luke 10:25-37.....Arturo Castillo  
Qu’ran 2:214; 93: 1-2 & 6-11.....Cairo Eubanks  
Lev. 19:33-34 & Isaiah 58:6-12..... Marquis Terrell  
Song: *Here I Am, Lord* (see insert)  
Message: Love One Another (A Life of Lasting Happiness)...CQE



**From The Mandaka Upanishad.....Carley Pierson**

From The Mandaka Upanishad

The individual self, deluded by forgetfulness of her identity with the Divine Self, grieves and is sad.

But when she recognizes the Lord as her own True or Deeper Self within, she grieves no more....

The Lord is the one life and Light shining forth from every creature.

Seeing the Divine present in all, the wise person is humble.

This wise person's delight and joy is this Deeper Self.

He or she serves the Lord, the Eternal, within in all people and beings.

Indeed, these are the true knowers of the Divine..... [pause]

The Divine is supreme. Self-luminous. Beyond all thought.

Subtler than the subtlest, farther than the farthest, nearer than the nearest.

The Divine resides in the lotus of the heart of every being....

**Qu'ran 2:214 & 93: 1-2 and 6-11.....Cairo Eubanks**

In the name of the Merciful and Compassionate; a reading from The Qu'ran:

Did you suppose that you would go to Paradise untouched by suffering which was endured by those before you? Affliction and adversity befell them; and so shaken were they that each apostle, and those who shared his faith cried out: 'When will God's help come?' God's help is ever near.

By the light of day, and by the dark of night, your Lord has not forsaken you. Did God not find you an orphan and give you shelter? Did God not find you in error and guide you? Did God not find you poor and enrich you? Therefore, do not wrong the orphan, nor chide away the beggar. But proclaim the good news of your Lord.

**The Gospel of Luke [10:25-37].....Arturo Castillo**

From the Gospel of Luke

Y hé aquí, un doctor de la ley se levantó tentándole, y diciendo: Maestro, ¿haciendo qué cosa poseeré la vida eterna?

Y él le dijo: ¿Qué esta escrito en la ley? ¿Cómo lees?

Y él respondiendo, dijo: Amarás al Señor tu Dios de todo tu corazón, y de toda tu alma, y de todas tus fuerzas, y de todo tu entendimiento; y á tu prójimo, como á tí mismo.

## Y díjole. Bien has respondido: haz esto, y vivirás.

<sup>25</sup> Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.<sup>[a]</sup> "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" <sup>26</sup> He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" <sup>27</sup> He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

<sup>29</sup> But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" <sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii,<sup>[b]</sup> gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" <sup>37</sup> He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

### **Leviticus 19:33-34 & Isaiah 61:1-4.....Marquis Terrell**

Hear these words from The Book of Leviticus:

When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

And from The Book of Isaiah 58:

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; **you shall be called the repairer of the breach**, the restorer of streets to live in.

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<sup>i</sup> Lasater, Judith. *Living Your Yoga: Finding the Spiritual in Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: Rodmell Press, 2015).

<sup>ii</sup> The Dali Lama and Archbishops Desmond Tutu, with Doug Abrams. *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*. Penguin Publishing Group, 2016.

<sup>iii</sup> Brent Lambert, *The 4 Neuroplastic Brain Circuits Governing Maximum Well-Being & How To Tune Them Like An Instrument*, March 16, 2016. <http://www.feelguide.com/2016/03/16/the-4-neuroplastic-brain-circuits-governing-maximum-well-being-how-to-tune-them-like-an-instrument/> Accessed May 4, 2017.

<sup>iv</sup> "Living In Deep Time", *On Being* interview by Krista Tippett with Richard Rohr, April 13, 2017 <https://onbeing.org/programs/richard-rohr-living-in-deep-time/>

<sup>v</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew* (SF: Harper Collins, 2006), 148-149.