

“Life’s Longing for Itself”

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A couple weeks ago in the sermon called “Some Assembly Required” I spoke of humanity’s apparent, never-ending search for some kind of spirituality. This almighty desire is manifested in the incredible array of religious traditions from the very earliest flicker of human consciousness up to this day’s post-modern religious thinking.

Today, I want to return to the idea of humanity’s desire for spirituality. Let us look at more closely at the very notion of *desire*, “to wish or long for; to crave; to want.” The connotation is that what we desire is what we do not have, but is nonetheless possible to attain. Reaching for something like an apple in a high branch, when you’re very hungry. Or, bending down to drink from a mountain stream when you’re very thirsty.

The list goes on and on. We seem to find ourselves longing and yearning, hungering and thirsting for just about everything, most especially for things we don’t have.

Just ask the Madison Avenue folks who are happy to tell you that you are hungry, even if you never thought about what they say you’re hungry for. They invent stuff they want to sell to you to satisfy that hunger. Because we live our lives in a constant state of yearning, we jump right on their advertising band wagons every time.

So why are we like that? Why are we always hungry and thirsty? What is the energy that pushes us into that condition?

As a matter of fact, I think there *is* an energy which moves us in desire. You’ve heard me speak of this force, which I call *Eros*, just as in the Greek god of love.

Whoa! Too many words crowded together there! *Eros. Greek. God. Love.* They just *can’t* fit into the same sentence.

OK, let’s start with *eros*. We immediately imagine a chubby little angel who shoots arrows at people who then are slain by great feelings of love. *Eros*, we have heard, is the Greek’s version of the God of Love.

The truth, at least according to the Greeks, is that *Eros* was one of the primordial, creative forces of all the universe. *Eros* was born of chaos (like in the Genesis story) and became large in its power to move the cosmos. It was originally wild and out of control, a terrifying energy, which gave birth to all that we know.

It is the great energy of the universe, we might even speak of it as the Spirit of Life itself. But its association with love is not accidental. *Eros* is, I believe, *the spirit of love*, which is the strange and fantastic energy which “*draws all things toward union.*” It is the powerful force which draws people together, makes them “attractive” to one another. It is the same force which draws all formulations of matter to all other matter, what we have called gravity, which some scientists now say is the fundamental energy of the entire universe. *Eros!*

When we say ‘*It feels right to me....*,’ we are actually acknowledging the erotic as true knowledge, the first and most powerful guiding light toward any understanding. The erotic is the nurturer and deliverer of all our deepest knowledge.

“The erotic comes to us in several important ways, and the first is in providing power which comes from *sharing deeply* any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the “I and Thou.”

Another way in which the erotic connection functions is the underlining of my capacity for joy. In the way my body stretches to music and opens into response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea....”

“During World War II, we bought sealed plastic packets of white, uncolored margarine, with a tiny, intense pellet of yellow coloring perched like a topaz just inside the clear skin of the bag. We would leave the margarine out for a while to soften, and then we would pinch the little pellet to break it inside the bag, releasing the rich yellowness into the soft pale mass of margarine. Then taking it carefully between our fingers, we would knead it gently back and forth, over and over, until the color had spread throughout the whole pound bag of margarine, thoroughly coloring it.

I find the erotic such a kernel within myself. When released from its intense and constrained pellet, it flow through and colors my life with a kind of energy that heightens and sensitizes and strengthens all my experience.”

The word erotic comes from the Greek word *eros*, the personification of love in all its aspects. Eros personifies creative power and harmony. The erotic is an assertion of the universal life-force; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are can reclaim in our language, our history, dancing, our loving, our work, our lives. (from Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic, The Erotic as Power” in *Sister Outsider*, Crossing Press: Freedom, California, 1984)

Eros is what makes us *want*. Not just us, everything there is. This is what Kahlil Gibran was talking about in his Prophet’s word “On Children”.

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts.

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,

Yes, life longs for itself.

Buried in all this is a truly spectacular feature of human experience: When we intentionally engage erotic energy, it feels really good. In fact, erotic energy may give us

the best, most thrilling feelings we ever encounter. It's almost as if the universe is *tempting* us to get onboard, so to speak. Eros works in mysterious ways.

Of course, we talking about sexual activity, and most of us will say feel-good things about sex, which sure is the perfect example of erotic flow and energy.

But Eros is much larger than sex, which is, after all, only the beginning.

There are many ways we can engage that erotic flow. Just ask Joseph Campbell. He advises us to live our lives following whatever it is that brings us bliss. Bliss!

Whidbey Island poet David Whyte writes, "What waits in *the seed of you* "to grow and spread its branches against the future sky?"

Or, as Howard Thurman wrote: "Don't ask yourself what the world needs; *ask yourself what makes you come alive*. And then go and do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

Our true bliss is what makes us come alive. Think about that. Is not that the truth?

Can you recall those moments in your life when you really came alive? Do you remember the times that you got so turned on by something you were doing, that you realized every part of your body and mind and soul was genuinely engaged, genuinely energized, genuinely "turned on"?

What were you doing then? What was it that so completely "occupied" you?

I suggest that our most joyful moments are when we are engaging and participating in the work of Eros. If Eros is the original creator of all that is, we can join in as co-creators. Of course, we do that when we desire new life, as in procreation of the species. And we also do that when we create anything—art, music, literature, architecture, a new life-style plan, a hobby like gardening. Thousands and thousands of opportunities to make something out of nothing.

Plus, there's an additional thrill which Eros provides. That is the joy which comes from the sharing of our bliss, our pouring forth of creative energy. And the best place I know of where that can happen is in the community of faith, even as we "encourage one another to spiritual growth".

The great poet Audre Lorde, in her book *The Uses of the Erotic*, wrote, "The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their differences."

Just watch what can happen when this service is over and when the people begin to converse and to exchange words and sentiments and good will and all the other thoughts, emotions, feelings, hopes, dreams. The meeting of the hearts and souls and lives of the people is here and now, and it brings me great joy, deep in my heart.

When I perform weddings, I say this very thing:

This is the heart of this ceremony. We come here to honor and celebrate as you two people publicly declare your commitment of love to each other. We also celebrate that magnificent power which brought you together, what the Greeks called eros, "the allurements which urges the all the universe toward

union.” It is the coming together of separates into intimacy. It is what we now all love.

Let us praise this wondrous force which transforms lives and brings goodness and health and blessedness to all souls in all places.

Pretty cool, huh? And that’s the way it should be since *Eros* is a pretty cool thing, we might even say, a *life-giving* thing, especially in our relationships.

SONG: “I’ve got that joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart!”

AMEN!