

A few years ago I had a newly resettled refugee claim that he was struggling to learn English. Just after that, the same man told me he like me because I was frank. I told him his English was just fine. I'm sure you want me to be Frank today, but I'm hoping you will settle for Julie.

Do you ever get the sense that too many worlds are colliding at once? This idea is sometimes accompanied with an overwhelming feeling of anxiety, or fear of not being able to handle all that is coming. This time of year can trigger that effect. It has for me in the past, have you experienced that? And why am I dragging this all up now, now that Christmas is behind us? Can't I just leave you alone to be in peace with the fact that another holiday season has finally passed? Tom Ellis read with you earlier that for everything there is a season. Technically, Christmas hasn't fully passed yet since today is the 11<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas. Fear not, I have not arranged for eleven pipers piping to appear at any given moment to help me make my point. I am inviting us all to take this moment to "stop, look, and listen" to what this day means for us. What does appear?

It seems like it was not long ago that many of us were lifting our candles during our Christmas Eve service, or maybe you were somewhere else important, celebrating Christmas elsewhere with family or friends. Last Sunday was Frank's farewell as he left on his sabbatical – a time for him to go on a spiritual journey. New Year's Day has only recently passed us by, and tomorrow is the Epiphany. If anyone has ever considered this to be a slow going time of year, a time for a winter holiday hibernation, they're crazy... or are they? Do you frantically move from one holiday event to another or do you see this period as a time to catch up on rest, squeeze in a little hibernation? Do you go into overdrive, cruise control, or park? There is a lot going on with all these holidays clumped together- some we may observe while others we do not, but in the end we choose what to value and what to let go. We don't have to celebrate everything, right?

So, who here made a New Year's resolution? This was the question I asked my children on January 1<sup>st</sup>, a few days ago. "Not me!" I heard them chime. "Good," I responded, "me neither!" I gave up New Year's resolutions long ago because I rarely kept them for very long. Maybe you've done the same, but then how do people like me mark this change without making a promise that I will soon enough break? I mark the change with the power of mindfulness. I choose something that I am already doing in my life and I slightly alter it with mindfulness- I pay more attention to that thing.

Instead of hurrying through the task, I slow down and take the time to stop, look, & listen. I stop to notice how I am doing the task, I look to see what else is going on around me, and I listen to the sounds around me, too- to my breathing or an airplane flying overhead as I tend to the task at hand. So, what is this "task" that I am talking about? It can be anything really, and I recommend that it be something that you already do... doing dishes, laundry, bathing, eating, it can even be sleeping. Once you pick what that task is, the next step is to do it mindfully. How can one mindfully sleep? By going to bed on time, planning to linger in bed longer on days when your schedule allows you to, but not on Sundays, please. Basically,

I'm urging you to slow down and not rush through this task. By slowing down and turning this everyday task into a mindfulness adventure, you are actually incorporating a spiritual practice into your life.

You might have thought a spiritual practice meant you needed to start getting up earlier and meditating or praying for an hour every day. You could do that, that certainly works, but for those of you that cringe when you hear me suggest that you wake up earlier, you may want to remain open to this mindfulness practice- this could be your opportunity to learn how to incorporate a spiritual practice into your life. And if you already have one, well, maybe another one could be revitalizing.

Every time you partake in a spiritual practice you go on a personal journey. You sojourn through your soul. Yes, you could take Frank's suggestion and revisit the reading from last week- the one that says for us to have humility because it is realistic experience that leads to sacred independence. The reading urged us to see, judge, and act from the point of rest in ourselves, the center of our being, and notice what appears and what disappears. What appears in us, what are the feelings that rise up? What appears with us, do we have companions? When we make the time to connect with ourselves, we may notice a tree can become a mystery and a cloud a revelation. These companions, the tree and cloud, might only be seen in a glimpse, a flash of insight, but then again they may stay longer in our field of view, or we may notice them for the first time though they were there all along. Frank and I are really asking you to do the same sort of thing. He gave you a thought to meditate on and I am offering you the suggestion to mediate as you do a mundane everyday task, making the mundane holy. Either way, in the end, you will be doing a regular spiritual practice.

Can drinking a cup of tea be a spiritual practice? How about a nature walk? Or stopping your busy life to play a game with someone you love? The answer is, YES! If you do these things, these tasks with intention, if you stop, look, & listen to the center of your being while you do these tasks, yes- you may consider it a spiritual practice. So, if you were struggling with how to incorporate a New Year's resolution into your life, you can say that you've resolved to be more mindful.

And what about the other many holidays that clutter this time of year? We still have all those 12 days of Christmas and the Epiphany... no pressure there? If you are just noticing that today is the 11<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas, I invite you to let it go and say maybe next year I'll notice each of the 12 day of Christmas, especially if that mindfulness practice is still paying off.

I just don't think we have to celebrate everything. We can choose what we want to celebrate. After all, we may want to let some of these go and put our attention to tomorrow because tomorrow is the Epiphany. Let me tell you what The World Book Encyclopedia says about Epiphany. "The Epiphany is a Christian festival. In the Western churches such as Roman Catholic and Protestant, the Epiphany commemorates the adoration of the infant Jesus by the Three Wise Men's appearance. In Eastern churches, it celebrates the baptism of Jesus. Epiphany comes from a Greek word that means *to appear* or *to show oneself*." What stands out most for me is the part that says "Epiphany comes from a Greek word that means **to appear or to show oneself**." For everything there is a season and now is the season **to appear or to show oneself**.

Christmas is the day which the divine appears in human form, as a helpless infant. And at New Year's we show ourselves anew all over again with the beginning of another year, and the Epiphany marks the day the Three Wise Men bearing gifts finally appeared to Jesus. Each of these events point to similar situations- each one features an appearance, something new, or a showing of oneself. We do not have to overburden ourselves with too many holiday; perhaps our quest can be to simply show oneself, to appear as who we truly are. And as we do, we notice from the center of our being and from the point of rest in ourselves. We notice what appears and what disappears. We become more mindful about what actually is, who we are, who our companions are on this journey. What a gift, to observe what's in our heart, to see our deepest river from where all our values and principles flow. What a gift, we are not alone.

Today we already sang many hymns and we've been reminded what it feels like when "When Our Heart is a Holy Place," it's then that the "Spirit of Life" come to you and me, and "We Three Kings of Orient Are" – Well, I think we are those wise folks who have finally arrived. As we've joined our voices in song, we've journeyed together- singing as we go. With each song we have been invited to take a moment to "stop, look, & listen" to what this day means for us, to be more mindful, these songs remind us that we have all the gifts we need, that love will guide us, and that we are the wise ones we've been waiting for. We have shown ourselves.

Blessed pilgrims, for everything there is a season, and this starts the season of our spiritual journey. And as we continue our journey singing "Blue Boat Home" may we fear not. Heck, I welcome you to lean over the edge of this boat with wonder. I recommend we all cast questions into the deep- deep into your center of being. May you fully feel the blessing it is to be here drifting. You are drifting, not alone, rather together as ship's companions- all here are kindred pilgrim souls. As we make our way together by the light of the heavens- let us rejoice that the wide universe is the ocean that we travel. Come, come fellow pilgrim souls, let us drift together in our beautiful blue boat home.

May it be so and Amen.