

St. James the Fisherman, Wellfleet MA
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Some of us spent time at this morning's Patio Conversation talking about *The Book of Joy* and how to choose to cultivate joy as the grounding for our daily lives. As we think about today's readingsⁱ I invite you to consider thinking about what is it like for you to step into the breach and be a bridge-builder? Not out of duty or obligation, but as an expression of the joy that grounds you!

I want to tell you about Ken Nwadike who did exactly that! Ken is a peace activist and director of the *Hollywood Half Marathon*. After the *Boston Marathon* massacre in 2013 Ken decided to participate in the 2014 *Boston Marathon* as an act of love and a counterpoint to the violence. The bad news for Ken was that he was 23 seconds shy of qualifying!

Ken then did something unexpected. He decided to go to Boston for the 2014 marathon to offer free hugs to the runners to spread love and encourage them. A video of Free Hugs with marathon runners went viral on YouTube.

Ken Nwadike has taken his Free Hugs message to de-escalate riots & protests nationwide. Free Hugs were offered at rallies for Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders. This young peace activist thinks of it as a way to bridge some of the racial, cultural and political divides that fracture our country.

Ken was stepping into the breach and being a bridge builder. I invite you to think about what stepping into the breach and being a bridge builder might look like for each of us this time of crisis.

I don't think it is much of a stretch to say that there is a crisis of being among us. We see it in the race to the bottom of dismissing, demonizing and dehumanizing one another and in the process disrespecting our own humanity.

The crisis manifests itself in fuming about the lack of civility; defriending people on social media; cutting off longtime friends or family members; vitriolic blame assigned to one political party or another...and more.

We see it manifested in those who have given up and retreated to a secluded corner. At the edge of this abyss we even have some undercutting the very essence of prayer by saying they will not pray for the occupant of the White House. At the edge of the abyss there is seething anger from people on all sides.

In Buddhist art anger is depicted as a man with an arrow in his own eye. In our crisis of being are we blinded by the arrows?

How might today's readings invite us into the breach with bridge building?

Jesus certainly disrupted the life of his followers as he sat teaching them in the synagogue in Capernaum. He promised them that he would be united with them forever if they were to eat his flesh and drink his blood.

He does something even more significant in this passage from John's gospel - he declares that it is the spirit that gives life. So a question for us and for our time is what sort of life might this spirit give?

For some context the first reading from the Book of Kings gives us the words of Solomon at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem. This was a defining and long anticipated event for the Jewish people. God would reside in the temple. Solomon prays that the great name of the Holy One will be made known to all.

But Jesus says that the Holy One will abide in us and us in God when we partake of bread and wine, of flesh and blood. Instead of the Temple it is you and I who are living temples of divine presence and life.

To add another piece of context, the passage from Ephesians offers a different riff on a similar theme. It talks about putting on armor to protect and gird you for proclaiming a gospel of peace.

It's an interesting image linking armor with peace! For peace is not so much about the absence of conflict or the victors of war imposing their values and rule on the defeated; peace as understood in the Hebrew tradition is about the well-being of all people. Peace is one of the three values of Judaism along with truth and justice. Some even say that *everything* in the Torah was written for the sake of peace.

So where are we with the wisdom and encouragement from today's readings?

Well firstly, we are intended to be the living temples of the Holy One; secondly we are to proclaim the gospel of peace. Or to put it more accurately, the gospel of well-being. Not the prosperity gospel that some promote but the well-being that says our lives are bundled together. Thirdly, we hear that is it the spirit that gives life.

What an interconnected circle it is! Each of us as living temples of the sacred; each proclaiming and working for the well-being of one another; and each nurtured or jolted into life by the presence of the spirit.

So how might the spirit be unexpectedly at work? The dominant image of the spirit is of a dove; often a dove of peace or more in line with Hebrew tradition, a dove of well-being.

But there is another image of the spirit. It comes from the ancient Celts who depicted the spirit as a wild goose that cannot be tamed or domesticated. Now I live on a working farm of about 1,500 acres and the lesson I've ever learned is that you are ultimately not in control. You can use the best farming practices imaginable but in the end nature can never be controlled and always has the last word with your crops!

As I think of the spirit as the wild goose it makes me think that a wild goose chase may not be what it seems. We're not in control of chasing the goose – it is the wild goose that chases us.

I wonder if Ken Nwadike felt that the wild goose was at work with Free Hugs. Was it the goose disturbing and disrupting his love? Certainly Free Hugs is an expression of the gospel of well-being.

My friend Donna recently told me that her college roommate and best friend announced that after 30 years of friendship she could no longer see Donna.

Struggling to respond, Donna asked why. Her friend said I don't agree with all of your politics. We had a lengthy conversation about this unexpected announcement which ended with Donna telling me how much she loved and admired her friend. She said, "I need to keep her even closer to my heart than ever because someday there will be an opening for both of us."

Donna and Ken Nwadike have each offered a response to the human family. Your response will no doubt be different but just as vital and valid.

I'll offer you a homework assignment for the days or weeks ahead.

This moment in our history must surely be an invitation to respond. To respond as living vessels of the divine or the Holy One. To respond with an open heart to the wild goose.

How might you use what you have where you are to step into the breach and to be a bridge builder? Like the Torah *are our lives written for the sake of peace? To be bearers of wellbeing?*

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ⁱ 1Kings 8: 1,6,10-11, 22-30 & 41-43 Ephesians 6:10-20 & John 6:56-69