

The Iron of Autumn
October 25, 2009

I would like to begin my sermon this morning by reading again the passage from Robert Weston which Bill shared with us just a moment ago. It reads:

Autumn, we know,
Is life en route to death.
The asters are but harbingers of frost.

The trees, flaunting their colors at the sky,

In other times will follow where
The leaves have fallen,
And so shall we.

Yet other lives will come.
So may we know, accept, embrace,
The mystery of life we hold a while

Nor mourn that it outgrows each
Separate self, but still rejoice
That we may have our day.

Lift high our colors to the sky!
And give,
In our time, fresh glory to the earth.

What might it look like, to give, in our time, fresh glory to the earth? What might it look like, and *feel* like, to rejoice that we may have our day, knowing all the while that when we, like the trees, have followed where the leaves have fallen, other lives will come? Do we *think* about those lives to come while we are the ones lifting high our colors to the sky?

It's not actually as if there's never an overlap; many of the lives to come are already here, sitting on the laps of mothers and fathers in the first part of the service, or sitting side by side with good friends, sharing hymnals before going off to class. Some of the lives "to come" are actually already coming of age, exploring their life journeys with other young teenagers in our Coming of Age class. So we need not dive too deep into our imaginations to wonder just who those coming after us are.

Where we may need to do our deepest imagining is in asking ourselves, how do we want to leave this world for those who come after? And in asking that question, subsequently, we will need to ask, what must we do to make it so?

Now this morning, when I talk about “this world,” I have in mind specifically the world of Wildflower Church, and the world of Austin, Texas. OK, I’ll include Buda, Manchaca, Dripping Springs, and even Marble Falls so as not exclude any outlying Wildflowers. And, as the sermon moves along, I might let the ripples move out even further. You’re certainly welcome to do so as well. But for now, let me begin with Wildflower Church, both the community of people, and the physical plant.

Most of you know that the physical plant consists of this space, known as SASAC, and Starbright School, both of which we rent on Sunday mornings; two offices down the street,

which we also rent; and de facto-ly, the domestic domains of many a generous person willing to host meetings, classes, and other church events. Some such configuration of rentals and living rooms has been the way our Wildflower world has looked since its inception some nine or ten years ago.

But change is upon us. Just as the asters are, in Robert Weston's words, but harbingers of frost, we know that SASAC and Starbright and our two offices are necessarily but harbingers, or precursors, of a home of our own—a home that fits all of us comfortably, one that is available seven days a week, one which has a sanctuary and a social hall, several religious education classrooms and offices for our staff, and so on. If you've been here at least as long as I have, you've heard me present this litany more than once before. But, beloved people, we are coming to a turning point. As our community continues to grow, we are coming to a time of harvest, a time

in which we can see, if we choose to include ourselves in the life of this community and to keep connected to it, we can see that leaders in this church—and by leaders I don't mean just the Board, I mean people who have taken it upon themselves to help lead the way—leaders, also known as people, have worked tirelessly to find us a home. And now there is one toward which we just might turn our commitment, our creativity, and our community.

Whether we as a community choose to move forward with the building on Corral Lane or we choose to let go of this opportunity for a better, or simply a different one, we are *all* called to participate, in one form or another, in the discernment process that is coming before us. We need to do it for ourselves, and for those beautiful, budding lives following ours.

Now, I've heard mention of some people saying they don't feel they've been included or informed in the process thus far. Please know we are doing all we can, with Conversations with the Board after services, website postings, weekly email announcements, newsletter articles, and yes, sermons, to keep you up to date. To give a brief synopsis, the Building Committee, having looked at several other properties that proved to be either unaffordable or uninhabitable, has found a building that is roughly 22,000 square feet, on 6-7 acres of land, in the vicinity of William Cannon and I-35. The selling price, especially for that much square footage, is extremely reasonable, at somewhere just over a million dollars. We have sent a letter of intent, received a counter offer, and sent once more a counter-counter offer. Should we sign what is known as an earnest money contract, we will have about 120 days to have the building inspected and to run a capital campaign.

Anywhere along the inspections and the campaign we may hit a red light that says nope, not happening, back to SASAC and the drawing board. But as of now, we don't have enough information to even see if the light is red, yellow, or Christmas-tree-with-a-big-beautiful-building-underneath-it green.

Now, knowing that we don't have all the information, it would be wise to remember the words of the Greek philosopher Herakleitos who says, "In searching for the truth, be ready for the unexpected... The same road goes both up and down," he says, "the beginning of a circle is also its end." In other words, we have to keep our hearts and minds open to all possibilities. We must be ready to move forward, and we must be ready to let go.

But in order to do either, we must first be present for the here and now. Showing up for life in the present moment means paying attention to our surroundings, connecting to

ourselves and to our community, and acting as agents of possibility. As Robert Weston says, “So may we know, accept, embrace the mystery of life *we* hold a while.”

Now, mulling it over, the notion of “knowing... mystery” may seem a little contradictory. How can one know mystery? How can one know, for example, how to prepare for those who follow us a world that will be as good and as loving and as sustainable as it can be? How do we know whether this one building we’re looking at will be worth the investment and that it will last for generations beyond our own? Mahatma Gandhi once said, “The impenetrable darkness that surrounds us is not a curse but a blessing. [God] has given us power to see only the step in front of us, and it should be enough if Heavenly light reveals that step to us.” I think those words might best sum up what “knowing mystery” may look like. Only by stepping into mystery can more be revealed.

So I ask you to step into mystery with me by attending today's congregational meeting, by keeping yourself informed as information comes, and by living in faith that the next step shall be revealed, if only we let go and take the one step that is before us.

But I said that in this sermon I would move us beyond the walls of Wildflower Church, into our lives that spill out across Central Texas, and wherever our paths might take us. How does the willingness to move into mystery, into the world where we are called to step toward the unknown and let go of what we know, or think we know, apply to our larger lives?

Returning to Herakleitos, the philosopher pithily proclaims, "Change alone is unchanging." Now, if your growing up years were anything like mine, and unpredictability and crises were experienced a little too familiarly, such a statement might not sound all that comforting—great, you might say, all

our lives are just spent trying to adjust to twists and turns put before us, and we never seem to be able to quite catch up.

That's one way we can understand the notion of change alone being unchanging. Some of us may even feel that way in this moment, and have every right to, as we receive unexpected news, or face a loss, or fear for our own well being because of health or aging or finances, or what have you.

On the other hand, there is the comfort in knowing, as Herakleitos notes, that the world says, "... all is one. And... everything comes in season." For we can then turn to the seasons and see that the very breath of life is operating in everything—taking in, letting go, taking in, letting go. For some, that experience might come in the joy of gardening and the cycles of the plant life you tend to. For others, it might be practicing Buddhist meditation, as several people do twice a month in our church office. For some it might be Pagan ritual

at particular points of the year. For some it might be the raucous thrill of a new Longhorns year or the return of the World Series, and knowing that if our team doesn't fair as well as we'd hoped, there's always next year. For some, as with Wildflower member Anna Finger and her family, it is the birth of brand new life and the cooing and the crying and nursing of a days' old babe. For all of us, we can give thanks for each breath we breathe, and for our bodies taking us all the way up to this moment, with grace and with graying, with strengthening and with slowing, with softening and with knowing.

In my ministry, I have been graced and strengthened and softened by the cycles of the Wildflower seasons. We have gained members and lost some. We have succeeded in stewardship campaigns and are preparing to make cuts to our 2010 budget. We have been empowered by our work with

Austin Interfaith, letting our voices be heard alongside those of thousands of other citizens of Austin, in issues ranging from health care reform to education to a living wage. And we have come upon city officials telling us it is not as simple as keeping the commitments they had made to us before. In my witnessing the work of those leading the way toward a home of our own, I have seen great strides forward, a tapping of the brakes, breakthroughs in seeking solutions, and honest ponderings. We breathe in, and we let go. We see the one step in front of us, take it, and let the next step be revealed.

As we move through autumn, as we are cooled by the grey and the rain and the shortening of the days, we know that this year's leaves are preparing to fall. Once again, in Robert Weston's words, "the mystery of life outgrows each separate self."

We are outgrowing the walls of SASAC and our offices. Unlike the trees and their leaves, however, we cannot simply assume the cycles of life will bud a new building for us. We must be willing, in our time, to give “fresh glory to the earth,” and to step into the mystery that will bring us new life, new sanctuary, a new home to call our own.

Whether that home will be on Corral Lane is up for all of us to decide, with our votes, our money, our time and energy, our choice to stay informed. With the willingness to step into this particular mystery, we *will* discover the next steps to take, whether that means moving in, or moving on. But be with us on the journey. With heart and mind, take a deep breath, exhale, take a step, and let the mystery unfold.

Amen.

#300 With Heart and Mind