

“The Snail Effect”

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N.B. These sermons are made available with a request: that the reader appreciate that, ideally, a sermon is an oral/aural experience that takes place in the context of worship, supported and reinforced by readings, contemplative music, rousing hymns, silence, and prayer and that it is but one part of an extended conversation that occurs over time between a minister and a covenanted congregation.

The butterfly effect, is a well known story within these walls. It shows the connectedness between us as individuals and the workings of the Earth. It outlines clearly the importance of having respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

In one version a time traveler steps on a butterfly causing the apocalypse in his home universe. In another, one flap of a butterfly wing causes a tsunami on the other side of the world. The story has sobered a great many of us to the reality of how vast our footprint really can be.

Experiencing life and ourselves with this understanding makes each one of our actions feel crucial to state of our world. But we can also be small in our impact. So assuming every action will shift reality is a bit over the top.

I would like to share a little bit of an idea I call the snail effect with everyone.

The idea started when I was in grade three when I insulted my classmate's snail. It was small, the shell was a little warped and its antenna like eyes were slightly different lengths away from its smooshy neck. I could see that as far as snails go, this one was highly unimpressive. But I would not have commented without being asked. I had been pretty distracted that recess playing an imaginary game in my head, or possibly hopscotch. Unfortunately though he came right up and asked. “Hey Maya, what do you think of my snail?”. “It's gross,” I responded, with a hint of criticism, and walked away.

My teachers told me that bullies were kids who had been bullied themselves by their classmates or even their families. Bullies were very sad kids. Now I was a bully. I was devastated.

I wasn't being bullied, my family was very nice and I was pretty happy, overall. I was also generally kind to people around me. I was known by the teachers as a leader and someone who helped others.

So I didn't understand what happened.

After about thirty seconds of walking across the school yard I was holding back tears.

When I arrived home I went straight to my mom. She was sitting in our big, comfy rocking chair. I hugged her and cried until everything in the world disappeared except for that poor boy and his poor snail. I imagined him looking down at it with a horrible, angry, expression, yelling. I imagined him getting up the next morning and deciding to bully the smaller kids in our class. My worries went on and on and on, and I told her all of them.

She was shocked by my sadness but she listened patiently not asking questions, letting me try to work things out on my own.

Eventually she said "Tell you what sweetheart, how about tomorrow you apologize really nicely and let me know how it goes, he might not even remember."

I sniffled, said ok, doubtfully, and went to bed.

At afternoon recess the next day I told the boy I was really sorry for being rude. I mentioned it was probably actually quite a nice snail. Maybe it was very friendly with a great appetite despite being a little misshapen.

For a second he looked at me, eyes glazed, muddy hands and feet still moving, anticipating getting back to the soccer game. He said "I'm not sure what you're talking about, but ok", and then went off to play.

I still don't know why I said what I said. But at the end of the day what really mattered was that I hadn't hurt anyone's feelings beyond that day. Apologizing for my mistakes, even if only for my own peace, was necessary.

My mom had given me the perfect advice. She reminded me that we all make mistakes and we always have the ability apologize. We are powerful and vulnerable. We all have impact but we are also small.

This snail effect shows that sometimes we are not as instrumental to the changes we see around us as we might immediately assume.

In a world where we are expected to be perfect seeing the limitations of our actions can feel belittling, sometimes almost mocking. A lot of the time we can't change as much as we think we ought to be able to. Admitting our vulnerabilities and need for guidance can be scary.

At this point we feel small and like we're running on a perpetual treadmill. We notice we're completely stuck. What are we doing with our lives? Why are we so small?

The snail and the butterfly effect tend to be both scary and truthful. It can be hard to find a middle ground in our minds that is like the reality where we actually exist.

My mother has always provided comfort and wisdom when I feel disproportionate in the world.

As well mother earth, a mother we all share, has a habit of showing us where we fit in her web. We are blessed with the ability to see her hereditary beauty within ourselves. We can see it reflected in our curling waterfalls of hair, and landscape deep eyes, and humming ocean breath. Plants tissues and our own mimic each other brilliantly. Trees communicate in ways that have recently been discovered to be incredibly similar to communications between humans. The more we understand the more we see.

Then she sometimes plays a trick on us. Displaying the infinite sky full of stars, That we can get lost in, feeling completely free and infinitely small.

Our mother Earth sends us wisdom that is both humbling and empowering. She shows us we are small, and big, disjoint and connected with the world.

Another way we can escape our stuckness is by seeing a wider goal and receiving support from within a community.

This congregation has helped me become myself, and discover what I really believe.

Most of you probably know me as a worship leader. I started worship leading four years ago, just after coming of age. The ceremony not only marked a time when I joined the youth group, transitioning out of the religious education I was used to. It also introduced me to service building, which has, in turn, encouraged me to pursue my calling of becoming a minister.

The Coming of Agers today have worked incredibly hard towards forming this service and their credos. As everyone knows, establishing beliefs and morals in our complicated lives is no small feat and they have all done amazingly.

In my experience though the hard work of spirituality really started after I presented my credo. After coming of age you will need to look at life differently to keep up with the forever changing, often chaotic world. You yourself will change so incredibly. You will figure out where you are comfortable and what communities you want to be a part of. You are not going to be the same person forever, your beliefs will change, your relationships will change, your perspective will widen and deepen and become obscured in certain areas.

You will probably get lost finding your classes in high school next September. At times you will be overwhelmed by hard work and hard emotions. You will get lost within yourself many times. No one ever said teenagehood would be easy.

These past years have changed me so much and in many ways I would never have expected. But I always have known, and I hope all of you know that this community is here for you and loves you.

In this community there is no pressure on us to be something we're not. In fact we are strongly encouraged to embody everything we are with pride.

Here we can sit under the stars feeling completely at peace. We can drift through the next half hour until the mosquitos come out to the dock and start biting away at us, encouraging us, in Mother Earth's sneaky little way that we should probably get to bed so that tomorrow we can change the world for better again.

Right here we are more than a sum of our actions. We are expanding in all different directions of ourselves. Here we can see how we fit perfectly and importantly in a way no one else can.

And on Mother's Day let's recall all the experiences, relationships and communities that motherlike, have shaped us to be the way we are.

Let's remember the wisdom of our mothers, chosen mothers, godmothers, motherly friends and grandmothers.

Let's grieve and laugh and dance with our mother Earth, whom every one of us shares as a mother.

Let's take full advantage and full responsibility for the community we are sitting in right now.

And within our relationships may we be blessed enough to proceed with reckless compassion.

Thank you