

The Road to Wholeness

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by Ed Ostrom, October 13, 2019

In keeping with the theme of wholeness, the movie, “The Wizard of Oz” came to mind. The year was 1940 and I was 8 yrs-old. Mother took me to see the matinee’s showing at the Strand Theater in Belmont, Massachusetts. The entrance fee was ten cents. You may recall the movie starts in black and white. Dorothy is running home frightened by the threats that Ms Gulch, that terrible woman in the farm next door, is going to take her dog Toto. She runs home to her Aunt Em and Uncle Henry who ignore her cries of distress. They’re just too busy for her. Ever wonder about her parents? Why is she living with her aunt and uncle? The movie provides no answers to the question. Do her Aunt and Uncle love her? It doesn’t appear that they do. Where is there someone to love her? There are no kids to play with. She’s alone, on an isolated farm, just her dog Toto that loves her and that she loves. She is just so unhappy. How many millions of kids today are like that: alone, hungry, unhealthy, victims of violence, no one to love them, no one to care for them. My hearts breaks when I think of them.

Dorothy runs away—she wants to go “Over the Rainbow.” That’s a place where love will be found. You ever feel that way? So disappointed, so lonely, so desperate, so overwhelmed--you just want to run away and find a place where comfort abounds. But Dorothy, like so many kids that run away, falls victim to a con man—the self-proclaimed Professor Marvel. And that’s also what happens to run-aways, they’re found by con artists who capture them, harm them, and use them for their own purposes.

The tornado occurs, ...well after-all, she’s in Kansas. Its violence hits the farm and around and around she goes in that shed where she took refuge. It lands, she opens the door and suddenly the film is in color—brilliant

color. What a shock! Not to Dorothy but to the audience. You see in those days, all movies were black and white. It's the kind of shock that a newborn baby must feel. Suddenly no warmth, being slapped, having to breath on her/his own, no wonder they cry. Dorothy finds herself in a strange looking floral garden and she says to Toto, "I don't think we're in Kansas anymore." ..Dah! A bubble appears and puff, a beautiful lady emerges and proclaims she is Gilda, the Good Witch of the North. Small people suddenly emerge and are happy beyond words because they believe that Dorothy purposely killed the Wicked Witch of the East. Of course it wasn't anything that Dorothy did on purpose, the shed accidentally fell on that Witch. Suddenly she learns that she's in Munchkin Land and all these small people are called Munchkins. After a bit of how-do-you-do they show their joy of being rid of that terrible witch. They dance, march, and do silly things all because Dorothy's has done them such a good deed. Oh, yes the impact that simple, accidental deed of kindness can have an enormous impact on other lives. The Boy Scouts have it right. We all should strive to do a daily good deed. Perhaps it's just a friendly word to someone standing alone at coffee hour—what an impact that simple gesture can have. Those Munchkins gave her aid. They gave her comfort. Isn't that the role of this Congregation as well? Isn't the word "Munchkin" just another word for Congregation? Aren't we all now sitting in a kind of Munchkin Land? It's just that we're taller. Like our parents, if we're lucky enough to have had caring ones, who provided us with direction, so to, those Munchinks put Dorothy on the yellow brick road, the path that will lead her to the Emerald City, where she will find The Great Wizard who will grant her wish to return home to Kansas. All she has to do is follow the yellow brick road. How easy that is... just follow the yellow brick road. Our road through life isn't marked. We have to find our own

road and perhaps even build one of our own. The adventure of life is about to unfold as you follow your own yellow brick road. You see wholeness is an adventure, it's the trip through life, it's never a destination. In one sense, it's frustrating because the hunt that never ends. We move closer to wholeness and then the target moves further away. Want proof? Just ask an expert in any field whether she knows everything there is to learn about it and you'll receive the same answer. "Oh no, I now know how much more there is yet to learn."

Dorothy encounters a scarecrow who comes to life and we hear his lament that he has no brain. (There are days that I feel like that, too.) She asks, if you have no brain, how can you speak?" His response is profound, "Some people without brains do a lot of talking, don't they?" There's a man in Washington which immediately came into focus. Did she abandon the scarecrow's need? No, even though his need was beyond her capabilities, she helped him. Isn't that we do here, at the UU Church of Wilmington, we help each other—even if all we can do is listen. We help and we help because that's who we are. But Dorothy goes further, she not only listens, she restuffs him, and she offers him a possible solution to his problem. "Join me," she says, "we'll ask The Great Wizard - the Wizard of Oz." They join hands. That gesture alone is just so great. When one is grieving, just a touch can say volumes. Ever do that? So, off they go encountering bends in the road, trees that throw apples at them. Isn't that what life does to us? It brings joy and it also throws bad apples at us. I've encountered a few bad apples in my day and I'm sure you have as well. Their journey continues. Life goes on and new adventures await. That's what we have to do, go on despite the crosses we bear. Each of us carries a cross. Some crosses are heavier than others, and some are more visible than others but, despite their burden, we carry on as best we can. And,

once in a while, somebody helps you carry your cross by some kind gesture. How great that is. Those us who have achieved that unflattering status of being labeled “senior citizen” need to carry on too.

Years ago, that famous actor and director Clint Eastwood was playing golf with a stranger who subsequently became his friend. He was the song writer, and songster, Toby Keith. After learning that Clint was shortly turning 88, he asked him, “What are you doing lately” “We start shooting a new film tomorrow,” Clint responded. “Man, just what keeps you going?” Clint replied, “I don’t let the old man in.” Toby found that statement profound. Later on he turn that phrase into a beautiful musical ballad whose wisdom is worth absorbing.

Verse 1

Don’t let the old man in, I wanna leave this alone
Can’t leave it up to him, he’s knocking at my door
And I knew all of my life, that someday it would end
Get up and go outside, don’t let the old man in

Chorus

Many moons I have lived
My body’s weathered and worn
Ask yourself how would you be
If you didn’t know the day you were born

Verse 2

Try to love on your wife
And stay close to your friends
Toast each sundown with wine
Don’t let the old man in

(Hums a Chorus)

Many moons I have lived
My body’s weathered and worn
Ask yourself how would you be
If you didn’t know the day you were born

Verse 3

When he rides up on his horse
And you feel that cold bitter wind
Look out the windows and smile
Don’t let the old man in.

outro

Look out your window and smile
Don’t let the old man in.

Dorothy eventually meets, helps, and encourages the Tinman and then the Lion who join her journey because each of them isn’t whole and like all of us—wholeness is what we seek. That road to Oz is not without hazard. We all face hazards, disappointments, hardships, and more. That what life is. Is there anyone here whose road, whose way through life has been without bumps, without detours, without disappointments, without problems. But we carry on. No matter your age, we don’t let the old man in.

Eventually, they arrive at Oz and after much effort gain entrance to the Emerald City and meet the Great Wizard. But instead of being a benevolent Wizard, he scares them. He's a bully. Instead of granting their wishes, he bargains with them to get what he wants. Is there anyone you know who's a bully--an individual who uses his power to get what he wants? A guess that a guy who builds his reputation on being a great bargainer and a bully can even grow up to become aPresident – Excuse me, I meant a Wizard. Just a slip of my tongue.

So now they're begrudgingly off to acquire the broom of the evil, the super-evil Witch of the West. They monkey around with her for a while, toss water on her, get her broom and escape, returning to the wizard with her broom. They face the awesome, the booming-voiced Great Wizard of Oz once again. But, by accident, they discover, he's a fraud! They've been hood-winked. The Wizard is just an ordinary man, who with his gadgets pretends to be the great, all-knowing, a giver of wishes. We all probably know such people: People who promise but never deliver. They take, but never give. It's hard to turn the other cheek with such people. Handling them is an art – one I continue to work on.

But this self-proclaimed Wizard has been caught and after mumbling a lot, the so-called Wizard admits says, "I'm a good man, just a bad wizard." They all angrily challenge this phony, "What about those promises you made" they ask. He then, most unexpectedly, responds by granting them their wishes. That's not typical is it? As we pass through life, we learn to stay clear of frauds, of liars, of cheats, whenever we can.

But this bad wizard but good man says to the scarecrow, "Anybody can have a brain. That's a very mediocre commodity. Every creature that crawls on the earth or slinks through slimy seas has a brain. But they have

one thing you haven't got, a diploma. Therefore, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the universitat e pluribus unum, I confer upon you – a doctorate degree—the TDT: “The Doctor of Thinkology.” But, for me, there was something missing because he said nothing about how the scarecrow should now use his brain.

Turning to the lion the Wizard continues, “You my friend are the victim of disorganized thinking. You are under the delusion that because you run away from danger, you have no courage. You are confusing courage with wisdom.” But where I come from we have heroes and they have no more courage than you have, but what they have that you don't have is a medal. Therefore, for meritorious conduct, extraordinary valor, conspicuous bravery against wicked witches, I hereby award you the triple cross. You are now a member of the legion of courage.” But what he doesn't say is what Winston Churchill said, “Courage is the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees all others.”

And turning to the tinman, the Wizard continues, “for you, my galvanized friend, you do not realize how lucky you are not to have a heart. Hearts will never be made practical until they are made unbreakable. Back where I come from there are men who do nothing all day but good deeds. They are called, (stumble with the speech) good deed doers. Their hearts are no bigger than yours, but what they have that you don't have is a testimonial. Therefore, in consideration of your kindness, I take pleasure at this time in presenting you with a small token of our esteem and appreciation—and remember my sentimental friend,— and his next statement is profound--a heart is judged not by how much you love but by how much you are loved by others. A heart is judged not by how much you love but by how much you are loved by others.

After Dorothy is instructed, she clicks her ruby shoes together three times and she awakes and finds herself back in Kansas. And so ends the picture.

But you don't know and even the writers don't know, to this very day, that there should have been a sequel. The yellow brick road, you see, does not end here. Visiting Oz, having their wishes fulfilled was but a pause in their journey. The road continues because life is not fulfilled by finding a brain, a heart, or courage, These characters must now use what they have acquired. Use it to improve themselves and to improve the lives of others—that, you see is the journey on their yellow brick road. You see that yellow brick road is the road to wholeness.

With a heart, there are so many whose hearts need soothing—need mending. Now armed with a brain, there are so many people everywhere who are under-educated. With courage, there is much in the world that cries for men of courage to do, to report, to meet the challenges presented by the unscrupulous.

For all of us, let's follow down our road with the wisdom from the words of Catherine Galasso-Vigorito, who wrote an editorial in the Delaware County News on September 4 of this year. She says, "Right now, today, slow down and take a careful look at all that you are doing—the road you are on. Right now is the time to make healthy choices. Now is the time to tell your loved ones how much they mean to you. Now is the time to bless people with your words and actions. Now is the time to smile and bring joy and enthusiasm to those you meet. Now is the time to stop worrying. Now is the time to help a person whose cross is heavier than yours. Now is the time to bounce back from what has been holding you captive. Now is the time to go after what makes you truly happy. Now is the time of opportunity. Now is the time to believe that all you seek to achieve can

truly happen. Now is the time to go past limitations into a world where anything is possible—miracles can happen and dreams can come true. Be determined to set your thoughts of whatever is true, noble, right, pure, and lovely.

Wholeness, you see, is not an end, it's a yellow brick road that ends only when one takes a last breath.