

The Gift of Getting Lost
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In a column for *On Spirit*, Parker Palmer talks about being Lost in the Wilds of Your Life. He says, “Ever been lost in the wilderness — or in the wilds of your own life? Me too! Because I get outwardly and inwardly lost from time to time, this poem by David Wagoner means a great deal to me.

“Lost

by David Wagoner, from [Collected Poems 1956-1976](#)

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
 Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
 And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
 Must ask permission to know it and be known.
 The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
 I have made this place around you.
 If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
 No two trees are the same to Raven.
 No two branches are the same to Wren.
 If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
 You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
 Where you are. you must let it find you.”

Palmer goes on: “A couple of years ago, I got lost hiking alone on a poorly marked mountain trail at Ghost Ranch in New Mexico, where I was on a ten-day silent, solitary retreat. It was starting to get dark, I panicked and began to run. Just the right thing to do when you have no idea where you're going, don't you think!

“Then I remembered the wisdom in this poem, stood still, and listened. I could not tell you what I was listening to, except that it was something both in me and around me. After five minutes or so, as my fear subsided, that something told me to turn around and walk slowly back up the mountain, looking to the left as I climbed. That's how I found the trail I'd missed in my fearful run down.”

For me, that story and this poem have all kinds of implications for this chapter in our lives. A brand new thing is happening, something so different that it can make us feel that we have lost our bearings. Here, in the woods, we can't see the forest for the trees. We don't know which path leads us back to safety, to the surroundings that we are used to, to the territory where we know our way around.

Actually, I really wonder if there *is* a path “back.” And I wonder, too, if we really want to go back there. Back where we just *knew* we were right, we knew what was needed for our society to be more just and whole. Back where we used our heads, we had it all mapped out – but our hearts didn't understand why so many people are angry.

As we have been exploring the Gifts of the Dark Wood, we have considered how uncertain many of us feel. Last week I described the feeling I have, at times, of paralysis; which path is the right one? How do I choose? This place does not look like any place on my mental map; I can't seem to get my bearings. Yet, I know I don't want to become so discouraged that I just give up. We can't give up!!

On his way out of the Meeting House, Bob Fancy said to me, "Remember: when we can't find the path, we UU's just make a new one!"

I've been thinking about that all week. If we strike out on an uncharted path, how do we know we are going to end up anywhere near where we want to be?

Well, to take a hint from Parker Palmer (whose wisdom and deep honesty I respect a great deal), we first need to make sure that we don't choose a path in a panic. As hard as it is to be calm, at times, choices made in panic are rarely our best choices. In a state of panic, we are likely to run in circles, never getting anywhere; or worse yet, end up in a worse place than here.

But there are certain things that can help us get our bearings, if we take time to calm down and remember them. Our faith offers us a basis for choosing our path. Does this path lead toward preserving the rights of others, or do other's rights get trampled if we take this path? Does this path strengthen and preserve our democratic form of self-government, or does taking this path lead to a privileged few holding more power than the rest of the people? Does this path safeguard our environment, or would the interconnected web, upon which we all depend, suffer more damage?

There are signposts in our hearts, too. Like the intuition Parker Palmer heard, urging him to retrace his steps and look out for the path he needed to take, our hearts have a wisdom that our brains sometimes don't understand. We need to remember to give our hearts a full hearing. They will tell us whether taking this path is on the side of love, or not. If we listen to our hearts, we will eventually find ourselves following the path our intuition and imagination suggest is right for *us*—the path that helps us bring the best of our energy and joy to the world.

This is a new day, and it calls for new ways of thinking, new ways of acting, new ways of organizing ourselves, perhaps new ways of doing business, new ways to work and play together, new ways of understanding the world and our place in it. Are you ready for the adventure?

Because once we can get past the discouragement, the disoriented panic, the urge to either act like nothing has changed or to rush into change headlong and heedless – once we can get still and let ourselves listen to our hearts, we may find that we are on the brink of new possibility.

I have a book that I return to over and over. It's called, *The Impossible Will Take a Little While*, by Paul Loeb. It is a book of stories of people who faced seemingly insurmountable problems, how they were able to still the voice of despair and panic, and think outside the box, finding a path to more justice, a more livable life, a joy and purpose and hope that they had thought was impossible. Stories in people's own words, about what it's like to go up against Goliath-- whether South African apartheid, Mississippi segregation, Middle East dictatorships, or the

corporations driving global climate change. Without sugarcoating the obstacles, these stories inspire the hope to keep moving forward.

None of these people sat and thought about their problem, figured out a way to solve the problem, and then followed that path to the solution. Instead, they followed the signs, they used trial and error, they learned and corrected their course, and forged a new path to freedom and justice. A new path, a new way. We can find our way, centering ourselves in the Here, listening to the voice of intuition, using our heads and our hearts together to blaze a trail through this new terrain we find ourselves in.

This is an era of great innovation! Cars that can drive themselves, instant connection to people all over the world, a global economy. These things are not good or bad in and of themselves; it depends on how they are used. Like fire, like money, they are powers we must learn to use wisely.

So here we are. Yes, things need to change. We don't know what that will look like, but we are ready. And we have lots of allies, LOTS of allies! We will learn to work together. We will form cooperatives, B corporations, and other socially responsible forms of businesses. We will find ways to govern ourselves without excluding people or consigning them to the margins of our society. I have faith that we humans, all over the world, will find new ways of being that come closer to our dream of a just, peaceful, and sustainable world.

Yesterday, people turned out in UNPRECEDENTED numbers to march. My friends, this was so much more than a reaction to the election of one man to the office of President. Thousands rallied in small towns across the country. Tens of thousands in small cities, hundreds of thousands marched in places like Boston, Denver, New York City, Chicago. Similar rallies were held in cities world wide – a “march” was even held on a ship off the coast of Antarctica!

People gathered, marched, rolled, linked arms for religious freedom, human rights, climate justice, racial justice, economic justice and reproductive justice. How all this is to be accomplished, we don't yet know! But the very fact that so many people, all over the world, actually turned up to march together in solidarity, gives me hope that together, we will find a new way, a new path, a new way of being.

My colleague Rev. Amy Shaw wrote this:

“Rise Up

We march for every woman who died on an illegal abortionist's table.

We march for the children of Flint, drinking poison at the hands of their Governor.

We march for the transman fired from his job when he came in to change his name, and for the genderqueer architect or doctor or mall worker who has to explain over and over and over again.

We march for the black family in the falling down house, and for the black family in the mansion.

We march for the sinners and we march for the saints.

We march for the saving of us all.

We march for Standing Rock and we march for water justice.
We march for the right to defend our planet from the ravages of climate change.

We march for justice, we march for science, we march to keep the ignorant angels of our worst nature harnessed instead of proudly steering us into the shoals.

Over and over we will show up, rise up, wheel up, stand up, sing out, shout.

We will shout.

We will scream.

We will fight.

We will not go gentle into that good night,
in fact
we will not go at all.

We will march
for the sinners and the saints.

We will march for the saving of us all.

We will march.

Rise up.”

-Rev. Amy Petrie Shaw

And in between the marches and the finding of where our path needs to go next, in those times when we have no idea which way to go, in times when we again feel lost – and we will – we will keep reminding each other:

“Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. you must let it find you.”