

A sermon delivered by Emma Welsh-Huggins at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, Epiphany 5, Youth Sunday, February 5, 2012.

“Reflecting and Recharging”

***Isaiah 40:21-31;
Mark 1:29-39***

In the gospel we heard about Jesus going into the wilderness. Like us, Jesus needed to rejuvenate himself by reflecting on his actions and abilities. The power of a quiet moment can work wonders.

According to the second law of thermodynamics, all physical processes are irreversible without outside impact. Basically, nothing can run forever without outside help. Unless I use my own breath, my own energy, to blow this balloon back up, it is doomed to stay deflated until its matter breaks down.

Every action, made by humans or machines, requires energy to get work done. Throughout the completion of any action, some energy is lost that cannot be replaced. As more and more work is converted into energy, the object or person falls closer to equilibrium—the point at which it can no longer do work without outside influence. Essentially, for this action to continue, the object must be recharged, rested or refilled.

There are many careers that include human interaction in order to better the world around us, such as parents, doctors, teachers, policemen or therapists. Many of these people are doing real and permanent good, and extending themselves beyond their emotional and physical limits in order to do so. They spend their days putting others in front of their own needs and solving problems that they took on by their own choice. However, many of those who choose

these careers make their decision based on the feeling that they get from their own goodwill.

But let's return to our physics lesson for a moment. As any system falls closer and closer to equilibrium, it gives off thermal energy that can power any object. As someone does work to help another person, they also give off their own thermal energy, which cannot be replaced without an outside intervention, such as rest or nutrition. In fact, "caregiver fatigue" or "caregiver burnout" is a medically recognized ailment similar to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder that can cause depression, withdrawal from social interaction and can even cause a fear of death or an increase in the use of alcohol or other stimulants.

My physics professor at Ohio State mentioned in a recent lecture the idea of perpetual motion machines—objects that can run "forever" completely on their own fuel and power source. The idea, however attractive, is completely impossible. As I explained before, nothing can go forever without assistance from an outside force.

Nevertheless, that hasn't prevented our stubborn human nature from trying. This is why the U.S. Patent Office has included perpetual motion machines in the list of objects that would not be accepted for patents in any situation. They are listed as "not helpful." An earlier version of this notice on their Web site can be summarized in a few words: Even if you think you have invented a perpetual motion machine, don't bother submitting a patent request, because it isn't possible.

In Mark, chapter 1 verses 29-39 (1:29-39), Jesus is a doctor, a therapist and a teacher all at once, and seemingly appears to be a perpetual motion machine. On the Sabbath, Simon invites him to his family's home, so that Jesus can heal his mother-in-law. By the end of that day, the home is flooded by masses of people begging to be healed. One by one, he exorcises demons, heals the sick and blesses the weary. However, when his work is finally done for the day, Jesus goes out into the wilderness, into the desert, accompanied by no one but his thoughts and prayers.

Once there, he is able to reflect on his day—on his accomplishments, weaknesses and, most importantly, what it will take to do the same thing tomorrow. Jesus understood what most of us seem to forget – that silence and reflection is just as important as the work that is done for other people. Without the balance that this rest gives to us, it is impossible to continue doing any kind of work for other people. Through this meditation, Jesus is also able to find his next calling, which is to take his ministry and healing to other towns that are yet to be introduced to his gospel. In stillness, one can find peace, new ministry and renewed faith in one’s calling. You don’t go to your own personal desert to be surrounded by hot air (like what I filled the balloon with). You go for your own inspiration, translated literally as the breath of the spirit.

Many of us already have activities that we do in order to calm ourselves and take time out of our day to renew our bodies and our minds. Every morning, my mom walks the dog and writes a haiku, while my dad runs early, while the city still sleeps. These are their ways in which they revitalize themselves and get ready for a new day. Neither of them is looking around every corner, waiting for Jesus to pop out and say “Hey! Great job! Now that you’ve recharged YOUR batteries, get out there and minister unto others!” It’s not necessarily an action that one takes in order to get closer to whatever higher power you believe in. It’s about renewing and ministering to yourself and what is important to you—so that, if you want, you can help renew and minister to others.

But you might say to yourself, “I’m not a minister, I’m not a teacher, I’m not a doctor,” what would I need to be recharged for? The fact is that, whether you realize it or not, every relationship that you’re in requires more emotional input and energy than you could ever imagine. The normal day-to-day human interactions that we take for granted are more draining and exhausting than anyone could expect. At some point, everyone needs some distance. Everyone needs reflection. Without time to ourselves, we won’t be able to find the time for others. Once you reach equilibrium, make sure that you stop and reflect and recharge. No one is a perpetual motion machine.

Maggie Lyon is a writer on wellness through spirituality for the Huffington Post, and recently wrote an article about spiritual practice and how to achieve it in your everyday life. She defines spiritual practice as “something you do every single day that draws you deeper into who you really are by connecting you with your divine self.” She strives to make it clear that this practice is never something fake or artificial. It must always come from the heart, and with ease. Additionally, she wrote a list of the bountiful benefits one gets from such reflection.

They include that it can:

1. Provide clarity
2. Cultivate attention to seemingly unimportant daily tasks
3. Lift your mood
4. Create a sense of steadiness and grounding in change
5. And my favorite – that it is able to draw you into the simplicity of the moment.

So, as you extend yourself closer and closer to equilibrium by helping others – or simply being yourself – never forget the importance of a quiet moment, of a reflection that rests and restores you.

If you take nothing away but this, make sure to ask yourself: What inflates MY balloon?