

Giving Birth to the Dream
Sunday, January 22, 2017

In 1999, sculptor Eric Kempson and his wife Philippa left Britain with their young daughter Elleni for a quiet life on the beautiful island of Lesbos. Eric was drawn to work with the olive wood native to the island. Because the wood is so dense, many woodworkers won't even try to carve it, but Eric loved the intricate patterns of its grain and learned to carve it into abstract sculptures, as well as every day tools like salad tongs, honey dippers, and candle holders. Philippa joined him in the workshop and Elleni attended the local schools and, as she grew older, began to sing in the local pubs. It was an idyllic life until about two years ago when refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq began to arrive. "We always [got] refugees here," Eric explained in an interview, but then it became a flood of people fleeing war and persecution – from 5,000 people in 2014 to over 100,000 in 2015 arriving on the beach in front of their home. In February of 2015, he was taking a walk along the beach when he came across a baby's life jacket lying on the sand next to a doll. "I'm here and I'm a human being," he said. "When you see these babies suffering you can't just watch." So he and Philippa and Elleni began helping the refugees. At first they would give them their own clothes, blankets, and food. As the numbers grew, they joined with other volunteers and offered their home as an informal collection center. But their assistance isn't only offered on dry land. They have plunged into the water to rescue refugees when the boats ferrying them across the strait between Lesbos and Turkey dump their human cargo out short of the shore or when the boats sink. In an interview, Eric described the worst day:

"October 28[, 2015]. The traffickers forced people overboard before the boat had reached the shore. All of a sudden, fuel began leaking and the boat exploded. Everybody jumped into the water: men, women, children. Our daughter Elleni swam to where the boat was sinking to dive for babies. The very same day we received a phone call informing us that another boat had disappeared after being spotted in [a neighboring town]. I took my binoculars and drove there. When I arrived, I saw that the deck had collapsed, trapping women and children, many of whom were stuck underwater. At the end of the day, we saved 242 people out of 300."

Because refugees often spent their first night sleeping on the ground, the Kempsons leased a former hotel and reopened it as Hope Centre, a shelter for the refugees. While many local people supported their work, others felt their welcoming

the refugees and calling attention to their dangers would keep away the tourists on whom their economy depends. Their protests convinced local government officials to close the Centre last June for lack of proper permits, and I became aware of the Kempsons work through a story on NPR's Morning Edition on Tuesday morning which opened with a refugee from Afghanistan saying, "The difference of here and Kabul is that we have a roof there. So unfortunately, the air is too cold because we don't have a roof on us." The reporter explained that this man and over 4000 other refugees are currently housed in snow-covered tents on Lesbos. He then interviewed Philippa Kempson who told him about how her family began working for the refugees: "You can't take your child to school and drive past women and children on the beach freezing and crying, so we would go with whatever we could find. We gave away our own clothes, whatever food we could afford to buy." And then she went on to say though that they were thinking of leaving – not because of the refugees but because of the death threats they are receiving for helping them. She explained, "They blame us for bringing the refugees. Apparently, if we didn't help them, they wouldn't come... I mean, these people were fleeing anyway. It's just a case of we couldn't stand by and watch them drown."

As I listened to Philippa's story and later read more about her family's outreach, the word "call" came to mind. Though neither Philippa nor Eric used this word, they responded to a call to serve. Merriam-Webster defines "calling" as "a strong inner impulse toward a particular course of action especially when accompanied by conviction of divine influence." Seeing the plight of the refugees, they felt they must do something to help them – that was the call. Then they figured out how to respond to that call – in their case with food, clothing, shelter, and safety.

That phrase about "divine influence" can put us off – thinking that calls only come to holy people or people in religious life. We often talk about the call of clergy people to ministry, and it's common for candidates for ministry, UU along with other denominations, to be asked to talk about their understanding of their call. But "divine influence" doesn't have to be the voice of God announcing from on high, "you there, I want you to do this." And if it does come that way, it usually makes others suspicious. More often calls come as a question, as it did for the Buddha, as an inner voice telling you to see yourself in a new way, as it did for Jesus, or as a sense that something must be done, as it did for the Prophet Mohammed and the Kempsons. However it comes, it prompts you to set out on the path of love and justice. Calls come to all of us. The question is not are we called but how have we been called and will we have the courage and the companions to enable us to respond?

We don't choose our calling. It comes to us as that inner voice, in conversation, in people showing up and needing our help. Sometimes we resist the call because it's too hard or because we think it isn't hard enough. Last month I spoke in a sermon about the people of Le Chambon in France and how they and their neighbors sheltered thousands of Jews during the Second World War. Andre Trocme, the minister of the Protestant church in the village, was central to that effort. Without him, it might not have happened. But he almost wasn't there to hear and respond to that call because during the early days of the War he was off meeting with church leaders and members of the Resistance trying to find some large work to take on. But no ways opened, and he was home when the first people seeking sanctuary showed up. As Dorothy Day wrote in her autobiography, she didn't set out to found the Catholic Worker movement – but people who were hungry and in need of resources and shelter just showed up. Some of the socks we've collected will go to Cradles to Crayons which was started about 15 years ago by Lynn Margherio who saw unworn clothes in her niece's drawer and unused toys in her nephew's playroom and began to think about how they could be given to children without such resources. I asked Kate and Ali to light our chalice today not just because they were going to yesterday's March – there were many First Parish people there – but because they each responded to the fear and hopelessness after last November's election by inviting neighbors and strangers into their homes to share feelings, think about responses, and support one another in whatever the work may be. So they too responded to a call.

That's how calls come. But how do you know when you hear a call if it's a true one or you're just hearing voices? Calls must be evaluated, and that's where the community comes in. Quakers have a practice of forming Clearness Committees to help people do that. But even without a formal committee, the next step is to talk over your sense of call with people whose wisdom you trust. You ask, "Does it help to heal the world?" "Does it promote love and justice?" "Do I have the resources to carry it out?" Sometimes a call requires study or fund-raising or learning a new language. Sometimes it may take a while between receiving the call to when you carry it out. Or sometimes, as with the Kempsons, you're in the water before you quite realize how you got there.

Calls come to institutions as well as to individuals. Right now at First Parish we are listening for our call, though we're using the language of vision instead. But it's just a different metaphor. Our vision is our call – what does the world need from us at this particular time and in this particular place? And then our mission is how we will carry out that call. Our call could be to offer spiritual food and water to people who are doing justice – in that case our mission would be to craft worship and spiritual deepening programs geared to provide that sustenance; our call could

be to model radical hospitality in a time of division and fear of the other – in that case our mission would involve offering welcoming and connecting worship and programs. We might have a call to peace, and live that out in a mission of offering workshops of non-violence and worship of reconciliation. I don't know what our call is – it comes to us collectively. But I invite you over these next few weeks to have that question in your mind and in your heart as you read the news, talk with others, even as you peruse Scituate Monthly on Facebook – what is our call? What need might we fill? What hurt might we heal? What value might we promote? And bring what you've heard, what you've seen, what you've thought, and what you've felt on Sunday February 5 when our Mission-Vision steering team will lead all of us in visioning our communal call.

Earlier I read from the poem Maya Angelou wrote for Bill Clinton's inauguration. Since poetry was absent from Friday's inauguration, the organizers of the TED talks invited 5 poets to commemorate the occasion. In her poem *2053*, poet Jamila Lyiscott imagined watching the inauguration of a new president in that year with her grandchildren:

*Minutes before the January 20th 2053 inauguration
My grandbabies and I will be tuned into the worldwide news hologram station
Eager contemplation
Headlines scrollin' by about the history of our nation
My granny grays showin' them that I survived back in the days
So they pumpin' me for historical information*

*Like, "Granny...
Were you there during the divided state of America?
My history teacher says that the social climate was lethal
That the country bled
In a curious shade of red
Under the principle of profit before people...*

*That the world around you felt more and more one-sided?
And no one knew what to do when the indivisible was so profoundly divided...*

*But granny, what happened? This is all so confusin'
This history I'm perusin'
'Cause today we livin' in the United States of Inclusion...*

My 'Real D History Hologram' app took me back to the days after the 2016 election

*Days filled with protests and misconceptions
Days that led to the deepest unity of the people to take the country in a new
direction*

*How you pushed through such uncertain times is just a mystery
Is this real or, granny, is this trumped up history?"*

*And I will say
baby
In the year 20-and-17...*

*We the People
Believing in the possibility of a more perfect union
Stood at the precipice of pandemonium and fought for a palpable peace
We stitched together a quilt of hope out of every fiber of our being
We juxtaposed our journey with a history of healing
We organized for all types of equality
Restructured the economy
Uprooted false ontologies and toxic ideologies*

*We the people
Loved each other like the broken skin of a god
And by disarming any disease to our true democracy we beat the odds*

*We the people
Faced our flaws
And became critically conscious about our collective care
We did not back down in the face of bigotry or waver under the fallacies of
fear"*

***Just** minutes before the January 20th 2053 inauguration
When the world is tuned into the international news hologram station
My grandbabies will want to know how we overcame
I will tell them
That healing is not the absence of pain
It is the decision to act in the service of your development
Rather than your defeat*

How are we called to act in that service? How are we called “to lift our faces and give birth again/To the dream”? What is your call? What is my call? What is our call?
 - Pamela M. Barz

**From *On the Pulse of Morning* by Maya Angelou
 20 January 1993**

A Rock, A River, A Tree
 Hosts to species long since departed,...

But today, the Rock cries out to us, clearly, forcefully,
 Come, you may stand upon my
 Back and face your distant destiny,
 But seek no haven in my shadow.

I will give you no more hiding place down here.

You, created only a little lower than
 The angels, have crouched too long in
 The bruising darkness,
 Have lain too long
 Face down in ignorance.

Your mouths spilling words
 Armed for slaughter.

The Rock cries out today, you may stand on me,
 But do not hide your face.

Across the wall of the world,
 A River sings a beautiful song,
 Come rest here by my side.

Each of you a bordered country,
 Delicate and strangely made proud,
 Yet thrusting perpetually under siege.

Your armed struggles for profit
 Have left collars of waste upon
 My shore, currents of debris upon my breast.

Yet, today I call you to my riverside,
 If you will study war no more. Come,

Clad in peace and I will sing the songs
The Creator gave to me when I and the
Tree and the stone were one....

The River sings and sings on.

There is a true yearning to respond to
The singing River and the wise Rock....

Today, the first and last of every Tree
Speaks to humankind. Come to me, here beside the River.

Plant yourself beside me, here beside the River.

Each of you, descendant of some passed
On traveller, has been paid for....

Here, root yourselves beside me.

I am the Tree planted by the River,
Which will not be moved....

Lift up your faces, you have a piercing need
For this bright morning dawning for you.

History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, and if faced
With courage, need not be lived again.

Lift up your eyes upon
The day breaking for you.

Give birth again
To the dream....

The horizon leans forward,
Offering you space to place new steps of change.
Here, on the pulse of this fine day
You may have the courage
To look up and out upon me, the
Rock, the River, the Tree, your country...

Here on the pulse of this new day
You may have the grace to look up and out

And into your sister's eyes, into
Your brother's face, your country
And say simply
Very simply
With hope
Good morning.