

“Making Sacred”

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All Ages Reflection

Who here has ever smelled an elephant? Did it smell like a tree?

Y'all ever hear the story of the blind men and the elephant?

Kind of a silly story.

Blind not deaf. Couldn't they smell? Hear?

I get the point though. What's the point?

Kind of like the Tree Squid at Moodyville park. One way this. The other way that. What it is, depends on where you are, on how you're looking at it. What it is depends on your point of view. And that is called postmodernism children.

But if you've got a problem, try changing your perspective.

Reflection

My first church was probably my best church. Never mind that it was entirely made up - what church isn't? - and consisted of only myself and two friends, and only ever met twice.

It was called, “The Church of Look Up.” Now, you may ask, “what did you do in the church of look up?” Ahem...

We looked up! We found a patch of grass, lay on our backs, and looked up at the sky.

It may seem trivial. Far from it. Looking up changed our focus, drew our attention from all the rigamarole of the horizontal world, and gave us a little peace. It carved out time and shifted perspective. It was effective.

I find a lot of value in shifting perspective. Sometimes I'll hang my head upside down over the back of a chair and observe the world anew. That shift in perspective highlights details and compositions I otherwise take for granted or miss. It gives me the eye of an artist. It conjures a soul-deep appreciation for the elegant intricacy of things.

Of course, this is really just a technique of paying attention. When you pause and allow yourself space to consider the angle of the light as it falls upon a given subject, say a blade of grass, and you consider how it is converting that light into matter, and offer your senses to its smoothness and color and shape, and consider its relationships, origins and destiny, how it is an icon of life in general and the kind of life possible here, in this

place, and so becomes an icon for this specific ecorange, and feel how beautiful that blade of grass is emerging from that tufted soil in that falling light, and how, should you be open to it, it emanates some... feeling that is not inert, some radiance of its own...

When you consider the nature of anything, much less everything, it quickly becomes miraculous. A butterfly. A rock. A human eye. A drop of water. Anything you can think of. Miraculous. Infinitely embedded. Unique but interdependent. Sacred.

It's not that the elegant interdependent intricacy of every and anything automatically makes it sacred. It takes our attention to make something sacred. And when we make something sacred, it is not the thing that changes, it's us. Treating “as sacred” induces an awareness of interbeing while amplifying whatever meaning empowered the act to begin with. Real sacralization turns a cracker into communion with god without changing the cracker at all.

Put that way, transubstantiation begins, weirdly, to make sense. But only in the sense that *everything* is, at least, pregnant with the sacred, waiting for us to notice. Anything is awe inspiring and mesmerizing when we give it our soul's attention. But, of course, we don't.

In fact, we can't. Or at least we can't attend to everything we encounter in a way that would reveal it's miraculous nature and while still participating in the world we have made of that miracle. It may not even be possible. To perceive all the information available unveiled would be overwhelming, not to mention dangerous.

Indeed, one of the tasks of our neural network is to act as gatekeepers to let input pass or not. This gating determines what we perceive. But, as we've seen, what you perceive depends on how you perceive. Like that tree frog in Moodyville Park¹, what we let through the gate - our apprehension of reality - is shaped by our point of view.

And how we perceive is in large part determined by the paradigm in which we are arranged, the story, in our present case, of separation. That's not to say that we don't have a say in what and how it compels us to perceive.

¹ There is a sculpture in Moodyville park that if seen from one side looks like a tree frog. Seen from the other, it looks like a squid.

In fact, we here, as a spiritual community... we have a rare opportunity to be both intentional and supported about what information, sensations, meanings, and relationships we pay attention to. This machine births angels.

A simple example is that in the midst of the paradigm of separation, we declare a contrary story, that everything is interdependent. Now, there is still some ground to cover between our declaration and our actual perceptive lived experience. But it takes practice and you've got to start somewhere.

So. Everything is sacred (potentially). But everything is too much for us. So we curate our world. We decline to perceive some things and limit the full perception of almost all things due to both the need to survive and the influences of the stories in which we make our lives.

But we are not entirely without agency. And if we carve ourselves a little space, a little break from the story of separation that dominates our days, we might allow another story to emerge out of yearning and into experience. A critical device in doing just that is the art of sacralization.

The art of making sacred consists of befriending a practice, an ideal, or a thing that conducts us into a sense of interbeing capable of holding the meaning we yearn for and the story we seek to amplify.

It is the art of recognizing the sacred in what had been relegated to the mundane. It is a simple shift in how we perceive the same practice, ideal, or object in a different way, a way wherein it both stands out from the field and stands for our connective yearning. In some ways, making sacred is simply recognizing the god in the cracker.

It is a shift in perception that invites a shift in the significance and weight of the story carried by that practice, ideal, or object. And, as we discovered a few weeks back as we thought about a return to the oral, when you discover and amplify a story in a thing, that story becomes a shared vocabulary, a kind of medium in which that thing can, in a sense, talk back.

As we recognize, so too are we recognized. For we too are stories. This mutual recognition inspires in us the feeling of home. I am of thee, you are of me. By selectively shifting our perception of a practice, ideal, or object, we midwife the sacred from inherent to

explicit and thus reveal - and become aware of - our always already ongoing communion with the world. We feel it real, a taste of the world as it is, mutual and mutually generative. We find connection and meaning.

Now last week we explored how yearning was itself connection. Sacralization gives that yearning a body. Ritual gives that body a method.

Ritual sets the table. It creates an opportunity. It uses yearning and method to create a sort of empty space in which spiritual recognition may occur. Thus we maintain the sacred through ritual.

So what is the good news here? Friends, I am telling you that if you are lonely, or afraid, or defeated, you need not lose hope. If you are lost or discarded you need not mope. Or if you are buoyant and generous and want to expand your scope, we have the opportunity before us at all times to enter into a state of vibrant meaning and connection.

It's just we get so busy and caught in the numbers that it becomes difficult to shift our perception or even notice what we are yearning for. But LUCKY FOR US we have made this place. For many hands make light work. And make no mistake, shifting perception, in the face of the momentum of separation, may take some effort. Not that effort need be bereft of fun.

And so my assurance becomes an invitation to run the experiment. This Tuesday is Shrove Tuesday, more enticingly known as Fat Tuesday. It's the last day before Lent, that time of sacrifice intended to draw one's attention to the coming resurrection. Of course, like most Christian holidays, Lent is a graft on a more ancient practice rooted in the end of winter food storrs and the anticipation of spring.

We will take a cue from this ancient human observance. Tuesday night we will engage in the glorious debauchery of donut consumption, a celebration of making it to now, together. And then, for the next several weeks will carve a hole in our day, 15-30 minutes in which, should you accept the invitation, we will neither consume nor produce media or information of any kind.

The hypothesis is that to hear the still small voice of the holy, to shift our perception, to recognize our mutuality with the sacred, we first, in light of the relentlessness of the story of separation, must carve out space. That's

why the donut icon works. The hole. That and their deliciousness.

After service today, Laura and I will have these RSVP clipboards. Everyone who signs up will get weekly reflective videos and periodic reminders to make your time. We'll have spirit zones dedicated to reflecting on the experiment and close with a donut communion on Easter Sunday. So, come on Tuesday. Have a donut. But sign up first, cuz its donuts so I'm not sharing.

Come, together we will listen.