

“Magical Thinking”

**A sermon by
The Reverend Bill Clark**

It was called a magical mystery tour. Yes, I know, it sounds like a Beatle’s album but this tour involved only one Beatle, John Lennon, and it was not actually him on tour – as he was now dead – rather it was his piano – more specifically the piano in which he composed his song “Imagine” – spreading peace and love at the sites of tragic events.

The piano toured cities like; Oklahoma City, Waco, New Orleans and Virginia Tech.

Free of any restrictions the piano was there to be touched or played by anyone.

Libra LaGrone, whose home was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina, said “It was like sleeping in our grandpa’s sweatshirt at night. Familiar, beautiful and personal.”

Carolina True, the tour director said; “I never went anywhere saying this was a magic piano and its going to cure your ills,” But she added consistently there was a warming of even the most skeptical hearts. The piano landed in Virginia a mere month after the massacre; “I had no idea,” she said, “an inanimate object could give people so much.”

It was in preparation of a wedding ceremony when the couple declared they did not want any of it.

“Any of what,” I asked hesitantly.

“You know, any of that magical thinking of religion – we don’t want any unicorns, rainbows, god or grace in our service – none – no magical thinking at all.

This was actually the first time I heard the expression – magical thinking. Personally I had never thought of “religion” in terms of magical thinking. Religion was not about unicorns, rainbows, or magic – religion was about faith and service, tolerance, acceptance and love. Is this a part of magical thinking?

According to the magazine Psychology Today;

“Magical thinking is defined as believing that one event happens as a result of another without a plausible link of causation. For example: “I got up on the left side of the bed today; therefore it will rain.” Or I want to live in a small cottage on the water with a wood burning stove and a claw bathtub and BAM you find yourself living in one!! Just an example.

Is there a cause and effect link to uttering one’s desire and the outcome of that desire coming to fruition?

Is there a cause and effect between the care and comfort felt by playing John Lennon's piano magical? Is this also a part of magical thinking? Or is it like the man who was a magician who didn't know he was because no one ever told him he was. Are we all magicians? Is there magic in the world?

To help us locate an answer to this question we need not look further than the month of December. This month has been called one of the most magical times of the year. Tonight, at sundown begins the festival of the lights or Hanukkah. The story of Hanukkah is more than the victory of the Maccabees and the rededication of the temple.

The story of Hanukkah does not end with the victory of the Maccabees. For the story of Hanukkah continues with the blessing of the "wondrous deeds" wrought by God in those ancient days at this season. Now in another translation I found for this blessing wondrous deeds is read as miracles. So what are the wondrous deeds or miracle of Hanukkah?

As the story is told after the cleansing of the temple, Judah and his followers wished to light the eternal light, which is present in every Jewish house of worship. Once lit, this light should never be

extinguished. The oil needed for such light must be specially prepared and blessed by a religious leader. Yet no such oil could be found by Judah. Finally, a tiny jug holding just enough oil to burn for a single day was discovered. The lamp was filled and lit. However, the tiny amount of oil burned not only for a single day. It burned for eight days! So the festival of Hanukkah last for eight days commemorating the miracle of the oil. The miracle of the oil, which represents the presence of God on Earth!

In another Midrash written by the ancient Rabbi's was found another teaching on the festival of lights. It appears with the first man – Adam. At this time of year when the light grows shorter man fasted eight days believing the darkness was a result of his sinful ways. Candles were lite to rekindle the spark of light within him. Following the eight days the natural light begins to return. The magical thinking is within the light.

Welcoming Yule on solstice with the burning of the Yule log is also a tradition and ritual dedicated to the return of light – magical in nature – I am not so sure about – as it is the beauty of nature itself. But the traditions and rituals behind the solstice celebrations ushers in the magic of the season.

And then of course there is Christmas – which celebrates the very birth of light and hope. Now the birth narrative of Jesus, in my opinion, is chock full of magical thinking – a virgin gives birth to a son who will bring a ministry to light that will change the world. History tells us that church officials most likely chose December as the month to celebrate the birth of Jesus to coincide or (many would say)to replace the pagan traditions.

So whether you are a Christian and celebrating the birth of light – a pagan and welcoming Yule or a Jew and lighting candles of the menorah – December gives us numerous opportunities to see the world through, as Safford reminds us, with open eyes – the kind of seeing that is a choice it is a sacred and spiritual practice.

In viewing the world with open eyes we see it and the events in it exactly as it is – reflecting beauty for beauty, violence where there is violence and joy where there is joy.

Safford’s concept of seeing the world with open eyes is seeing it clearly as an act of will and conscience. It will make you very vulnerable, she reminds us, but it is holy and world transforming work.

So if magical thinking is about seeing oneself, the world and all the events in it with mindfulness and open eyes then I say let us celebrate the magic of this season – but not magic as in being a trickster or pretender, or making things happen that shouldn't happen but rather the magic of work; wonderful – wonderful work and the “miracles” of the season.

There is a little jingle I am been going around and singing all this week its from a musical we did in high school. (sing jingle) Now clearly this is the hocus-pocus kind of magic, but still I came to realize this world is full of magic. You may not call it that exactly, but events happen in our lives that are totally with out logic or reason. You may call it a coincidence, synchronicity or a miracle. I don't think that matters much. What is important is to remain awake, mindful with open eyes to witness the wonder that is all around us.

In interrupting the Christian Scriptures from the original Aramaic the word repent had another translation; “Stay Awake” or Be awake.

How differing the phrase from the gospel of John would sound;

“Stay awake, stay awake the kingdom of god is at hand.”

Stay awake and see the magic of this universe – life is a surprise constantly before your eyes – in true focus the world is hocus-pocus.

In viewing the world with open eyes we become aware of the magical thinking. Is there always a cause and effect correlation? Maybe not. But the outcome of our thinking is the transforming work.

Frankly speaking I simply call it all grace! Grace to me is about the movement of its blessing. The Reverend Peter Fleck says “Grace is a blessing, a blessing that is undeserved, unsolicited and unexpected, a blessing that brings a sense of the divine order of things into our lives. The ways of grace are mysterious. We cannot always figure them out. But we know grace by its fruits, by the blessings of its works.”

Call it grace. Call it magic. Call it miracles. Call it magical thinking. Call it whatever you wish. The message for today is not about the words. The message today is about seeing the world with all of its mystery, wonder, pain and sorrow – taking it all in – absorb it, feel it and let it all then re-emerge as compassion.

My friends, let us be intentional about our seeing in this month of December. Intention is a wonderful concept as it implies going out of your way to do the work it will take to see the world differently. Intentional work is not easy work. As we are viewing our mission later today as an Intentionally welcoming congregation this implies that we will do whatever we can to welcome ALL people – especially those marginalized by sexual orientation or gender expression as well as people from all faiths and backgrounds. We will go out of our way to help you make this your church home.

So as we do this wonderful intentional work let us also be intentional about our seeing this holiday season. See the candle lights as that precious light within us all – and lets light not just one more candle – but as many as possible to show our presence on this Island and in the world.

Amen and Blessed be