

## Parenting as a Spiritual Journey 9/2/18—Morning Message & Readings

### Opening Words/Call to Worship

“As adults we have the opportunity to look back on our childhood, to gain a sense of awareness, and to experience our lives today from that place of knowing—of knowing what we know and knowing all that we don’t. From this perspective, each one of us has the opportunity to embark on a parenting journey because we all have a child deep within us who hungers to be guided, to be challenged, to be healed, to be loved and to be forgiven.”

### Chalice Lighting: words by Gary Kowalski

- Children widen the circle of our being in ways that are limitless.
- Every baby that’s born connects us to our history, our own parents, grandparents and unknown forbears who brought new life to the world in each successive generation.
- Every baby that’s born links us to the future, to a world yet to come that belongs to our descendants and that we hold in trust for our posterity whom we will never know.
- Each child connects us to nature, to the innocence and exuberance of a world always hatching newborns: kittens and pups and lambs and babes.
- Each child reminds us of the kinship we share with people of other lands and races who love their young as purely and tenderly as we do.
- Each child connects us to the universe, to the holy mysteries of birth and death and becoming from which we all emerge.
- Children widen the circle of our being in ways that are limitless.

### Conversation with Children and Youth: *Mornings*

Today’s service is called Parenting as a Spiritual Journey.

**Can anyone tell me what parenting means to you?**

**Can anyone tell me what a journey is?**

**Where have you traveled on your journeys?**

On a spiritual journey we travel to places within ourselves—discovering new feelings, making connections, facing new challenges, and uncovering sources of strength deep inside us. Our spiritual journey inspires us to grow into better versions of

## **Parenting as a Spiritual Journey 9/2/18—Morning Message & Readings**

ourselves. For me, my travels inward are inspired by events that happen in my daily life—often ones that happen over and over again and aren't pretty.

**Mornings at our house are a great example. How are mornings in your house?**

**If we were to make a map of your morning journey, what would it look like? Where do you start? Where do you go? What do you do? What is your destination?**

Now, let's look at your morning journey from a spiritual point of view—from the inside. What's going on in your head and heart as you take the journey from your bed to school (or work-or camp-or the babysitters)?

Later on in the service I'll be sharing more about my morning spiritual journey. I invite you to listen and consider how it is similar and different from your own morning journey.

### **Second Reading: "Wholehearted Parenting Manifesto" from Daring Greatly by Brené Brown**

- "Above all else, I want you to know that you are loved and lovable. You will learn this from my words and actions—the lessons on love are in how I treat you and how I treat myself.
- I want you to engage with the world from a place of worthiness. You will learn that you are worthy of love, belonging, and joy every time you see me practice self-compassion and embrace my own imperfections.
- We will practice courage in our family by showing up, letting ourselves be seen, and honoring vulnerability. We will share our stories of struggle and strength. There will always be room in our home for both.
- We will teach you compassion by practicing compassion with ourselves first; then with each other. We will set and respect boundaries; we will honor hard work, hope, and perseverance. Rest and play will be family values, as well as family practices.
- You will learn accountability and respect by watching me make mistakes and make amends, and by watching how I ask for what I need and talk about how I feel.
- I want you to know joy, so together we will practice gratitude.

## **Parenting as a Spiritual Journey 9/2/18—Morning Message & Readings**

- I want you to *feel* joy, so together we will learn how to be vulnerable.
- When uncertainty and scarcity visit, you will be able to draw from the spirit that is a part of our everyday life.
- Together we will cry and face fear and grief. I will want to take away your pain, but instead I will sit with you and teach you how to feel it.
- We will laugh and sing and dance and create. We will always have permission to be ourselves with each other. No matter what, you will always belong here.
- As you begin your Wholehearted journey, the greatest gift that I can give to you is to live and love with my whole heart and to dare greatly.
- I will not teach or love or show you anything perfectly, but I will let you see me, and I will always hold sacred the gift of seeing you. Truly, deeply seeing you.

### **Morning Message: *Parenting as a Spiritual Journey*— by Jennifer Knight**

My parenting spiritual journey begins every morning before my feet hit the floor. Sometimes I have the opportunity to begin earlier than others—as one or both of our children awake with a nightmare, a fever, to use the bathroom, or simply needing to know I am there. I would love to say that I am always deeply present and loving, meeting their needs with warmth and grace; but there are more occasions than I'd like to admit where I am hoping—no praying that they'll head over to Stefan's side of the bed so that I can get a bit more sleep.

And let's be honest, the journey doesn't begin anew each morning, more often than not, I've carried over the worry, regret, to-do list from the previous day-week-year-decade. Luckily, I also carry over the lessons learned, inspirations gathered, forgiveness given and received, and an all-encompassing love that shines through even in the most difficult of times.

Fully armed, I face my children. Together we brave the new day and the demands of the morning. This particular morning wasn't any more or less demanding than the hundreds of other mornings that we had faced together. Our mission—Alex to daycare, Ethan to SailMV, and me to work—on time. On the surface of it, how difficult could getting dressed, eating breakfast,

## Parenting as a Spiritual Journey 9/2/18—Morning Message & Readings

brushing teeth, packing lunches, and driving off in the car be? VERY! The distractions are limitless: Legos, books, dirty dishes, laundry, brothers. And getting dressed involves more moving parts than you might imagine. Shirt, underwear, shorts. . . Mom, I don't have any shorts clean. . . shoes. Ethan, put on your shoes. Ethan, your shoes. Ethan, where are your shoes? Ethan, do you have your shoes on yet? The first couple of times are a throw away. The third requires some conscious breathing. By the 7th ask, the whole neighborhood is begging for Ethan to put on his shoes. Not exactly a pretty picture of spiritual parenting.

The kids are finally in the car. Alex is buckled in his carseat. Ethan has his seatbelt fastened. They have their bags packed with lunches and spare clothes. I slide into my seat. I've forgotten my own water bottle and lunch. We're already 5 minutes behind schedule. Mad dash back into the kitchen. I slide back into my seat, lunch in hand. No car keys. Back into the house—search for the purse—is it in my office? On the couch? There. On the counter. 8 minutes behind schedule. Finally. We're all in, the car is on. My pulse is racing—I tune into my inner voice which is chiding me for being late, for yelling at Ethan, for not making lunches the evening before, for staying up too late, we're going to be late—again. I pause at the end of the driveway. Take a deep breath. Listen. Sanity and insight return. I remember that we need to celebrate our accomplishments. I turn around and give the kids a high five—we did it! We're on our way.

The break from the negative voices in my head is short-lived. The kids start arguing over something that I no longer remember. I keep glancing at the clock. Why does the clock seem to move so quickly in the morning? How am I ever going to make it to work on time? Another pause—this time mental, not physical—no time to stop driving. A breath—deep into my pelvis. Inhale—hold—exhale. And then I remember my friend and mentor Kimberly Cartwright sharing Eckhart Tolle's definition of stress: the difference between where you are and where you think you should be. My chattering mind clears as I focus on how my current situation fits into this definition. I am here. On our bumpy old dirt road. I think I should be 8 minutes down the road, turning into Jenn-

## **Parenting as a Spiritual Journey 9/2/18—Morning Message & Readings**

Jenn's driveway, dropping off Alex at daycare. And, in the moment, I smile. This much stress for 8 minutes? For a difference of 3 miles?

Everything shifts. Instead of feeding those nagging, derogatory voices in my head and complaining outwardly to my kids about how late we are—blaming them for making me late; I am inspired. Alex complains about the bumpy road and I transform our car into a roller coaster. We lift our arms as we go over the bumps, whoop and holler with delight and then our car transforms again into a rocket ship and we fly together to day care. Instead of a tearful, stress-filled separation; Alex excitedly shares about how amazing our car is. As I walk out the door, the kids are already creating a rocket ship. Ethan's drop-off is uneventful, traffic is clear, and my first client is running late, so we arrive at the same time.

Pause, take a breath, listen. Repeat.

Why is it so difficult to pause? The greater the time constraints, the bigger the parental "agenda", the more transitions that lie ahead, the more I need to pause and the more I resist pausing. I remember hearing about a Quaker tradition of beginning a meeting in silence. The more controversial the agenda, the longer the silence. I have experienced the wisdom of this practice and try to incorporate it into my parenting journey. The mornings when I awake on my own and begin the day in my own energy, in silent meditation or with a gratitude practice; I am fortified for the day and the morning stressors flow past me without dragging us all under.

Pause, take a breath, listen. Repeat.

The demands of parenting become a crucible for my spiritual practices. One of the practices I most need in my life is forgiveness. Children are great teachers in this realm. They can be quick to anger and even quicker to forgive. Being an adult, while I can be just as quick to anger, it often takes me longer to forgive—others, but especially myself.

## Parenting as a Spiritual Journey 9/2/18—Morning Message & Readings

We have a “do-over” practice in our family. Ethan inspired it and I watched Stefan effectively using it before I began incorporating it into my own interactions with our kids. It’s simple—really—just a verbal pause. Like turning off the computer and restarting it. It makes everything better. “Mom, can we have a do-over?” I am in awe of my children’s bravery. I, myself, find it hard to admit I’m wrong, to ask for help. Asking for a do-over requires admitting that I’m not doing my best, that I might be wrong. It’s taking responsibility for my actions and asking for help, for the chance to try again. It’s the exact opposite of “Because I’m the parent, that’s why.” So, sometimes I now ask: “Ethan, can we have a do-over?”

Pause, take a breath, listen. Repeat.

This past spring, I started to notice a shift in Ethan’s attitude. It wasn’t subtle. His response to many of my requests started to take on an unpleasant tone. Sort of a super whine. I wondered where he had acquired that particular gem. I called him out on it. We had a discussion. I shared that he seemed to be complaining about an awful lot lately—that whenever we asked him to do something to benefit the family, he was talking back, complaining, throwing his body around, stomping. I termed it his “my life sucks” attitude. That got a little smile out of him. The fact that I said “sucks”. And he seemed to get it. We talked about how good his life really is. About how much we do for him. About how we love to see him happy. And about the responsibilities we have to and for each other as a family. I watched him make improvements some days and fall into the habit on others days. I continued to wonder, “Where did that come from?” I’m such an optimist. Stefan’s full of gratitude. Look at how we interact in our community. Then, in the back of my mind I heard the sayings “Apple trees have apples. The fruit doesn’t fall far from the tree”. Kids do provide a wonderful mirror for us as parents. So I started to get curious. I looked inward. How was I projecting the message that *my life sucks*?

And there it was—all over the place. The most obvious example was whenever I was cleaning the house. I work myself up into a fit of madness—all of the resentments that I’ve had sitting on standby come to a head as I straighten

## **Parenting as a Spiritual Journey 9/2/18—Morning Message & Readings**

and sweep and vacuum and mop. Flitting from room to room, mumbling, gritting my teeth, the reel in my mind showing the movie, telling the story where I have to do everything, no one helps, no one can do it as well as I can. Sharing the message—that my life sucks. Ouch.

Pause, take a breath, listen. Repeat.

Then there it was again. During our morning routine. I caught myself resenting all of the preparations, the tasks that needed to be done to get the children and myself out the door. Resenting the tasks and then resenting the children who needed me to do the tasks. Flashing the message again. My life sucks.

Pause, take a breath, listen. Repeat.

I started to catch myself in the moment—to catch those negative voices in my head that were clearly transmitting themselves through my mouth to Ethan's ears. Pausing, I remember that ever since I was a little girl, I've known that I wanted to be a mother. That I chose to be a mother. That I choose to be a mother. I get to wash the dishes—we have food to eat. I get to clean the house—we have a house to clean. I get to be awakened by Alex's early morning wake-up call and I am blessed to snuggle with his warm little body in the early morning light.

Pause, take a breath, listen. Repeat.

This summer, the boys and I went to Maine Fiddle Camp. My mother joined us. It was a gift to have her there. Not just any grandmother would sign up for 5 days in August in a rustic 9 person cabin without electricity in 90 degree heat and 98 percent humidity. She was a trooper. Not a complaint about the living conditions or the extreme heat. And daily I observed the myriads of ways in which I had lived my childhood with a martyr. And the subtle ways in which I had and have taken on some of that attitude myself.

Pause, take a breath, listen. Repeat.

## Parenting as a Spiritual Journey 9/2/18—Morning Message & Readings

I am in the midst of writing today's message about parenting as a spiritual journey and Alex approaches me to help him find a piece of Lego. Stefan has just gotten home with the boys, having given me some time and space to myself, but I have not yet finished. I get up from the computer and approach the Lego bin. I catch a glimpse of myself that is internally telling the martyr's story. I decide that I can change that story. After all, *I* am the storyteller. I tell Alex I will search for 5 minutes and then I need to get back to my work. I search with intent, with presence, without resentment. I am good at searching. I lose all glimmers of resentment—of "have to's". I choose to search. I find 5 pieces.

I return to writing. Ethan's friend comes over to play. Stefan feeds the boys lunch. I am mid-sentence, mid-thought when Ethan approaches me to ask me to unearth the Wii video game console that I have hidden away for the summer. I look up. I tell him I am in the middle of something. I will respond in 5 minutes. Two minutes go by. Ethan interrupts and begins to propose a solution. I begin to speak, to respond, to react. Then I pause, take a breath, listen. I am getting good at noticing when my martyr slips in. She can be sneaky, but I've become hyper-vigilant. So, mid-sentence, I shift my attitude and it is reflected in both the tone and the content of my response. I gave Alex 5 minutes to help him find his Lego. I'll give you the same. I search for the console. I've hidden it too well—from the boys and from myself. I share this with Ethan and Stefan diverts the issue by proposing another fun activity.

Pause, take a breath, listen. Repeat.

My spiritual journey is not linear. It's more like a spiral. I travel in and out, backwards and forwards, ever deeper into the heart of who I am. The terrain is varied—there are mountains and valleys, roads bumpy and smooth. I am human. Sometimes I feel as though I'm completely underwater—which can be the ultimate relaxation or feel like I'm drowning. Parenting is like that every day—every hour—every minute. The answer to how was your day can easily be "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." And yet, as long as I



## **Parenting as a Spiritual Journey 9/2/18—Morning Message & Readings**

remain open and aware, parenting allows me countless opportunities to live fully, to love deeply and to forgive unconditionally. Parenting is my spiritual journey.

**Benediction:** “A Parent’s Prayer for Patience” by Rabbi Naomi Levy

When my child tests me, teach me, God, how to respond with wisdom.  
When I grow irritable, send me patience.  
When my fury rages, teach me the power of restraint.  
When I become fixed in my ways, teach me to be flexible.  
When I take myself too seriously, bless me with a sense of humor.  
When I am exhausted, fill me with strength.  
When I am frightened, fill me with courage.  
When I am stubborn, teach me how to bend.  
When I act hypocritically, help me to align my deeds with my values.  
When mundane pressures threaten to overwhelm me, help me to remember how truly blessed I am.  
When I lose my way, God, please guide me on the road back to joy, back to love, back to peace, back to you. Amen