

**When The Birds No Longer Hide:
Reflections on Feathers, Faith, and Fear**
A Sermon Offered by Rev. Tim Kutzmark
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Unitarian Universalist Church of Reading

Unless we turn, we will be trapped forever
in yesterday's ways.
—*Jack Riemer*

William Schultz, former president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, tells this story:

A five-year-old visited her father every week in prison, and each time she brought him a crayon drawing, but each time the guards confiscated it. “No pictures of people!” they shouted the first time, so then the little girl brought a picture of the family dog. “No pictures of animals!” the guards commanded, so the third time the child brought a picture of birds. But still no luck: “We said no animals—birds are animals.” Finally the girl brought a picture of a forest and the guard let her through. The father, who was in prison for criticizing the [Central American] regime, was overjoyed. “What a beautiful picture!” he exclaimed. “The trees, the branches, the leaves... and what are these round circles in the trees. Fruit?” “Shh,” whispered the little girl fearfully. “Those are the eyes of the birds. They’re hiding.” (William Schultz, *In Our Own Best Interests*, p. 38)

If someone drew a picture of you, now, in your life, what would you see? Would they draw you showing up full and unafraid in your life, embodying, as Zorba the Greek would say, the full catastrophe of life? Or would they draw only your eyes: watching, wide with fear, hiding in the trees on the edges of life?

Now, I’ll be the first to admit that sometimes the idea of hiding out sounds enticing. I’ve been known to want to pull the covers over my head and get away from it all, and more recently that temptation has been a bit stronger than usual.

Think of the recent headlines. The summer we’ve all lived through has been downright scary, and that unsettledness is now reaching into this autumn season. Just think about the last few months. On July 20th, there was the horrific shooting at the Century Movie Theater in Aurora, Colorado. On August 5th, there was another shooting, this time on a Sunday morning at the Sikh Temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin. On August 12th, right here in Boston, three young, vibrant girls were killed as they sat talking and laughing in a car on Harlem Street in Dorchester. Then came August 13th and a shooting near the Texas A&M University campus. September 11th brought the assassination of Ambassador Chris Stevens and three others at the US Consulate in Benghazi. Just over a week ago, on September 27th, a disgruntled employee killed five co-workers at the

Accent Signage Systems Building in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Sometimes we wonder: Who, what and where will be next?

There have been other things that have been uncertain and unsettling these last months. We're in the midst of a presidential campaign where unfathomable amounts of money is being spent in distorted attack ads, where it seems that every side is manipulating purported facts to suit their own needs and agenda. We have an economy that still makes most of us a little nervous, especially when we look at our investment portfolio or IRA. Some of us are out of work, and those of us who have jobs hope this will be true tomorrow. We see the tinder box of the Middle East igniting a civil war in Syria. Our soldiers continue to die in Afghanistan, now at the hands of the very security forces the US troops are training. And all over the world, religious fundamentalism threatens the rational and the realistic.

No wonder some of us might be tempted to hunker down and hide away from it all.

But there is a deeper form of hiding, a form of hiding that is more personal. I'm talking—not about the magnitude or uncertainty of current events or external forces, scary as they may be—but about something closer to our psyche and our soul. Let us look, for a moment, at our inner life, our emotional life, our own connection to creativity, passion, and spirit.

If someone drew a picture of that, right now, what would we see? Would we see ourselves showing up full and unafraid. Or would we see only our eyes: watching, wide with fear, hiding at the edges of our life?

There are many ways to hide from ourselves.

We hide in a situation that is draining us of life because we are afraid to act and risk making another mistake. (And yet that risk might open us to the part of ourselves we have been searching for all these years.)

We hide behind our work, our busy-ness, in order to avoid feeling the emptiness that might be there in our quiet time. (And yet that emptiness might whisper what it is we truly need to hear.)

We hide in a relationship that is growing hollow because we're not sure what would happen if we spoke how we felt. (And yet, challenging the way things are might be the catalyst for the change our heart has been hoping for.)

We hide in the repeated asking of questions (What should I do? What should I do? What should I do?) in order to avoid acting on the answers that have already come (And yet that very action might move us closer to what it is we need.)

We hide behind past hurts and imagined wrongs. (And yet forgiveness or forgetting would free up a vast amount of energy that could impact our future positively.)

We hide behind depression or illness or addiction or despair or loneliness in order to avoid the hard but heartening work of reshaping our lives. (And yet that work might reveal our own heart's song.)

We hide behind our easy access to processed food, mass produced consumer goods, and the latest and greatest high tech products in order to shield ourselves from the fact that our lifestyle, the way we choose to live each day, the way we spend our money, is literally destroying our planet and condemning future generations to a decimated world. (And yet, this admission, and our making small but needed changes, could move us a closer to sustainability.)

We hide from the fact that our days are numbered, our mortality is certain, forgetting that each new breath is a blessing that should not be taken for granted.

We so often hide, because it feels easier than facing so many different and complex truths about ourselves.

Most mornings I walk my dogs at a reservoir in Burlington. Recently, someone put up signs there, and in the neighborhood surrounding it. On each sign there is a picture of a beautiful grey dog and these words: "Have you seen Snappy? Please help us find our beloved family dog. She is easily scared so please don't chase." She is easily scared so please don't chase. That sounds so sad: a frightened dog, hiding in the trees and bushes, watching, watching us, but too scared to come out of hiding.

An unknown author asks:

Why am I afraid to dance,
I who love music, rhythm and song?

Why am I afraid to live,
I who love life and the living colors of earth
and sky and sea and changing seasons?

Why am I afraid to believe,
I who admire commitment, sincerity and trust?

Why am I afraid of love? I who yearn to give myself in love?

. . . Why must I be so ashamed of my strength or of my weakness?

. . . Each of us is capable of an unimagined greatness.
Each of us is a treasure house of vital potential.
Yet apprehensive love and inhibited talent pervade the expression of our being.

Past failure and present fear restrict the range of our feelings and the purview of our thinking.

While these days of tribulation awaken us to the truth of what we are,
They must also quicken within us the reality of what we can be.

My spiritual friends. We cannot hide from life. We cannot hide from who we are, what we yearn for, and what we could become. This is a time for boldness. It is autumn, our autumn, and nature herself is calling us to come out and become part of the vibrancy that is all around us. Trees are turning bright red, orange and yellow. Nights are plunging down to chilly temperatures that enliven. Squirrels are out foraging and searching for sustenance. Birds are gathered in full view at the feeder, feasting and eating their fill. This is a season of boldness and brightness. This is *our* season of boldness and brightness. This is our season to turn to courage, to show up fully before that which is authentic and true.

My favorite poem about autumn is a call for us to come out of hiding. Mary Oliver writes:

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting --
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

May it be so. Blessed Be. Amen

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