

# Lost<sup>©</sup>

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If you've lived on a farm or a grazing space with cows or sheep, you may have noticed the path that they take out in the morning and back to the barn at night. It is usually a fairly direct path although steep inclines and gopher holes are avoided. And even though there is no fence or even herding dog to keep the cows in line, they actually could wander where ever they wanted to, they go in a line, on the path worn well through the years seemingly knowing that it provides the least caloric output and the least thought.

We humans seem to do the same thing. We take the same route to work and, I know, that I sometimes forget to get off at a different exit when I am attempting to run an errand. We say, the car knows how to get home. It is normal human behavior to minimize risk. It is normal to stick to the tried and true ... it is easier and one can almost unconsciously go along.

Yet, when something unforeseen happens, a disaster, a cavalcade of unfortunate events, a George Clooney perfect storm event, we are ripped from the known and thrust into WTF, which I like to translate as Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, but my kid tells me it stands for something else.

But we've already taking it to an extreme without needing to. We all have routines, just like the cows on the path. We have our comforts and our signposts. And we know if we look with a critical eye, we may even be in some ruts created by our need for comfort and security.

I think that one of the reasons that travel is so important, (especially adventure travel) is because it is a gentle way of unsettling us out of our known world. When we don't know where we are, when we don't have a clue what is going to happen next, our senses become much more acute. We hear the buzz. We smell the tang. We feel the breeze in a new way: our consciousness is expanded just by being out of our comfort zone.

I still fondly remember when Maren and I went to Greece for our honeymoon. We woke up on a Sunday morning to the smells of croissants baking in nearby bakeries. I heard the bells announcing the beginning of Greek orthodox worship and then heard the chanting broadcast over the speakers in the square. It was a whole new way to experience Sunday morning. It was easy to allow my senses to be filled and to appreciate those sensations because I had no demands on my time. I had nowhere I needed to be and nothing to accomplish.

I hope I am not alone in having such a marvelous vacation experience. That being said, I do not seek out opportunities to get lost, to expand my consciousness. I don't need to. It's not that I am such a spiritually robust person, it's that I get lost all

the time. Even with a navigation system in my car and even with Google Maps on my smart(ish) phone.

My first experience of getting lost was as a three-year-old at the Detroit Zoo. The next time I felt lost was when I attempted to go around the block of our new house when I was 4. I knew intellectually-- as much as any 4 year old can know stuff intellectually--that if I kept going and did not cross any streets, I would have to find my house again, but I kept walking and walking. I felt like I was in an Egyptian desert. Long after I had given up hope of ever seeing my family again, I did indeed find my house. I do not recall feeling good; I recall feeling absolutely drained and emotionally spent. I have gotten lost coming to this church. Imagine if you will, a pastor with a proclivity to getting lost, attempting to make pastoral visits in an unfamiliar geography. I get to practice being lost quite a bit. The practice of being lost so often means that I no longer panic. In fact, I rarely cry these days. All my practice at getting lost has allowed me to manage my panic, marshal my resources, and look for what new is heading my way.

This is true for me even when I feel lost in how I live my life, when I have been confronted by life circumstances that throw me into a tailspin, leave me bewildered at best and lost in terms of knowing where to go and who to turn to.

The three-month premature birth of our son was an example for me of feeling completely lost and having to regroup and learn a new way of living. His teenage years were another “often lost” time. And now, once again, I feel as if I am in the midst of radical lostness. I am having difficulty trusting all that I hold dear. I am having trouble trusting that I am safe: that our democracy is safe and that our social network will survive.

A few years ago, I could not imagine a scenario that included bakers deciding that their religious freedom allowed them to deny a same sex couple a wedding cake. I was not capable of imagining that the person we have serving in the office of the President of the United States of America would in fact be President. I’m not one of those conspiracy folks yet I still have trouble believing that there was no collusion between the Trump people and the Russians. I sense that our democracy is at risk on many fronts.

I remember thinking selfishly and so wrongly and perhaps just a wee bit gleefully that certain states like Kentucky where they are no longer teaching evolution, but just the origin story found in the Hebrew Scriptures. I remember thinking great that means there will be less people competing for university spots when my kid applies. I had forgotten the importance of an educated population to an ongoing democracy. Now it is I who feel stupid. I am lost in the current landscape of this country.

I then think of all the publicity regarding Black Lives Matter and the countless lives endangered by the darker color of a person’s skin tone. I had thought (foolishly) surrounded by white privilege that was so pervasive that I couldn’t even see it, that

we were in a “post racial society”. Well hello Kitty! The ugly underbelly of racism is much clearer to me now and I hope to you as well.

I think about our lawmakers. Congress has always been a mess of mostly male ego, self-interest, and dysfunction, but we are now to the point that the members of the House and Senate did not even read the bill they voted on most recently. You might remember the bill passed in the last gasping days of 2017 that has ripped the safety net away from so many people. Punishing people ever more stridently for being poor. And lest any of us forget why they are poor, it is because they are separated from the fruits of their labor by the CEOs that make 4000 times their salary. Like so many other things on the planet and in the country, this economic disparity is unhealthy and unsustainable.

During my darkest moments, I see our judicial system limping along and I worry that it will not survive in ways that I recognize as upholding justice. I am marshaling my resources. The cow path, the things I believed for most of my 60 years on this planet, without ever thinking this hard about them, are disappearing. I don't recognize my own country. I don't recognize the office of the President. Sometimes I don't even recognize the way forward.

So yes, I sound like a blues song. I am feeling pretty lost. And vulnerable. So I put on my lost girl cape and my lost girl goggles and get my lost girl light saber ready. (This has taken great effort because it involved getting out of bed with my new electric blanket that I have a secret love crush on.) It means getting back out into the world and making life-sustaining connections: even if part of me is afraid and tired: for to isolate and to cocoon is to let injustice flourish. I think back to the other times I have felt despair and lost. And I remember who I am and I am recalled back to my potential.

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you  
Are not lost.  
Wherever you are is called Here,  
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,  
Must ask permission to know it and be known.  
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,  
I have made this place around you.  
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.  
No two trees are the same to Raven.  
No two branches are the same to Wren.  
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you  
You are surely lost.  
Stand still. The forest knows  
Where you are. You must let it find you.

-David Wagoner (1971)

I must let the goodness find me. I can take direction from the ocean shore and her tide, from the desert sand holding thousands of seeds, from the bent trees and the rocky purple hued mountains that surround the Coachella valley at dusk. I must

let the goodness of my colleagues, other ministers working for justice and connection, light my way. And you, the members of this congregation, you are also a part of my salvation, of my lurching toward wholeness. When our light goes out, and if we are paying attention at all, our light is going to take a severe hit, we need the simple consistent presence of each other to call us back to that goodness and that commitment and that sense of sacred connection to all of life.

This congregation and congregations like it across the country are crucial to my finding strength to go on, to my finding my way again. Is it the same for you? Have you felt lost during this past year?

How is one to react when one hears the President of our country callously talking even joking about engaging in nuclear war with the North Korean leader? How is one to react when Roy Moore, a documented harasser of young women, almost wins an election? How is one to go on and feel up beat, when one lets in the truth that almost every woman you know and have ever met has been sexually harassed?

I mean, can you fault me, or anyone, for feeling lost in these times? And what is true and how do we know it's true? And tempting as it might be to blame certain networks and news outlets like Fox and Breitbart and liberal news sources for microcasting, (that is telling us news stories that fit with our world view), they are a symptom, not the source of lostness. From roughly the 1600's until the 1950's we lived in a time known as "modernity". There was a center: a consistent narrative that was believed by most people regardless of how true it was. It held the world together.

Now, along with quantum physics, everything is relative. We are in what sociologists call "post modernity". There is no universally recognized authority on anything. For women, for people of color, for lesbian, gay and transgender folks this multiplicity of narrative broke the chokehold of truth that denied their existence, their realities and their contributions. The center did not hold. The center can no longer hold and everything feels like it is breaking.

The task for those of us who are righteously feeling lost, our quest, is to let the breaking up turn into a breaking open. It is to let the chaos reveal its energy to further fuel our endeavors to become more whole, aware, connected people.

I wish I could stand here and give easy answers and assurances of how everything is ultimately okay and how everything will work out. But I can't because I value honesty and we are in a very mysterious time with no guarantees. All I can do, in my lost girl cape and goggles is to invite you to join me in being more comfortable in and with our collective vulnerability. All I can do, all I can invite you to do, is to marshal our resources. And when I do that, I see that I and we have an enormously valuable resource right here. We have each other. I cannot stress the importance of the gift we give each other when we support this church and Unitarian Universalism.

I'm not just saying this because we have a pledge drive coming up. I'm highlighting the importance of congregations like ours that allow us to feel the warmth of community and a sense of home and the knowledge that we are not

isolated beings adrift in a sea of injustice. I need this congregation. I need our UUA president, the Rev. Susan Fredrick Grey, with her leadership and courage. I need the knowledge that my fellow ministers are taking to the streets and the halls of Congress to encourage and demand that we do a better job of being human beings. I take comfort in the fact that I don't have the energy to organize the women's march on January 20, but just like last year I will be marching! I love quick food, pizza and macaroni and cheese. I wish fervently (and sometimes lazily) that we can quickly right all that is wrong with our society. Darn it. Why can't I just put justice in the microwave, press quick start and call it good?

Our faith is precious and life saving to me right now. I would never claim that ours is the only way. I am tired. I have the blues and yet, I will continue to do what I can to call us to our best selves and to revalue human life and dignity. I'm desperate and I'm tired. I've got the blues lord knows, and perhaps you do to. Here is more good news. We are welcome here. We have an oasis here. We can bask in and grow strong with and for each other. And there are some in this room who are not struggling right now. They will give us hugs and hope and comfort for our souls. Next month we may be giving them the hugs and the strength.

It is quite simply okay to be lost. It is okay to cry, to lament and to let the world's grief inside of our hearts. It is also okay to not have all the answers because we now can rest in the assurance that there are no complete answers any more. It was just an old way of looking at life. Being lost is not the end of the story it is just the middle part.

Blessed Be.

Amen.

#### Reference

Wagoner, D. (1971). Lost. Retrieved from  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/search?query=David+Wagoner&page=5>