



FOR ALL THAT WILL BE, YES!

REV. T. J. FITZGERALD | NOVEMBER 23

On April 1st, 1953, in the early hours of the morning, the phone rang. On the other end was someone saying the most alarming thing, "You are the new Secretary General of the United Nations." Dag Hammarskjöld hung up the phone and went back to bed because it was the most wildly impertinent April Fool's joke he had ever heard. Then the phone rang again. He hung up again. This time not amused at all. After the third call, a note to the Swedish Mission in New York City and a telegram from the UN Security Council being delivered to him while he slept, he believed at last that he was indeed the Second Secretary General of the United Nations. The work he had before him was to continue helping to reshape a broken world after World War II. Many nations today owe a tremendous amount to his work for their prosperity and others a tremendous amount to his work for their suffering.

History has shown that not all his decisions led to prosperity for all, but he was dealing with a lot in the shape of the world after that war. He served for eight years until his plane went down in Northern Africa on September 18th, 1961. The details of which remain the subject of some scrutiny and intrigue, if you watch some of the documentaries about it. Personally, I learned about Hammarskjöld when I was attending a Lutheran church on the east side of Manhattan, just a few blocks from United Nations Plaza, St. Peter's. September 18th, the anniversary of his death is a day of commemoration in the Evangelical Lutheran Church for how he helped to shape this battered world he inherited. That's when I heard the well-known saying, "For all that has been, thanks. For all that will be. Yes." That was 20 years ago or so. I was struggling... Sorry, I was struggling like my speech with just about everything a twenty-year-old, a twenty-something in New York City struggles with. Work, relationships, identity, public transportation. But they all usually boil down to these questions. Am I enough? Will I be alone? Will I be loved?

New York is the kind of place that can prey on someone's insecurities, can wring you out by your own vulnerabilities till your bone dry and leave you downhearted. Most of us have been in places, maybe not like New York, but places like this emotionally in our lives. Some of us, I dare say, are there right now. And then someone says to you from a pulpit like this one, "For all that has been, thanks." Really? Thanks? For the ways the world mistreats people? For how I feel right now for the tremendous suffering of nations and of people? For people who bring speakers with them on hikes and blare techno music as loud as they can on the trails?

I know we don't believe in hell, but there are times friends. Ada Limon's poem. I know someone here does that and I'm going to get a note that's like, you don't love me, but I love you just not your speakers. Ada Limon's poem, Downhearted, speaks to this. Her poem is funny because you're reading it and all of a sudden you want to laugh and thank you for... Yeah, because this is funny because the heart is watching lifetime movies and wishing and missing all the good parts of her that she has forgotten. The heart is so tired of beating herself up. You get it right, beating the heart beating? Okay, I'm sure she'd appreciate that.

And yet these inflatable turkeys in the yards around Dallas, the travels, many are preparing to take or have already the food that's being prepared. Tell us all that Thanksgiving is here for all that has been. Thanks. I don't know why, but something about this Thanksgiving is just landing funny for me this year. Anyone else just, yeah, it's kind of weird, right? I don't know what it is. It's just different than last year. I think maybe at the end of this national election we were facing last year, there was this preparation we were doing for being around a table or being around this world, but we know better now what to expect. We've seen it. For me this year, I know that the proximity of this day to the Transgender day of Remembrance that was celebrated this week when the world paused to recognize and remember violence worldwide against our trans loved ones, just landed with me different this year because of the ways my beloved trans friends are being targeted more and more in this world.

It's been on my heart and there's something weighing heavy I know on all of our hearts, and if there is, it may be robbing you of the joy you see others having maybe. So how does it feel? For all that has been, thanks. This week many of us will gather around tables with relatives, with these people who are near and far, both perhaps physically near and far philosophically near and far politically, near and far emotionally. We'll gather to pretend that we care much, much more about football than we really do so we can ignore what our second cousin says about politics, what our uncle says about those people and what our great aunt's boyfriend keeps saying over and over about traditional family values.

The challenge of looking at our past and saying thanks is coming for us all this week somehow and the poet tells us maybe an answer to his downhearted colleague, its story is old, the plot worn and the page is too, but we read this book anyway over and again. Giving is first and every time, hand to hand, mine to yours, yours to mine. What you did not have and I gave you what I had to give. Together, we made something greater from the difference.

This giving describes not just why we're all at church, but why we're all alive. The rivers of life that flow to us through the valleys of generations, upon generations, came out nourishing each one of us to life.

They are all what makes any one of us who we are today. They're all, any of us really, really knows of God. Sitting a few blocks, myself, from the United Nations in a church, in a church, I loved guys, but I feared could not fully love me. And in my private heart I wondered then if that church, if the God it prayed to even liked me very much. When I sat there and received this challenge then to give thanks for all that's been, I had a moment where I just didn't want to fight anymore. With fitting in, with being right. So I gave up. I just gave up.

I gave up wondering if I was enough. I gave up wondering if I'd be alone. I gave up wondering, questioning if I was worthy of love. I gave up the hope of making a better past for myself, and it was only then that I think I began to get it and not right away, but over time, being grateful at last for all that has been, it takes a kind of giving, but it's not actually Thanksgiving. It's forgiving. See, forgiveness is giving up the hope of making for ourselves a better past. Lily Tomlin said that. Only a gifted comedian could see it quite so clearly. I think. It's only been in the decade since that I have known the life-giving and the life-saving power, like we said in the story of communities committed to a love that depends upon diversity of opinions and thought that thrives and flourishes with equitable just relationships and strives always to be more understanding, more inclusive.

That kind of love is in one of these letters that Hammarskjöld shared. It goes like this, "Our work for peace must begin within the private world of each one of us. To build for a man, a world without fear, we must be without fear. To build a world of justice, we must be just, and how can we fight for liberty if we are not free in our own minds? How can we ask others to sacrifice if we are not ready to do so? Only in true surrender to the interest of all can we reach that strength and independence, that unity of purpose, that equity of judgment which are necessary if we are to measure up to our duty to the future."

That cat may have been Lutheran, but he sure sounds Unitarian to me. Free minds fighting for liberty and measuring up to our duty to the future. These are all ideals I know that we cherish here, but it's always important here to notice values that we actually share with people of faith, people of good conscience. All around the city. All around the world. Last week here in this pulpit, Jen Crow told a story about our sister church in Rochester, New York who was part of a rapid response team of congregations that responded to immigration and customs enforcement activities as observers and providers of care, support and resources. As it would happen this week, I was also called to a table in an undisclosed location where very concerned Catholic, Muslim and Jewish leaders gathered to discuss these very same concerns. As usual, somehow the Unitarians got an invite to. We just somehow end up in those places, don't know why. And we talked together about how Dallas is more spread out than other cities, not as concentrated, and that's for a reason.

That's another sermon. Someone got the idea though, that if each congregation had its own rapid response team, then a leader in the church could stay connected to a growing network of response teams that can blanket a city, an area, a metroplex, even as spread out as this one is and respond in concert when needed. Right? So if you go to realm now, you'll see an immigrant rapid response group that you can join.

I promise I will let you in. Joining this group doesn't commit you to anything. It's a beginning to help you stay informed about ways to respond, when to learn, ways to learn, and to support those who are greatly in need of support right now. And make no mistake about this, friends, we take steps, some of us, maybe all of us, to protect immigrants, not only because many seizures of them are unlawful, not only because it is biblical if that works for you, but because our response will be a message to those they are coming for next. For our trans siblings perhaps, or for those who speak out against authoritarianism or for those who dare challenge fawning, fascist sympathizers around this country, in this city and afar.

I pray in my heart of hearts that no more will suffer this constant threat of harm being visited upon our immigrant friends and neighbors and that the suffering they're experiencing will end. But let's not forget here that service is our prayer. One friend shared with me at that meeting that a young child born to immigrant parents who'd been shielded in many ways from so much that many of us are seeing now, unfortunately and tragically witnessed their father apprehended right outside their home. And since this experience, this happy, healthy child now barely sleeps, wets the bed, can't leave their mother's side, can't go to school or anywhere else for the sheer terror of separation in their bones at losing another parent in this way. A life-changing, unnecessary event.

And I know it's hard to hear. I know we are all in a sensitive place right now hearing this, but the best immigration lawyers I know in Dallas have told me that the stories, the individual stories of the people living under this threat, experiencing this wrenching trauma are what we must get out to the public so that the wider population understands the toll that these tactics, these unlawful, unjust tactics are taking upon our neighbors.

There's an old saying, guy asks someone, "Hey, are you Christian?" And he goes, "Well, I don't know." And it goes to someone else, asks someone else in the town, "Are you Christian?" And she says, "I don't know." And finally says to the waitress in town, "Why all these people I'm asking if they're Christian, no one will say it." And she goes, "Well, yeah, because you're going to have to ask their neighbor whether they're Christian or not." These are our neighbors friends. In the coming weeks, we'll be sharing more about how you can get involved or informed about supporting those who are in the immigration process or supporting those who are just supporting them.

You decide your level of involvement. And in this way, we'll grow our capacity as a church, as partners across faiths and beliefs in the city to let others know they are not alone, that they are worthy, they are loved until the fight for true equity and justice is won here. Listen. Listen, church, I don't know why the world is how it is right now. Really. I don't know why the people in it are the way they are and I don't know why your second cousin wants to tell you about politics or who your uncle really means when he says those people. But this I know.

I know they will be gone someday. They will slip out on you and leave you holding the check. Forgiveness isn't for them. It isn't for these people in the world who are perpetuating these wrongs against our neighbors or against you. Who's forgiveness for? You.

Hammarskjöld says this says, we can be forgiven ourselves and most of us need it in our lives for things we've done, but we'll only believe that forgiveness is possible if we forgive others first. Indeed, in some tellings of the story, forgiving his captors, his tormentors and even his killers was the last thing Jesus did with his life. Hammarskjöld says this, God does not die on the day we cease to believe in a personal deity, but we die on the day when our lives cease to be illumined by the steady radiance renewed daily of a wonder, the source of which is beyond all reason. These words of Hammarskjöld ring perhaps even more with me than any others that he shared. We die on the day when our lives cease to be illumined by the steady radiance renewed daily of a wonder, the source of which is beyond all reason for all that will be.

Yes. This is more than optimism or hope, friends. This is a tool, a system, a life-saving task to grow and to sustain the radiance of a source of all life, of the rivers that have met and that have merged so that you might live here in this moment. Of the light of love that sheds its grace upon us daily. Of the wonder that does defy all reason and is the only in wonder where each of our futures lie. For nothing is promised, but this moment, friends, it may be in the lives around you, this wonder growing into wholeness, the laughter of children perhaps is where we see it, who need not live in fear for this. Yes, it may be in the wonder of the natural world around us in which we are an essential part that might help flourish about us and within us for this, yes, it may be a wonder in a people, in a church, in a faith, imperfect alone, but better and blessed together who stand with those in fear and for the rights and the dignity of all for this.

Yes, in the private ways we seek the just and the righteous way. Yes. And in the public ways we will love those who have been forsaken. Yes. In the singular way, we each traverse this wilderness in each of our beating hearts, this ranging expanse that longs, that longs to beat free and have her horses back. To this day, we say yes to the days to come, we say yes and for all that our faith asks for all that it may take. Yes, yes, yes. For all that will be. Yes. Blessed be an amen.