

Buddhist Evangelism:

Ok, so this Facebook Meme gets me every time. Naturally, I Googled it and found out its a fake. Which fits this essay so perfectly, it almost seems divinely fraudulent. "In the end, only three things matter: how much you loved, how gently you lived, and how gracefully you let go of things not meant for you." Perfect, right? Only Buddha never said it. He never even said anything like it- well all at one time, anyway. It does seem pretty budhistic (is that a word?) and I love it. It made me break my "end" into three parts. And you know how I'm a sucker for the standard essay.

I got the love thing down. I truly see the face of God in each ill-behaved child. I chose to be a teacher to give my love more freely. I remember believing that vegetable snacks and tissues would empower global change. My family collects on couches to watch DVRed movies. We still manage to eat at the dining room table many nights of the week. I still irritate them by random acts of strict parenting. Both kids still storm upstairs, incredulous, when I say I mean it, even when I have to mark my action plan on the calendar. My friends come over to remind me how normal this is... with booze. And we laugh. And cry. And spill red wine. Even hot flashes haven't interrupted intertwining my body around Rikki and hearing his soft, sleepy voice answer that he loves me too at 4:26 am. So then I can roll over towards the open window and listen to Earth wake up.

Quite conversely, I have never ever been gentle. I am awkward at most everything I do. I laugh like the strike of an axe head. Small birds and frail women fly off complaining. Heck, I can't even make eye contact when people stand too close. I giggle-cry while walking backwards when someone keeps leaning into my personal space bubble. I avoided getting a cell phone so I could continue to slam the old style receiver down on every caller who riled me. There is probably an app for that now. Did I mention I swear? Hotly. In kindness and in anger. I cook my food on a high flame, and I don't buy recycled products because they annoy me. I don't have the patience for details; so make-up, icing, and throw pillows have no place in my life. Those are the accoutrements of the gentle, whose foot falls wont wake a house, whose steady fingers don't involuntarily throttle a cousin, whose tears can be ratified by one disposable Kleenex from someone else's handbag.

But, if you need to lighten your burden, kneel down. I know I know- I was there, just keep reading. I always noticed that Pop and Gram's church was full of "afflicted" people. They didn't seem like normal people who had a healthy relationship with a higher power. They seemed like a poster for some commune that would help share your sorrows as we garden for Christ. Or a law firm ad helping you fight for your fair share of the promised land, since you were denied three times here. I didn't want to be pathetic, so I didn't drink the kool-aide. But by the time I was diagnosed, I had raised my kids in a softer, gentler, Congregational community. I believed in God, and saw "service" simply as the stewardship of rural life. In my illness I started realizing that my cancer was the same as John's divorce, was Maggie's alcoholism, was Bonnie's grief, etc etc. And I wondered how all of these hardships were brought about by my cancer. No, really. I thought the world was just the bright blue mirrored disco ball – that people who suffered probably brought it upon themselves somehow. No, really.

The problem for me was that I wore wretched fairly well. As an awakening, I looked around and saw all sorts of misery. Lots of us are sick. Many of us grieve. Most of us are anxious. The human condition is one of struggle. However, I was flopping like a fish avoiding the feeling, the label, the caricature of piteous. And as I was successfully avoiding being ordinary, we found out that our kid was on drugs. Paralyzed by crying and chemo, I said a prayer every bedtime- giving him back to God, since I was entirely useless. What a horrific nightmare to watch that beautiful baby turn himself inside out to become a man. I kept a journal of fake parenting while he was out of the house. I lied to myself about all my daily decisions. And I stayed on my knees- because there wasn't anywhere else I could go. Jake's journey was long, but you should see his eyes now- they smile just like his Dad's. Jake's successes (and failures) are completely his own. How many struggling parents honestly know that?

And guess what? My church prayed with me. Some on their knees, some bringing food, some burning fires in a pit. Let it go. I will have surgery performed by people I have never met. I qualified for Obamacare. I left 103 students to a sub who never taught before. My grandmother decided to quit dialysis. The grocery list keeps growing on the fridge. My daughter does or doesn't do her homework, got a job and drives everyday with a million other people on the road. My horses are being loved by new owners. I look dyke-ishly bad-ass bald. Today I woke up not dead. What now? I say we come back to Buddha. Ok- since it was misquoted anyway, let's get rid of the graceful part. He's just fat and smiling, like me anyway. Despite the waiting brimstone, the whole of humanity isn't our responsibility. Let it go. It is not meant for me. It is none of my business what happens to the rest of my life. God has provided thus far. My job is to make today somehow better. My duty is to love those children unconditionally. My obligation is to breathe and allow joy into my heart. Most days, I really, sort of, let it go.

And who knows, that joyfulness could be called Gentility or even Grace. Maybe I'll just go have another kid. Can I get an Alleluia?