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## Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered

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If seeking to walk a consciously chosen spiritual path, undergirded by rituals and practices of some sort, is bringing you a growing sense of peace, of freedom, love and joy - and I hope it is - into your life; how would you describe that to someone else?

Last week I referred to knowing how to answer this question as your spiritual elevator speech. Someone asks, "Why are you so happy?" Or, someone asks, "What is Ordinary Life all about?"

The elevator doors open and you have thirty seconds or less to give your answer and you want what you say not to turn people off or turn them away but, rather, cause them to respond by saying, "That sounds interesting. Tell me more." Or, "That's exactly what I've been looking for."

I ended last week by saying that perhaps the best answer to the question would be, "Why don't you come and see."

If, however, you wanted to put it in a phrase, what would or could that phrase be?

Richard Rohr, a man I've referred to as one of my primary spiritual teachers for years now, has a tendency to use words and phrases that express the paradoxical, contradictory, non-dual nature of spiritual work.

For example, one of his books is "Breathing Under Water." So, you could say, "I'm learning to breathe under water." Or, you could use the title of another one of his books and say, "I'm learning to fall upward."

Or, perhaps you could borrow from the Buddhist tradition and say, "I'm learning to be nobody, going nowhere." Or, "I'm learning to make the sound of one hand clapping."

You might say, "I'm learning the real secret of staying young." I got that from a novel I read once. An older woman who has been a widow for some time becomes the object of affection of a man she meets by chance at a hotel where she has gone to have lunch with a friend. As matters unfold and he is able to declare his intentions to her, she rebuffs him by saying, "I'm way too old for this sort of thing." He says, "Are you still learning things?" She says that she is and he then says, "Then you aren't too old. You only start growing old when you stop learning." Nice.

Based on the teaching of Jesus we are going to explore today I might say, "I am finding meaning and happiness being bewitched, bothered and bewildered."

The teaching of Jesus, indeed, the entirety of the Gospel of Thomas and most all of the teaching of Jesus, is designed to leave us this way: bewitched, bothered and bewildered.

You likely recognize these words - bewitched, bothered and bewildered - to be the title of a song. Wikipedia lists 39 what they label "notable recordings" of this Broadway show tune.

If you are familiar with this song and are anything like me, you likely remember the recording made by Ella Fitzgerald. Though, as I say, it is a song that has been recorded many times.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bewitched,\\_Bothered\\_and\\_Bewildered](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bewitched,_Bothered_and_Bewildered)

The first person to sing it, however, was Vivienne Segal when she introduced it in the Rodgers and Hart musical, Pal Joey, on Christmas day, 1940. 1940 was when Germany was on the march and when it established the first ghetto in Poland. During this year Paris surrenders to Hitler and German troops occupy Paris. It was during this year that Winston Churchill gave his "this was their finest hour" speech urging perseverance during the Battle of Britain. France falls to Germany and Hitler orders the invasion of Britain. It was in 1940 that FDR signed into law the draft. German bombers destroy most of Coventry, England. And, Pal Joey by Rodgers and Harts premieres in New York. It was a year of dazzling bewildering events.

Bewitched, bothered and bewildered. We are. Aren't we?

Let's take this first from the dualistic perspective. This won't take long because, frankly, dualism and dualistic thinking and behaving are killing us. Literally, psychologically and spiritually. Yes, great benefits come from dualistic thing. But also unspeakable horrors.

Religion and religious wars, doctrinal disputes, cultural wars of all sort take the lives of people, literally or spiritually regularly. Just this month the group known as Boko Harum has taken the lives of over a hundred people in Nigeria. Twenty-eight of these were passengers on a bus that was stopped by the extremist group. Those who could not recite a verse from the Koran were assumed to be non-Muslim and, because of that, shot. Loosely translated the phrase "Boko Harum" means "Western education is sinful."

I think of the families and churches that are divided and or destroyed because of different opinions about the full inclusion of gays and lesbians.

All of this the result of people who function at a very low level of emotional and spiritual intelligence.

Last week I said that one of the things Ordinary Life is about is providing a crucible in which people can: deepen an awareness of who they are, develop relationships with others, grow in spiritual intelligence, and make a difference in the world.

Growing in spiritual intelligence is difficult because we are living in a world and in a time when life in general is so bewitching in so many ways.

If you just limit this to the realm of technology, you can see what I mean. The first cell phone I owned cost a heck-of-a-lot of money and was the size of an actual brick, perhaps bigger. Just this week I heard an advertisement from one cell phone provider saying you could come in and buy a cell phone for \$1. (I'm sure there were some contractual considerations.) Actually, probably very few people in this

country carry simple cell phones any more. Most people have what are referred to as “smart phones” and indeed you can do a lot with them.

The news magazine I take recently had a page devoted to what it referred to as “The Connectivity Boom.” Over the last two decades there has been an explosion of internet use.

In 1994 there were 25 million internet users worldwide.

Ten years later, 2004, that figure had grown to 910 million.

Ten years after that, this year, the figure stands at 2.9 billion and this figure takes into consideration only 40% of the global population.

More astounding to me were two other sets of statistics.

First, how what happens every minute regarding the use of our devices. Every minute \$272,000 is spent on online shopping. Every minute 48,000 apps are downloaded from iTunes. Every minute 204 million emails are sent. Every minute 100 hours of videos are uploaded to YouTube. You can do the math to figure out what that means in terms of every hour and every day.

The other set of statistics said that 62% of people grab their cell phone first thing after waking up and that the typical person checks his smartphone 150 times throughout the day. I notice they said “his” phone. Are women so addicted?

Clearly we are bewitched.

As we have been working on the Conspire and Odyssey education, worship and community building emphases coming next year, we have done so against a backdrop awareness that we live in a world of increasing isolation and disconnection. If you don't feel that, I am happy for you and you are in the minority.

I am confident that I could spend the rest of our time today and for many weeks into the future talking about and giving examples of how our culture is bewitched,

bothered and bewildered. The information is interesting and runs from the ridiculous to the horrible. Though it is important for us to be aware of this data, knowing it is hardly transformative.

My beautiful bride came up with a new emotional disorder diagnosis this week. You remember when some time ago some pundit came up with the diagnostic label for our culture that indicated we suffer from affluenza. It was a word used by those who are critics of consuming. The book "Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic" defines it as a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more. The term "affluenza" has also been used to refer to the inability to understand the consequences of one's actions because of financial privilege.

The new term Sherry came up with is "awareless." Many people don't have a clue, or at least seem to have a clue about how their awareless behaviors affect other. The incident that led her to come up with this term, actually it was a repeated series of the same incident, was the increasing number of people she saw driving their cars at night without their headlights on.

So, lets leave the realm of dualism and head off into the territory of a different kind of being bewitched, bothered and bewildered.

I am using the relatively recently found Gospel of Thomas to based these "life talks" on and here is the teaching of Jesus we are up to for today:

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Blessed is a lion that a man eats, because that lion will become human. Cursed is a man that a lion eats, because that lion will become human.

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Here is another translation of the same text:

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A lion eaten by a man is blessed  
as it changes to human form,  
but a human devoured  
by a lion is cursed  
as lion becomes human.

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Dualistic mind cannot understand, or grasp, this saying.

I'm going to use some dualistic language, because unless I give a dance interpretation of it or draw a painting - likely, very abstract - or read a lot of Rumi poetry, dualistic language is the only tool I have.

The two parts of this saying are not parallel or symmetrical. That's why it is so confusing to the logical mind.

First, this saying or parable is a metaphor that speaks of transformation either into a blessed state or a woeful state through the process of eating.

When the human and the lion-like forms ingest qualities from the other, they are transformed by that act.

This parable is about the transformation of consciousness. In the end, two very different kinds of humans exist. One who has eaten the lion and the other which the lion has consumed. In both cases the lion becomes human. But there is a dramatic and drastic difference between them.

Although you find no lions mentioned in Christian Scripture that I am aware of, lions are all through the Hebrew scripture - in almost every book. Likely everyone knows of Daniel in the lions den story. Lions are metaphors for power and strength and creatures to be in awe of because of their fierce qualities. So here in this teaching the lion is a metaphor for that which we can ingest to be transformed or that which ingests us and also transforms us.

Lets talk some more about the Gospel of Thomas. This collection of sayings of Jesus, which I personally think predate the other Gospels chronologically, is not easily understood. It is not intended to be. The text itself declares in its first saying that the discovery of the correct interpretation will not only lead to immortality but also that the person who seeks and finds the meaning of these sayings will be disturbed and astonished. I believe these sayings, some of which are found in the writings we call Mark, Luke and Matthew are meant to be puzzling. To learn the full meaning from someone else would be to defeat the self-proclaimed intent of the document. That is to say, the teacher can't do the finding for the student. Just as no one can take a bath for you.

The sayings in the Gospel of Thomas aren't arranged in any particular order. Neither is life. But we are so bewitched so much of the time we become ignorant of this. That's why we get startled by life so often. We keep falling asleep. We get to thinking that we've got, or can get, all our ducks in a row - and keep them there.

We get to thinking or feeling like we sort of have the hang of things and, oops! - we hit a speed bump. Good spiritual teachers are always tripping us up. Mine years ago said he would do that because the important learning came from the effort I made to get back on the path. I think Jesus did it to get people to pay attention.

He taught that each moment of life is new and full of possibility. He said, the Kingdom of God, is spread out all around you.

I think I had a breakthrough this week. See what you think. The central teaching of Jesus was about what he referred to as "the rule of God." He was always saying "the rule of God is like" and then he would give a parable or teaching. Or, entering the "rule of God" is like "eating a lion." "Not entering the rule of God is letting the lion eat you."

Here is my breakthrough: instead of using the phrase "rule of God," "kingdom of God" or certainly "kingdom of heaven," use instead just the word "God." If you are uncomfortable with the word "God," use something else that points to the mystery for you. Sacred Mystery. Divine Entanglement.

Every moment we are in this reality. Every moment it is in us. But, we so easily fall asleep to this. We get bewitched. We don't want to be bothered and bewildered which is exactly what Jesus promises us on the journey. A being disturbed and bewildered that leads to joy and happiness in the face of the fact that we all grow old, get sick and die. That is, if we are lucky. Think about it: health is the anomaly for the human animal. Life is not secure and stable. The reason we like things to be consistent and predictable is so that our sleep won't be disturbed.

In the very first class I taught under the label "Ordinary Life" I said:

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If you are disturbed by what happens in this class, that's good. In spiritual practice it is good to be disturbed. The goal is to be disturbed as long as we can be disturbed. When you are not disturbed, it's only because you are not disturbed. It's not because nothing is disturbing. Of course, because everything is always the way it ought to be, nothing is really inherently disturbing. Of course, as long as we can't be disturbed, we can't know that. So, if we want to wake up, we will want to continue to be disturbed and to pay very close attention to being disturbed for as long as we are disturbed - because nothing is really disturbing.

Now, if you understood that and can laugh about it, you'll probably enjoy this class. If you didn't understand it or you didn't laugh about it, this class is an excellent opportunity for you - although you might have as much fun as the folks who laughed about it.

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What we eat in the outer, literal world sustains us, becomes us. You are what you eat. (Clearly, a lot of people eat a lot of nuts.) If you eat a lion, metaphorically, you become powerful. Not strong. Powerful.

I am not going to elaborate on this today as I'll devote a full class to this later on. However, consider how the central ritual of the early Jesus movement was eating. Jesus' followers clearly heard him say, "Eat this! When you do, you are consuming me. You become me."



One of the things that happened to the Jesus movement when it became imperial Christianity is that it exchanged power for strength. It began to preach a powerless gospel that led nowhere. The god that it led people to worship had little, if anything, to do with the God of Jesus. It created religious leaders who became good at dividing and excluding.

There was a story in the New York Times in September of this year that illustrates my point.

(You can read more at <http://www.ktvq.com/news/bishop-responds-to-lewistown-catholic-church-controversy-with-gay-couple/>)

In Lewistown, Montana, a gay couple who have been together for more than three decades have been told that they're no longer really welcome in the Catholic parish where they've been worshiping together for 11 years. Not only have they been attending mass there but also been mainstays in the church, singing in the choir and performing other duties.

These two men, one 73 the other 66, had in May of this year, without any fanfare, gone to Seattle, where they had met and lived for many years, and got married. While they didn't do anything to publicize this, eventually word got out. The town has only 5,900 inhabitants. When the word did get out, they were summoned by the priest of their parish and told that they could no longer be choir members, perform any other roles in the church or, for that matter receive communion. If they wanted those privileges restored, they would have to divorce, stop living together and sign a statement that marriage exists only between a man and a woman. That is to say, renounce a love fortified over 30 years, unravel their lives and affirm that they are a less class of people, barred from the rituals in which others blithely participate.

Here, then, is an example of an institution that has been devoured by a lion. Not to say that the Catholic Church has not done good in various places in the world, produced devoted servants of good works like Mother Teresa and more. But here, and in the cover-up of pedophile priests, the institution qualifies for the label of "evil."

I can't find the author of this but it is a prayer I keep close to me:

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From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth,  
From the laziness that is content with half-truths,  
From the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth,  
O God of Truth, deliver us.

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There is a truth that continuously recurs within the world's sacred paths. It points to Sacred Mystery in all things and people and, in one way or the other, says that the goal of existence is union with this Mystery. Among mystics this truth is referred to as "the perennial tradition."

I can easily imagine a representative of the Roman Catholic church defending the decision made by the priest of the parish in Montana, and which incidentally was upheld by the bishop of that area, as simply being faithful to "the tradition."

I am a believer in tradition. I think it is important. I remember, however, in graduate school reading a definition of tradition by the great 20th-century church historian, Jaroslav Pelikan. He said that "tradition is the living faith of the dead, and traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."

I love this definition. Especially in light of the mysticism of sacred entanglement. Sacred Mystery means we are all connected. Tradition is this living thing we inherit from people who have gone on before us. We are the recipients of their experiences: the poetry, words, art, the things that mattered to them; the insights they learned from their own lives.

It becomes a lion that devours us when we freeze-frame the things they have passed on and act as if tradition isn't a lived experience but, rather, some sort of unchangeable antiquated vase that we don't like but got as a gift from our in-laws

and feel obligated to put on our coffee table for display anyway. Many people think they are adhering to tradition when in fact they have become traditionalists.

The more I stay with this work, the more convinced I am becoming that Christianity, and I could say this about any religious organization or institution, will not survive in any meaningful way unless it is willing to become more mystical in its orientation.

That means less certain.

In the realm of the mystical divisions and fragmentation lose their tyranny over our hearts. It is not that the mystics aren't certain of anything. It is just a different kind of certitude.

Richard Rohr, who is a Franciscan, says that the prayer St. Francis prayed over and over and over was, "God, who are you? God, who am I?" He didn't know.

The prayer Meister Eckhart prayed over and over was, "God, deliver me from God." That is to say, deliver me from the stance of thinking I know, control, understand, need to defend you.

I am told that the word "mystic" comes from a Sanskrit word that means to put your finger in front of your mouth to make the "shush" sound.

Mystics are not going to try to get you to join their group. If they were to do so, it would likely be in words of the great classic of Christian mysticism, "Come and join me in the cloud of unknowing."

Can you imagine how politics, both in and out of the church, would be transformed if people had the humility of not knowing.

Mystery is not that which is not understandable. It is that which is endlessly understandable.

I know some of you need or desire a more rational sounding definition of mysticism. So here is one attempt at that: mysticism is the consciousness of the

existence of God that by definition exceeds definitions and which consciousness transforms the person who has the experience. Or, put another way: mysticism is an overwhelming consciousness of God and of one's self in a divinely entangled relationship with God.

It is this experience, this awareness that leads the mystic to be so at peace, so happy. We have a phrase in our culture that is such a trouble maker for us. The phrase is "peace of mind." I want peace of mind - about whatever. However, think about it. When you are in your mind you are never at peace. When you are at peace you are not in your mind.

So, unlike Western culture that strives for success and control and winning and being right, the mystic buys into none of that - certainly on the spiritual plane. The mystic never would say, "Look at what I have done." Rather, the true mystic says, "Look what love has done to me."

Eating the lion is about being transformed into this awareness. You see with different eyes and lead at the world with a different heart - braver, more loving, more inclusive. The transformed person knows that everything and every one belongs. No one need be excommunicated, shunned or eliminated. Because Sacred Mystery has become alive in you, you begin to see - again to quote Meister Eckhart - with the eye of God. You experience that the same eye with which God sees me is the eye with which I see God.

We enter this Sacred Realm that is right here where, once we see it, experience it, we are bewitched - wanting more, bothered - because it is more than we can or could imagine - and bewildered by a love and beauty that leave us breathless.

Why are you so happy? Serene? Peaceful? Loving? Unafraid?

Because I'm learning more and more to live in a place where I am spiritually bewitched, bothered and bewildered and it is wonderful.

No matter where you go this week, no matter what happens, remember this: you carry precious cargo. So, watch your step.