

“The Art of Flocking”

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Rev. Bill Eichhorn



Readings

Mysteries, Yes
Mary Oliver

Truly, we live with mysteries too marvelous
to be understood.

How grass can be nourishing in the
mouths of the lambs.

How rivers and stones are forever
in allegiance with gravity
while we ourselves dream of rising.

How two hands touch and the bonds will
never be broken.

How people come, from delight or the
scars of damage,
to the comfort of a poem.

Let me keep my distance, always, from those
who think they have the answers.

Let me keep company always with those who say
“Look!” and laugh in astonishment,
and bow their heads.

Isaiah 40:31

But they that wait upon the Lord
shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings as eagles;
they shall run, and not be weary;
and they shall walk, and not faint.

The title for today's message comes from activist and writer Adrienne Maree Brown. In her book, *Emerging Strategy*, she observes:

...birds don't make a plan to migrate, raising resources to fund their way, packing for scarce times, mapping out their pit stops. They feel a call in their bodies and they must go, and they follow it, responding to each other, each bringing their adaptations.

There is an art to flocking: staying separate enough not to crowd each other, aligned enough to maintain a shared direction, and cohesive enough to always move towards each other. Destiny is a calling that creates a beautiful journey.

Doesn't that sound like CCC? We practice the art of flocking here. We heard a call. Most of us came here seeking a spiritual community that would provide ways for us to experience the sacred interconnectedness of all life, to connect with the One who made us in the image of God's own mystery. Some of us are exiles from religious institutions demanding rigid dogma or stale doctrine. We are aligned enough in our beliefs and values to maintain a shared direction, without crowding each other to believe in a particular way. We joined CCC to embark on a beautiful journey.

Rev. Dorsey Blake, Presiding Minister of the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco, the congregation founded by Dr. Howard Thurman, recently spoke about the art of flocking as practiced by geese, and offered this observation by Sharon VanSchuyver:

Geese do not typically fly individually, but tend to thrive in a flock. Geese fly in a V formation because it distributes the hardship of travel. The goose at the center point of the V has a greater challenge, as it meets the greatest wind resistance in flight; therefore, this position is rotated every few minutes so that the geese can fly long distances without rest.

The easiest position is at the rear of the V. The stronger geese allow the young, weak or old birds to occupy these less arduous positions. If a goose becomes too tired or ill to continue, it is never abandoned. The bird will leave the flock, with the assistance of a healthier bird, and remain grounded until it can continue its flight.

VanSchuyver continues:

[T]his social order greatly contributes to the survival and well-being of their flock. The "honking" of geese is believed to be the method of the strong encouraging the weaker birds to continue.

The art of flocking suggests, I believe, a way of life, a way to be church. It is our calling to encourage one another when the days are really hard. It is our calling to care for and stand with those most vulnerable in our community. It is our calling to resist hate speech and stand against the violence it spawns.

In the hymn "Migratory V," that Gabby Winnett will sing, the first verse asks us a profound question:

*We sail above the weather,
We search the ocean floor,
We rival our creation,
Still yearning for more.
But can we fly together –
A migratory V?*

My friends, whatever season it is in our life as a congregation – Easter or Christmas, interim ministers or settled pastor, sunny days full of hope or stormy times that threaten – whatever season it is, our calling is to fly together in that migratory V. The church is a body of people with a vocation, a calling, to serve the world beyond itself: to stand with the most vulnerable, to struggle for systemic justice, to heal and to feed and to clothe and to house those left behind by social, economic, and political structures. If we keep on honking, as we stay true to our vocation, as we live our calling, we will find our strength renewed. We will discover we can run and not be weary. We will walk and not faint. We will, dear church, mount up on wings as eagles do, as geese do. “Aloft and in formation. A migratory V. How wonderful that would be.”

Like some of you, Ann and I attended the Marin School of the Arts theatre performance of *Cabaret* recently. Scott DeTurk was the musical director. Gabby had a lead role as Sally Bowles. The cast’s energy and talent were breathtaking; their interpretation of a terrible period in German history heartbreaking. The play takes place in Berlin in the early 1930’s. The government of the Weimar Republic is increasingly on shaky ground. The Nazis are rallying in the streets. LGBTQ people seek refuge in cabarets because they can be themselves in a safe place. But by the end of the play the Gestapo are arresting Jews and LGBTQ people and shipping them off to concentration camps. Jews are identified with a yellow star, LGBTQ people with pink stars. In the show’s printed program, some of the students offered their perspectives and insights gained from doing the show. Gabby said:

As a company, we decided to put on Cabaret to warn audiences of the dangers of political passivity, and encourage them to become more civically engaged, mindful and compassionate. In our show, we focus on terrifying truths of the Nazi regime. Nazis were not always nameless, faceless men. Sometimes, Nazis were unassuming, seemingly kind people. Cabaret’s text is written in a way that encourages audiences to reflect upon themselves, and ponder the question, What Would You Do? As artists, we must approach controversial material in order to honor the stories that must not be lost to history, and to try and prevent the tragedies that must never be repeated.

What will you do, what will we do, to stop the draconian measures being launched in America to erase and exterminate racial minorities, members of the LGBTQ community? This week the state of Tennessee outlawed drag shows, but Proud Boys can still hold their racist, homophobic motorcycle parades, and the Klan can still hold their vile public meetings. What will we do to oppose voter suppression and advocate for the rights of women to control their bodies? To stand against these threats to persons and democracy itself will require us to fly together in that migratory V. It will require us to keep on honking encouragement to one another as we practice the art of flocking. May CCC always be a place, like the cabarets, where everyone can be themselves and be safe.

I asked Gabby Winnett to share with us the process called “Community Guidelines” the Cabaret cast used to build trust and understanding with each other. It is, I believe, a profound example of what practicing the art of flocking looks like.