

REFLECTION @ UUFC

"How Do You Nourish Your Spirit?"

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As I listened to Heidi's wonderful, fun list of things that nourish her spirit, I was thinking about how all of us could construct such a list. (And in just a few minutes, we'll be inviting you to share some of the items on *your* list!) I was also noticing that so many of those spirit-nourishing things on Heidi's list are things we can enjoy with our five senses -- sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. We are very sensory creatures, aren't we? And if I were to make a similar list, I think about what I would put on it. For the sense of sight, let's see ... blue flowers. Yes. Blue flowers. Oh, my gosh ...there's a variety of morning glories called Heavenly Blue. And they are, indeed, heavenly.

And then, for hearing, of course, we all have favorite pieces of music on our list. My personal favorites would include everything from Crosby Stills and Nash to Johann Pachelbel. (Thank you, Monica, for playing Pachelbel today!) Then, let's see smell. How about the aroma of homemade bread in the oven? Or sandalwood incense? And as for the sense of taste okay, confession time: Who else loves the totally decadent combination of raspberry and dark chocolate? Anyone else?

And finally, the sense of touch. There's a wonderful story about Helen Keller. Have you heard this story? It's when she was a child, totally blind and totally deaf. Her teacher, Annie Sullivan, was trying to break through to her, trying to teach Helen the alphabet. Can you imagine? You can't hear, you can't see. How in the world are you going to learn letters and words? How can anyone communicate with you? As a result, Helen was unruly, a totally unmanageable child -- so full of frustration, no way of expressing herself or connecting with other people.

So Helen and her teacher were outside one day, at the water pump, and they were pumping the handle, and this delicious, cool liquid was flowing out in a torrent. Annie Sullivan held Helen's hand in the flow of the water and at the same time, she was spelling out the word WATER in Helen's palm. She had been trying to teach her sign language for months, with no success. She just couldn't break through that wall of silence. And Helen wrote about this later, in her autobiography, that suddenly the light turned on in her brain. She understood, in that amazing moment, that those signs that Annie was making in the palm of her hand, those were letters: W-A-T-E-R. And those letters spelled out a word, WATER. And "water" was that cool, wonderful liquid that was flowing over her hand. What a miracle! The sense of touch.

But what I'd like to really focus on in my half of this morning's Reflection are three intangible things that nourish our spirits. Nourish us, and help us be more fully human.

First of all, there's LOVE. Glorious, lovely love -- in all its forms. Young love, like Kyla and Kyle, sitting here this morning in the front row or mature, ripened-on-the-vine love (and here, I'm thinking of Berniece and Albert) ... and then there's brand-new love. For that, I'm thinking of the Thompson family, and my friend Martha, flying on a plane right now, or perhaps just arrived home, with her brand-new son from Ethiopia.

How deeply love enriches all our lives, and nourishes our spirits. But when I speak of love here, I mean not only love between two people, or within a family, or between friends, or a human and a beloved animal companion. I also mean a larger love, an all-encompassing love.

In Buddhism we call it Metta, or loving kindness. I've spoken of it before in this fellowship, and I know Alex has, too. It's a non-attached love, love without a price, without expectation of return. It's loving someone, or something, just as it is, here and now, warts and all. And it's expressing love not only in words but in our actions. We have some beautiful examples of that right here in this fellowship. Service work, volunteering, social justice. Marching in a Pride parade, helping teach our young members, bringing flowers to place on the altar, sitting through an endless committee meeting -- yes, that's love! Collecting donations for Clemson Community Care, as we've done this morning, working outside here on the grounds, on a sweaty Saturday morning. All of this is love, and all of it nourishes our spirit in innumerable ways.

The second intangible that I'd like us to think about for a few moments is HOPE. This is another of those intangibles that nourishes our spirit. Because, as we well know, sometimes -- many times -- life isn't easy. It's difficult, it's heartbreaking, it's shocking, like those grieving parents in Norway, whose world came crashing down in an instant, one phone call with horrible news. Life can knock us down and break our hearts, over and over -- and at those times, all we have left is hope.

Do you know about Viktor Frankl? I hadn't heard of him, but I've been learning about him recently in my classes at Clemson. He was an Austrian neurologist and a psychiatrist, a brilliant man, and he lost basically everything to the Nazis in World War II. He lost his parents, his wife, his home, his freedom. And he wrote about being in the death camp at Auschwitz, surrounded by suffering and sickness and despair. And he said that so many of the other prisoners died not necessarily of starvation, or overwork, or illness or even being gassed, but they died because they had lost hope. And somehow, in the midst of all this horror, Frankl found hope. He found that he could nourish his spirit, and literally keep himself alive, by holding on to hope. Let me read this passage to you from his memoir, *Man's Search for Meaning* ...

The last of the three intangibles that I want to speak about is GRATITUDE. Because this also can nourish our spirit. And in many ways, this is the icing on the cake of all the other things that nourish our spirit. Gratitude is the sweet appreciation of our blessings, those delightful, wonderful things Heidi mentioned. Without gratitude, we can't fully enjoy all those little daily miracles that happen, we can't fully taste that blissful combination of raspberry and chocolate. If we don't stop to acknowledge our blessings, with a small bow of gratitude, we're not getting the full nourishment they offer us.

Last year, I kept a gratitude journal. It was a little spiral-bound notebook and each day, for 365 days, I wrote down one thing -- only one -- that I had seen or heard or tasted that day. Because, again, a lot of these gifts that nourish us are gifts of the senses. Now, of course, the value of this exercise of keeping a gratitude journal was not so much the writing down of these things, but rather it was the *looking* for them, every day. It got me in the habit of being open to my blessings, of looking for them, and trying to find at least one in every day.

I remember one particular day, the blessing was this: An old black, battered, faded pickup truck that I saw, driving through Pendleton, and hanging out of the passenger window of that truck was an enormous white dog, very fluffy, hair blowing in the wind, tongue hanging down to here, absolutely full of joy ... joy blowing in the wind! And those two or three seconds of seeing that dog, of feeling his utter joy at riding in that truck and sticking his head out the window -- well, that was most definitely nourishing to my spirit.

OK, now, it's your turn! Please, if you feel so moved, share with us some of the things that nourish *your* spirit.