

WONDER IN A BOX
Homily by Tracy Sprowls
Sunday, December 23, 2018
All Souls Church, New York City

In the past, I have introduced to you the wonder box. It is a wooden box- this big- with a lid. We call it a wonder box because there is something inside of it and we wonder what it is. Once we open the box, we can wonder about the item inside and sometimes, sometimes, the item inside is a cause for wonder.

What I like about the wonder box is the mystery that it holds; the possibility it contains. For a short time, practically anything can be in the box. The mystery inside is only limited by our imaginations and perhaps by the size of the box. These few minutes before the box is opened, this liminal time between not knowing and knowing what is in there, is a very special time indeed and anything is possible.

This point in time between not knowing and knowing is a time when anything can happen. It is a delicious moment of uncertainty that brings with it hints of joy and hope, not dread or fear. In this space of mystery miracles can occur. The lottery ticket in your pocket could be the winning one. The book unopened holds countless undiscovered adventures. The wrapped presents under the tree are secrets to be revealed.

When a star appeared in the night sky a couple thousand of years ago, kings and shepherds alike felt compelled to follow where it might lead. They did not know where they might be led or what they would find when they got there. They trusted their instinct to move into the darkness of the unknown trusting in prophecy and a far-away star. At the end of their journey they discovered a new baby born to a poor mother and father. A miracle, some say. What these people beheld was a babe born into a difficult and challenging and even scary world. This new child brought into the world with its birth light and joy, hope and possibility. A baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes, with a whole life before it and who knows what it would make of it? A baby, bringing joy because of new life, but also wonder at all the possibilities. And with each new life, the cycle of joy and wonder and possibility repeats again and again and again.

Rev. Joan Javier-Duval writes, out of depths unknown, the spark of life ignites and we are born, we enter a world, a universe not of our making, our lives unfold in mystery and wonder, questions abound for which there are no definite answers...

Modern people don't necessarily like to let the answers unfold. We want definite answers, information at our fingertips. Living in that space of unknowing, of mystery, of being in the dark can be challenging and even terrifying. That moment of uncertainty may not be delicious but rather full of anxiety and fear and with these the need to control. And while we might like to think the life of a child will unfold into its own possibilities, despite all our efforts, we might let our own expectations and desires take the lead in the unfolding life of our child.

When my son was small, maybe three or four, we sat down one day to draw out Valentine's Day cards. Izaac began drawing little hearts in earnest all over the paper for his grandma and then proceeded to color them in yellow. So, I say, in all my wisdom, "Izaac, hearts are red. Color red hearts for grandma." He ignores me and continues to color in yellow. So, I sit quietly, watching. Finally, I ask, "why are you coloring the hearts yellow for grandma?" Without looking up, so intent is he on coloring, he says, "yellow is my favorite color." Of course! If you love someone

you give them your favorite, your very best. I had to shelve my expectations and sit in wonder at the unfolding mystery of this precious child.

Over the years, I have learned to let go of the way I want things to be and have worked to be more open to living in that space of uncertainty. Having a child almost forces you into letting go of a particular outcome, but working with children (and let's be honest, volunteers) insists upon living in that space of knowing and unknowing, of being open to possibility and maybe even a little chaos.

Now, upon is that season of liminal time, of not knowing and knowing. As Autumn marches quickly into the darkness of winter with the leaves falling and the animals preparing for the coming long season and, even we humans sense the change and begin our own digging down and digging in. The darkness of winter magnifies the gloom of a world still struggling with a way to end violence, hunger and poverty, greed and oppression. Justice and equanimity and peace are obscured in a world amid winter darkness.

Winter is the season of darkness but in this season come the lights and promise of December. We hunger for the miracle of light. We hunger for hope and possibility.

The Earth spins her dance further from the sun but then seemingly stops as the Solstice arrives. We are in liminal space for a celestial moment and then, once again, she tilts towards the light of that great star, the sun. So how joyous it is to know the dark and despair need not be permanent. The sun does return! How wondrous to see with the brilliance of the sun all of life. When all is dark it does seem that light is a miracle.

In this season of busyness, as we approach the close of a difficult and challenging year, let us pause. Let our steps become slower as the snows gently fall on our shoulders. Let the traffic ease and the horns and sirens dim. Let the news outlets be muted and the bickering fall silent. Let winter's darkness quietly blanket over us in preparation for a miracle.

In the darkness, let us prepare for that which is to come. In our stillness, let the holiness of the season become a burning light in our hearts. Let the glory and joy of life shine forth. Darkness is long but temporary and there is much beauty to remember. The earth spins away from the sun and maybe, just maybe, the hurt and pain of the times will too. The Winter Solstice teaches us that we will tip towards the light again. The earth's axis naturally tips toward love and light, hope and possibility. And we can, too.

In the lights of the season we are reminded of that light that burns within us when we are born, the hope that new life brings with it, and the very miracle that occurs, over and over again, with each new life. In the candle light of this holiday season may we keep witness to this holiness.

May the hope this season brings, glimmer and rise up in you like a sun-star in the night, bringing forth wonder and delight.