

The Good Bones: Discerning Where to Go From Here
(Genesis 50:25, Exodus 13:10 & Joshua 24:32)

When I met my husband, I did not quite understand the propensity he has for uncovering antiquitous books, antiques and history. While everyone has their own passions and interests, an interest I didn't know existed until we started dating, was the joy he experiences when he finds out that a building, book, or antique in one of our favorite thrift shops, happens to be what he deemed as "over two HUNGE!" Which is Ben-code for something that meets his standard of being made, created or honored prior to the year 1800. You see, new history, anything after 1900, just isn't quite as exciting to my honey and after learning this information and fully understanding through his eyes, I see the overwhelmingly beautiful reminder that God keeps sacred, many things though the generations, that are beyond our understanding, but perhaps not beyond our reach.

It is precisely why when I found out about my assignment for Main Street church, the very first thing that Ben did was begin to conduct research on the town of Amesbury. A town that while I know well enough from my cousins having grown up here, I have since learned more about in the last two weeks than I have over the last 40 years. History, you see, is very telling and can be both brutal and beautiful. The history of this particular church began in the early 1800s. Specifically in the year 1828, the founders filed a petition with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and just 11 short years later they had finally procured the building alongside your first minister. While it seems there were quite a number of conflicts, and turnover throughout Main Street's history, eventually, you became the more settled, peace filled, welcoming, and affirming space that we now see reflected today. History being tricky, however, means that one of the first reverends here decided to resign in order to give a lecture on anti-slavery. You see, history is tricky and it is up to us to decide what pieces we would like to remain now and into the future, of which pieces of us we would like to keep in the past for eternity.

Have you heard of "the 200 year present concept?" It is a term coined by peace research pioneer & sociologist Elise Boulding. The concept is relatively simple yet incredibly eye-opening. We often think of ourselves as living either at the beginning or the end of an era, yet Boulding's 200-year present concept ACTUALLY places us squarely in the middle of time. She would explain the concept this way: today is September 21 2025; one boundary of the 200-year present is September 21, 1925. That is the day of the birth of the people who are celebrating their 100th birthday today. The other side of that 200-year present is September 21, 2125, which will be the 100th birthday of the babies born today.

It follows the notion that if you have the gift of touching a grandparent's hand within the same lifetime that you clutch the hand of a newborn baby, you get to have a moment along the timeline of God's plan where you have held the wisdom of the old and the curiosity of the new. It gives us the ability to look backwards towards the progress that we've made, and while lately things seem to be wildly out of control and out of the realm of the normal checks and balances that we have anticipated, those who were born in 1925 have seen some version of this along their own timeline and the baby is born today will get a chance to see what new progress looks like into the future. And should we all play our cards right, perhaps we will be able to lend a hand to the generations that come beyond even the hundred years at the end of this boundary.

In other words; if you're feeling a little stuck right now and if you're feeling as though we have been slung shot backwards in terms of progress, I want you to remember that while things can be undone legally they will never be undone morally. I want you to remember that sometimes progress looks as though we are sliding backwards. I want to remind you that healing is not linear. Just as when we are recovering from surgery and need more days of rest than we anticipate. Or just when we believe we are getting over the grief of losing a loved one in any capacity; be that through changes in their job or in which kin-dom they reside; I want you to remember that even in the moments when it feels as though things are never ending, and as though things may implode upon themselves, we are not at the end, but rather smack dab in the middle.

If you remember last week, I brought up a secret at the end of my sermon; the secret from a little fox. This little fox hails from a French novella, entitled *La Petit Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The short story intersects a time when a pilot, who has crashed into the Sahara desert, encounters a little prince from a far away asteroid. This little prince goes on to share his adventures through the universe and the lessons that he has learned as a child traveling for eons. Along his adventures, he encounters adults doing many strange things such as counting numbers or criticizing children's artwork that they may know nothing about. For when we criticize a child's artwork, as Picasso reminds, while every child is an artist; the problem is how to remain one as he grows up.

While the pilot fixes his plane, the little prince tells the tale of meeting his fox who teaches him about responsibility and the taming of things; or what we like to call "naming the dog". The little fox is the one who tells the prince that what is essential is invisible to the eye for one can only see rightly with the heart. You see, the little prince travels the universe and learns, and at times rejects, adult ideology and thought. He sees across the span of 200 years and comes to understand that the things that we learned in childhood are often things that we need to retain, and yet he acknowledges that there are things that we learned in childhood that we must question when we are

older. There comes a time when we must question what kind of change lay ahead. There comes a time when we need to ask ourselves which direction we will choose. It begs the question I asked our children earlier; how do we preserve our history? Are we ready to purchase an entirely new book and leave the old books behind? Or, should we rebound our old books with a few blank pages to keep old ideas, while allowing for some of the new?? Or do we perhaps get rid of all the old thought patterns and instead purchase a blank journal with which to begin a new story??

It has me thinking of Joseph's bones; his solid foundation, his literal bones, that were carried out of the exodus and into the promised land. Quite like the parable, there are things that we can carry with us from the past that we would like to remain embedded within our histories or that we would like to carry with us into the future. And yet also like Joseph's story, we may need to make ourselves new just as the Egyptians let go of their old ways and began to embrace the new. Joseph knew that in shifting form as he made his way to the kingdom, while leaving behind his good bones, he knew that there were things that needed to be held onto tightly, while there were also things that needed a softer grip or perhaps to be released entirely in order to accomplish God's mission.

Though Joseph's ancestors may have been able to bring some of the past with them into the future, it is up to all of us to decide how we keep records of our history and ancestry. And while Joseph's ancestors encouraged both the keeping of history alongside creating changes for the future, I may present a fourth option that we have not discussed yet. What if, instead of completely letting go of our history, perhaps instead, we could explore what it means to simply put the history on a shelf that we could refer back to from time to time, to remember that our history was there? History is what brings us to this moment; whether those stories are brutal, beautiful or my favorite Brene Brown expression, which combines the notion that two things can be true at the same time - **brutiful**. In the creation of something new, perhaps we do not need to completely let go of the old and re-create, nor do we need to bring old thoughts into our new books, chapters and verses that we are creating as we speak.

Here at Main Street Congregational, you are in a beautiful space of discernment that allows for you to vision cast into the future. You are entering into a phase as a congregation that includes monumental financial, and spiritual decisions. You're entering into a time of discernment where you get to ask yourself questions that may have never been explored before. Perhaps you are in a space for the creation of a "parents night out" for local families that is open to members and community alike? Perhaps you want to explore what it would look like to host a monthly meeting at The Barking Dog, whereby perhaps Main Street covers the appetizers, while congregants cover their beverages, as you discuss the bible or new theological ideas. Perhaps you

are interested in using peace making circle practices to open up conversations of conflict. In opening the door to deeper discussions, you get to intentionally decide what kind of transformation needs to and should happen over the course of the next year or so that you have with your upcoming minister. You are about to enter into a time and a space where you may be excited about PowerPoints, spreadsheets and vision casting; and next week I'll be giving a tool that may provide much more joy for those kinds of activities. And while you are still mourning and experiencing the grief of change after two decades of really, really good bones, I wonder if, perhaps, you can find moments to refer back to the history book on your shelf as a sense of comfort and progress before setting it down in order to come together as a congregation and decide what story will be written next.

And so today, I encourage you to pick up your favorite writing utensils, and blank pieces of paper to begin your own discernment process on what your hopes and dreams for Main Street are as you slowly emerge from within this smack dab little moment of history we are in together & begin to take yet another step forward. One bone, muscle, memory or step at a time. Together. Amen.

Jenny Lane

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Main Street Congregational UCC

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