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**Speaking of Faith**

Over the past ten months or so much has changed. The human race is being faced with more and more choices: choices about how we live; life and death choices happening in real time to real people. But what can we base our choices on?

In 2003, the ‘On Being’ Project was created. It began with a radio conversation, “Speaking of Faith” about religious and spiritual aspects of life. 'On Being’ now looks at questions of meaning in the 21st century in the context of spiritual inquiry, science, social healing and the arts, and asks,

“What does it mean to be human? How do we want to live? Who will we be to each other?”

The Project has six 'spiritual tools for the art of living' and we'll look at each of these in turn, starting with:

**1. Words That Matter**

We are starved for fresh language to approach each other. We need what the poet, essayist and playwright Elizabeth Alexander calls “words that shimmer” — words with power that convey real truth, which cannot be captured in mere fact. Words that have the force of action and become virtues in and of themselves. The words we use shape how we understand ourselves, how we interpret the world, how we treat others. Words are one of our primary ways to reach across the mystery of each other. As technology reframes the meaning of basic human acts like making and leading and belonging, the world needs the most vivid and transformative universe of words we can muster.

What does it mean to you that words can ‘shimmer’? What is it about some words that make them"become virtues in themselves? St Peter once said to Jesus, ‘You have the words of eternal life’. What kind of words are ‘words of eternal life' for you? How would you / do you use them?

**2. Hospitality**  
  
The bible encourages us to 'provide the poor wanderer with shelter…'  Hospitality is like a bridge to all the great virtues. You don’t have to love or forgive or feel compassion to extend hospitality. And it’s much more than just an invitation - it's about creating a safe welcoming space — an atmosphere as much as a place.

Hospitality creates the conditions for all kinds of positive developments, including new relationships, even between unlikely combinations of people. Through hospitality, anything becomes possible - truly a 'bridge to all the great virtues'. When in doubt, practice hospitality.

What do you think it means to say that hospitality is about creating an atmosphere as much as a place?   
  
"You don’t have to love or forgive or feel compassion to extend hospitality" - in other words it's not about you. It's about someone else receiving what they need.

Providing each other's needs through hospitality should be an automatic response regardless of our feelings. Understanding this is surely a first step on the 'bridge to all the great virtues'.

**3. Humility**

"Humility is a companion to curiosity, surprise, and delight. Spiritual humility is not about shrinking, it is about encouraging others to grow. Spiritual humility is about approaching everything and everyone with a readiness to be surprised and delighted. It is equally the humility of the child, the scientist and the mystic — to be rooted in what you know while living expectantly for discoveries yet to come. The wisest people carry a humility that manifests as tenderness in a creative interplay with power."  
  
What does humility feel like to you? Punishment? Humiliation? (which is something totally different by the way) or something more positive and powerful?  
  
**4. Patience**  
  
"Patience, like humility, is not meekness or ineffectuality but a commitment to move through the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. A spiritual view of time is a long view, resistant to the illusion of time as a bully, or just a matter of deadlines.

Individual human transformation takes time — longer than we want it to — but it is what is necessary for social transformation. A long, patient view of time will replenish our hope for the world."  
  
How do you feel when you hear or read the word 'Patience’? What would you say you need more patience for - the transformation of society, or the transformation of the individual? (including yourself!)

The bible says patience is the 'fruit of the Spirit of God' (what the Spirit grows, or produces in our lives) and urges us "With all humility and gentleness and patience, bear with one another in love”. It also says Jesus 'did not grasp at equality with God but humbled himself, taking the form of a servant’.

**5. Generous Listening**

Listening is an art we have lost and must learn anew.

Listening is more than being quiet while others have their say.

It is about presence as much as receiving.

It is about connection more than observing.

Real listening is powered by curiosity.

It involves vulnerability, a willingness to be surprised, to let go of assumptions and take in ambiguity.

It is never in “gotcha” mode.

The generous listener wants to understand the humanity behind the words of the other and patiently summons their own best self and their own most generous words and questions.

One of the reasons we sometimes don’t listen generously is that we are conditioned to give quick answers - to show that we have something to say, even if it is just a soundbite or a cliché.  Journalist Krista Tippett of the On Being project writes:  "We trade mostly in answers— competing answers— and in questions that corner, incite, or entertain. …”

Perhaps asking the right questions would help us to listen more generously.

In the bible (Luke’s Gospel, Chapter 7), a 'sinful’ woman gate-crashes a meal at which Jesus is present  She touches Jesus, and weeps; she washes his feet with her tears and dries them with her hair - all this breaking the religious law and social conventions.

The host, Simon the Pharisee, thinks to himself of Jesus, "This man, if he were a prophet, would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him, because she is so sinful.” Jesus asks his host a simple question: “Do you see this woman?” The truthful answer is Simon does not. He sees what he thinks about the woman. He sees his own judgments. He doesn’t see the woman.

In the same way, generous listening involves not just listening to someone’s words. It means listening to who they are.  
  
There are people who, instead of listening to what is being said to them, are already listening to what they are going to say themselves.  (Albert Guinon)  
  
Beloved: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak… (the bible)

**6. Adventurous Civility**

‘Much more than mere politeness or niceness, adventurous civility honours the difficulty of what it means to be human. It doesn’t ignore the messiness and depths of diversity and difference. Civility, in our world of change, is about creating new possibilities for future living while being different and even continuing to hold profound disagreement.’

President Biden in his inauguration speech spoke of the deep political, cultural, religious and other divides he knows face his administration in the days ahead.

Referring to the U.S. political divide he called for an end to ‘This Un-civil War’ in a speech whose whole tone was utterly civil, yet focussed, purposeful and challenging.

We might even say, ‘Adventurous’, if by that we mean being visionary, breaking new ground, trying something different, being bold, creative, taking risks, being inspired and inspirational; acknowledging and honouring all the problems and disagreements - yet still inviting unity and aiming for the stars.

How do the ‘messiness and depths of diversity and difference’ impinge on your life and the choices you face? How might you/we employ Adventurous Civility to help bring about ‘new possibilities for future living’?

'Guest House' by Jelaluddin Rumi

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.  
  
A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.  
  
Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they’re a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honourably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.  
  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.  
  
Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

Written by Rev Steve Smith, inspired by The On-Being Project <https://onbeing.org/>