

This summer, I was lucky enough to travel to Costa Rica. Do you know where that is? It's in Central America, south of us. What a beautiful country! So much biodiversity – so many different animals and plants – in a country that's only about the size of New Hampshire and Vermont together. I got to spend three days and two nights in the rain forest. It was pretty incredible. A rain forest is basically a kind of jungle, and as the name implies, it rains a lot. Everything is damp and the ground is muddy. There are all kinds of animals – including some snakes and insects – that you want to pay attention to! When I was walking in the rain forest, with tall rubber boots on and a good walking stick, the rain forest and its numerous inhabitants had my full attention. When it started to rain, the paths seemed to wash away from under my feet. Boy, did that get my attention! But in spite of the potential dangers, it is very beautiful in the rain forest. And peaceful in its way, the sounds and smells of the rain forest in particular. And my favorite thing about it? (No, it wasn't that I was the first person to fall down and get all muddy...) My favorite thing was that when you're in the rain forest, you're totally in the moment. You're not thinking about what will happen in a week, or even later that same day. You're thinking about the moment you're in – that's your only concern. And so my three days and two nights in the rain forest were timeless. It didn't seem like a long time; it didn't seem like a short time. It just was. There I was.

Another thing I did this summer was to start kayaking. A kayak is a small boat for just one or two people to sit in and paddle on the water. The kayak I have is a little inflatable one, one that you blow up with air. So you don't want to use it in rough waters with heavy currents or rocks. I use it in lakes and ponds, where the water is more still, and more deep. And the thing I love most about being in my kayak is the same thing I loved about the rain forest. When I'm out in my little inflatable kayak in the middle of deep water, all alone, kayaking is all there is... the only moment that matters is the one I'm in.

The story book that [our Director of Religious Education] read to us earlier was based on a short story by Leo Tolstoy.<sup>ii</sup> Tolstoy was a great writer from Russia who died about 100 years ago. Tolstoy says “that there is only one important time and [it] is Now. The present moment is the only time over which we have [control]”.<sup>iii</sup> This moment, right now, is the most important time – for me, and for each of you. This is our moment.

In that story we heard, we find out that the most important person is always the person that's you're with – the one who is there in this very moment. That's what Leo, the old turtle, tells Nikolei: “The most important one is always the one you are with. And the most important thing is to do good for the one who is standing at your side.” So this is our moment, and nothing is more important than helping each other to have a better morning, and to lead a more beautiful life.

One of the things we can do to make the world more beautiful is to work toward peace. And when I say “peace”, I don't just mean “not at war”. I mean, a state of happiness and fulfillment – a feeling of well-being. That's peace. That's one of the things we'll be thinking about together this year. I was lucky enough to go to the National Peace Academy this summer and participate

in its first ever “Peacebuilding Peacelearning Intensive”, held at Wilmington College in Ohio. While I was there, I learned so much about the “positive peace movement” – that is, ways that we can create states of happiness and fulfillment for ourselves, our families and friends, and everyone really. We talked about big things – how to make our government work better, for instance – but at the heart of it all was really what we learned in today’s story. The moment you’re in will always be the most important one, and helping the people you’re with will always be just about the best thing you can do. If everyone did that all the time, we would have a world of peace, in every sense. It would be life-changing for each of us. It would be world-changing.

It sounds so simple. But how often are we in the middle of one thing, and thinking about another? Right now, I bet some are thinking about watching the Patriots game later today, or whatever else you might do this afternoon. I bet some are thinking about the coming week of school or work or whatever else you might have coming up. It takes practice to focus on the moment you’re in – that is, unless you happen to be in the middle of a rain forest or out in the middle of deep water on a little blow-up kayak. But we can do it. Let’s make it our spiritual discipline for the year, simply to be in the moment. Let’s make it our moral discipline for the year, simply to do good for the person or people we’re with. Let’s make a better world, one moment at a time. And let’s have a great year together, starting with this morning, this moment.

Let us love each other and “this community, where” (in the words of the Rev. Kayle Rice)

“rivers of tears may be shed,  
[this community] Where dry souls are watered,  
Where your joy bubbles,  
Where your life cup overflows,  
Where deep in your spirit you have found ... a home.”<sup>iv</sup>  
Amen, and blessed be.

Let us join together now in our Water Communion.

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<sup>i</sup> This reflection was delivered extemporaneously, but these written remarks are pretty close to what was preached.

<sup>ii</sup> The story was “The Three Questions”, written and illustrated by Jon J. Muth, Scholastic Press, 2002.

<sup>iii</sup> Leo Tolstoy, “Three Questions”, found at <http://www.yuni.com/library/docs/200.html>.

<sup>iv</sup> Kayle Rice, found at the UUA’s “Worship Web” online.