

People Everywhere, In These Times Tennessee Woolf

There is a Zen saying that inspires me. "Everything changes. Everything is connected. Pay attention." That's it. Seven words that hold volumes of wisdom and invitation. They are powerful in their simplicity.

Perhaps you relate. Perhaps you too have stories of how everything changes. In your personal life -- in your relationships, in your job, where you live. In your community -- people coming, people going, groups that can't find their way through conflict, groups longing to make a difference together. Perhaps you relate to everything changing in the world.

It is a common human desire to make sense of change. Most of us know that everything is connected. Not being able to make sense of it all, particularly from our well-trained linear minds, doesn't mean we are without capacity and instinct to recognize deeper connections and webs that string life together. Our bodies and our spirits know things that our brains can't know.

And so it is, that we gather, as friends, to remember our story together and a few key anchors in that story:

People everywhere yearn for connection.

They yearn for belonging. Have you noticed this? Most people know that they belong to a larger kind of family. Blood lines, yes. But also beyond. The neighborhood. The committee. Some see it bigger. The human family. The family of living things. The family that is the universe. I believe humans are coded for connection, predisposed to seek friendship and kinship. Even to seek difference, because it is interesting. I believe we know this coding from our bellies and from our hearts. Yet the world, currently, in many ways, is not structured for those deep connections to occur. Rather, for centuries, we have structured isolation and separation as building block of contemporary society.

People everywhere yearn for friendship.

Not the kind of friendship that is watching the basketball game together. There it that too, and it has its place. But I'm talking about a different kind of friendship. One that involves radical truth-telling to ourselves and to one another. It is radical vulnerability. A willingness to lean into shame, or doubt, or embarrassment and realize that these experiences are not isolated, but widely shared. We lean in to life's evolution together. To be in unknowns together. It is not more surface friendship that people are hungry for. Not friendship that is more appearance and production. The hunger is for more that is stripped back to a center. More that is from less. More that is from the simple core of who we are.

People everywhere yearn for presence.

Presence is a "core competency," language more commonly used in a business setting. Yet its meaning is widely known. An ability that is essential, a skill that is at the crux, a muscular memory central to accomplishing purpose. Like flour is to bread. Like kneading is to preparing it. Core competencies are very utilitarian. They help us get things done. They are things, or steps, that we wouldn't, or couldn't, live without. In professional life. In communal life. In the often fast paced, hyper-connected, ever-changing world, presence, perhaps more now than ever, is most needed. We cultivate it together.

People everywhere yearn for community.

Yet community takes discipline, doesn't it. It takes discipline to share ideas. It takes discipline to create a center, a shared purpose and imagination together, and return to it often. It takes discipline to work through difficulty without collapsing to embarrassingly conciliatory and discouraging consciousness. It takes discipline to find the simple and to stay with it. To not just please each other. To not just fight because it's the easiest thing to do.

So humans gather. To lament. To laugh. To share fears. To reify dreams. To restore memory. To witness together. Most of us know that it is a time to pay attention. We are simply remembering that we do this best together, with friends.

In These Times, Friends Matter

In these times
friends matter,
the people we turn to.
To listen.
To be heard by.
To be seen by.
To see.
To love.
To be loved.

In these times
staying awake matters.
Interrupting the many seductions
of numbness.
It takes discipline, doesn't it.

In these times
dwelling in complexity matters.
Old fixes don't work.
Imposing them more loudly doesn't work.
Waiting.
Listening.
Looking for patterns does.
Welcoming surprise
and union with life itself.

In these times
presence is core competency.
It is the core competency.
We grow it together,
telling stories,
and asking questions.

What matters to you?
What is it like to be you?
What has your attention?
Sometimes even,
What makes sense for us to do now?

In these times
friends matter.
Turn, and turn, and turn again
to one another.

Tenneson Woolf has been an associate and friend to Margaret Wheatley and The Berkana Institute for twenty plus years. He is a practitioner of Circle, World Cafe and other community building forms. His blog posts, articles, and other resources are on his website, www.tennesonwoolf.com.

