

Who Am I? A Person of Hope and Faith
A communion meditation based on the Broadway musical "Annie"
Rev. Jennifer Gingras
August 7, 2019

1 Peter 1:3-7

Thank you Kate and Carrie, that was lovely. You've taken the brave step of being the first vocalists of our summer sermon series, and I'm really grateful to you both!

Many of you know that Little Orphan Annie was a cartoon character in the papers long before she was a Broadway star. The story is set in New York during the Great Depression. The title character is something of a 20th Century American female version of other orphan characters created by Charles Dickens in classic works like *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield*.

The mystery of Annie's abandonment and unknown parenthood as consistent with a strand of mysteries in Dickens' tales. As the story goes, Annie's parents left her at an orphanage because they were unable to feed and clothe her. All she had to remember them by was a half a broken locket and a note saying that they'd return for her someday. And Annie believed with all her heart that they would.

Throughout the show we see how Annie's hope in tomorrow motivates her. Annie's good attitude carries her through the worst abuses and neglect the system could dish out – embodied in the evil Mrs. Hannigan, her brother Rooster and girlfriend Lily. Because of her charm, Annie is selected by personal Secretary Grace to spend a week in the mansion of billionaire industrialist Oliver "Daddy" Warbucks. After a botched kidnapping, Annie's happy ending comes when she is finally adopted. It turns out that Annie and Warbucks both needed someone to love and someone to be loved by. In the end, they found that in each other.

From a young age, I have found this musical inspiring. Sure, it's a little campy and sappy, it both romanticizes poverty and ignores the kind of income disparity which was a factor in the Great Depression. Neither does the musical address any of the complicated issues and abuses of our modern foster care system, or the plight of children separated from their family on our southern border. But I guess there's not much entertainment value in that!

When I was an adolescent just learning my own adoption story, wondering about who I really am, Annie's story meant a lot to me. I watched the 1982 adapted film version on VHS over and over. I felt the character's longing to belong deep in my bones. Annie dared to imagine that everything would all work out well in the end, because there were certainly moments in which I had my doubts. All these years later, this musical is probably one of the many reasons Clark and I first became adoptive foster parents, we want to help children in need of a forever family feel that kind of hope.

Some of us look at tomorrow as another way to avoid living today. Procrastination is a great way to assuage our conscience. I'm really good at this, actually – maybe you are too! We say to ourselves, "I ought to do it, and I will do it, one of these days." And of course, it never ever gets done.

So we say,
I'm going to heal that broken relationship one of these days...
I'm going to break that life destroying habit one of these days...
I'm going to get involved with that important issue one of these days...

But the tragedy of procrastination is that the opportunity may not come again, or if it does it may be too late.

Other people look at tomorrow and see so many problems. It's a hard knock life, right? For these people, the future is a place filled with fear. With every silver lining, they will remind you of the dark cloud. Unable to see the glass half full, they are the 'Yes, But' people. You might say "*It's a beautiful day out today*" and they'll respond "*Yes, but rain is supposed to come by this afternoon*".

When we are afraid, we limit the possibilities so that we can stay safe. We're afraid to trust, because we fear that trust will be betrayed. We're afraid to love, because we might get hurt. There is nothing more inhibiting, limiting or life-denying than living in a consistent state of fear.

Walter Bruggeman wrote in a recent Sojourner's article "*When we are contained in the world that is immediately in front of us, we will inescapably end in despair. The inventory of despair-producers is well known: the failure of public institutions, the collapse of a moral consensus, the failure of political nerve, growing economic inequality and the pervasiveness of top-down violence against the vulnerable. The good news of the gospel is that we need not be contained within that immediate world, and "hoppers" refuse*

to be so contained. Now, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1)¹

We're told in scripture, again and again, things like "Don't be anxious" and "Fear not" and "Let not your heart be troubled" and "Be not afraid". And how we look at the future makes so much of a difference because our vision of the future profoundly affects the way we live and approach our problems (Micro and macro) in the here and now.

What if, like Annie, we looked at the future with hopeful possibility? Whatever our present circumstances might be right now, they do not have the final word. That's what the Apostle Peter was trying to help people understand in today's scripture reading.

Peter knew that the early Christian community had some rough days ahead. Many were going to be persecuted, and some were going to be put to death. Those first century Christians understood that their faith did not spare them from trouble; in some ways it increased them. We can't live very long in this world without getting hurt. Knowing that is just living honestly. But it makes a difference how we see tomorrow, because it shapes how we will live today.

And although the musical "Annie" doesn't really talk about hoping in God or what it means to have faith (at least not in the traditional sense), her outlook seems much like what might be produced if one was to have hope: *"The sun'll come out, tomorrow!"* When we live by faith, even a cloudy, problem filled day is filled for hope for a better tomorrow, and that hope give us new life!

There's a story I heard the other day about a note that a woman living in a WWII concentration camp had written. Apparently, she had stumbled upon some seeds and planted them in the ground. She wrote *"All of the seeds have failed, except for one. I don't know what it is, but I wait for a flower and not a weed."*

Do you hear the hope and in that? Amen.

¹ Sojourners, page 32, Volume 48, July 2019.