

Live and Learn

By Whitney Altopp

This is the phrase that people carry with them into the unknown; into the area of discovery. But what are you learning?

David Bohm, a theoretical physicist of the 20th century, said, "A small truth is where the opposite is false. A big truth is where the opposite is also true."

Small truth- when something or someone dies, that is the end of their life as everyone knows it.
Big Truth- the point where something dies is also the point where something new begins. Death and life exist together.

Small truth- each of us is responsible for our own thoughts and actions, complete unto ourselves

Big Truth- We know ourselves personally while in community. It's in relationship with others that we come to know ourselves as individuals.

Are you learning small truths and stopping there?

If you're using small truths to engage the world, then you'll attempt to keep your world small enough in hopes of feeling content and satisfied.

To venture beyond the familiar is to encounter Big Truths.

When we allow ourselves to enter into the unknown, we discover paradox. We need a construct which can acknowledge the both/and of life.

"Yes. Life ends and new life begins at the same moment."

Sometimes life's moments can be of such a magnitude that we withdraw and pull back, hoping to spare ourselves the work of engaging the paradox; of holding contrasting parts within ourselves.

Consider these examples:

"I was so in love with him. How is it that I despise him to the depths of my being now?"

"This looked like the perfect job when I took it. Now that I know what I know, am I an idiot or are they liars?"

One of the reasons that I love being an Episcopalian is that we recognize, accept, and appreciate the paradox- the Both/And of life.

In the first example: "Of course you were in love with him AND there were parts that you didn't like that you refused to see. Let me teach you how to be unafraid of seeing. Let me show you how to allow yourself to engage with the things that unsettle you so that your love can grow in relationship to those things. By recognizing those things in real time, you'll know when to let go of the relationship, if it comes to that."

In the second example: "Going to extremes with categorizing idiot and liar only puts you in an adversarial relationship with the truth that a little bit of both exists. You're a little bit stupid and

they're a little bit deceptive. Both/And. Because whenever we know what we want we can primarily only see that. We don't see the parts we don't want."

From the Episcopal Church's birth 400 years ago, we have constructed our life so that we can have a soft heart and openness when the magnitude of paradox reveals itself. In the community of faith, strengthened by our faith tradition, allowing ritual to help us move through the complexity and magnitude, we can learn from our life. We learn how to move through the paradox to the openness, joy, and freedom of being human.

Great learning doesn't always require great cost. Religion offers us "wisdom" (Western religious expression) or "skillful means" (Eastern religious expression). These are Big Truths which are the same throughout all time, regardless of place. As Howard Thurman, a Christian pastor who founded and led a multi-racial, multi-religious community in San Francisco in the 1940s, has said, "Something is not true because it's in religion. It's in religion because it's true." By paying attention to the Big Truths, we can live and learn in a gentler way.