

Let it Go: A Homily for *Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins*

Haven't we all been that goblin with our hand stuck in the pickle jar? Haven't we all been held prisoner by our greed one way or another?

It's not just goblins who get stuck like this. Monkeys do too. In parts of India, people catch monkeys with a coconut shell hollowed out and chained to a stake. They put a hole in the coconut shell just wide enough for a monkey's hand and the shell is then filled with rice. When a monkey puts her hand through the hole to grab rice, that handful of rice makes her hand too big to fit back through the hole – just like the goblin with the handful of pickles. The monkey doesn't realize that if she let go of the rice, she would be free,¹ just like the goblin doesn't realize that if he let go of the pickles, he would be free.

And this isn't just about monkeys or goblins, but it is about all of us. We might not literally get our hands stuck in pickle jars and coconuts, but we get ourselves stuck, we become prisoners of our need to hold onto too much.

We fall into thinking that holding onto more will make things better – that if only we had a new job, or a new relationship or a new house or a new toy, we would be happy... and then if we have that new thing, we start grasping again, our hands back to the pickle jar and coconut shell. If we have enough to live on, having more doesn't often make us happy. Even people who win big in the lottery, hundreds of millions of dollars, are happier for only a few months, and then return to their pre-winning happiness level.²

I think this is especially challenging for us to remember this time of year. Kids, how many of you are hoping for something special this holiday season? Maybe some Paw Patrol, Doc McStuffins, Star Wars or My Little Pony? Maybe Frozen legos, a hoverboard, a new gaming system? Adults, are you hoping for a something special too? A tablet, a new piece of jewelry?

What would it mean to let go of that hope for things? To focus this season on the things that matter that can't be held in our hands – the love of family and friends, the beauty of the winter – if winter weather ever really starts here, the commitments to hope and justice and compassion and the search for truth that unite us here at People's Church and unite us with people of goodwill across the world. What would it look like to let go of the parts of ourselves that get awfully close to being a goblin stuck in a pickle jar or a monkey stuck in a coconut?

I have one example of what it looks like to let go of what doesn't matter most. This is a story that I first heard from the Reverend Jane Rzepka, another Unitarian Universalist minister. It is about a woman on the subway in New York City. To understand the story, you need to know that when the doors on the subway close, there is nothing you can do about it. They are closed. No amount of prying or pleading will get those doors open again. The doors close and the subway leaves the station.

¹ Steinke, Peter L. *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 1996. Page 68-69.

² Adams, Susan. 'Why Winning Powerball Won't Make You Happy.' *Forbes*. November 28, 2012. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2012/11/28/why-winning-powerball-wont-make-you-happy/>

So one winter day, a woman was leaving the subway. She looks back over her shoulder and sees one of her leather gloves, her favorite gloves, on the seat where she had been. The doors are starting to close and she realizes that there is no chance for her to run back and grab it. So what does she do? What would you do in that situation? She takes her other gloves, tosses it through the doors as they close, and it lands right next to its mate on the seat. She recognizes in that split second that there is no way that she will get to the glove on the seat. She recognizes in that split second that there is no way for her to enjoy both of her gloves. She recognizes in that split second that if she lets go of her glove, if she throws it through the closing subway doors, someone will enjoy it. Letting go doesn't do anything for her – but it will mean a lot to the stranger who discovers a matched pair of favorite leather gloves waiting for him on the seat.³

And what does it look like for us to throw a glove to make sure there is a pair waiting for someone else? It can look like a lot of things –service, care, love, generosity. We can remember the spirit of these winter holidays – whether the holidays we celebrate the time of year is Hanukkah or Christmas or Yule or one of the many other winter holidays– is not about presents, no matter how much we want them. All of these holidays are about miracle, mystery, and wonder – about the mysteries of light, the mysteries of birth, the mysteries of cycles and seasons, the mysteries of being alive.

So let us all let go.

Let us release ourselves from pickle jars and coconut shells and everything else that might be keeping us prisoner in this season.

Let us celebrate. Let us be free from greed. Let us be generous.

May it be so. May we make it so. Amen.

³ From 'The Glove in the Subway' by Jane Rzepka in *Quest*, Vol. LXIX, No. 5 (May 2014) page 3