

May 21 was Transitions Sunday at UUCO, but transitions happen every day! We thank Katie Lee, 2017 graduate of the University of Mississippi, for permission to share reflections that many of us asked to have in written form. Safe travels, and thanks, to Katie and all our other UUCO members and friends as they move onto their next stage.

"Afraid, and..."

by Katie Lee

Good morning.

Today we honored our graduates. This Sunday, however, has been established to honor many different kinds of transition, whether they transitions of celebration, or of mourning, or in between. Transition offers us times of learning, new potential, and reinvention. Transition can also be a time of uncertainty.

For many of us, transition means doing something or going somewhere strange to us without familiar comforts. Some of us begin transition without clear knowledge of what we are transitioning to. Even of those of us who have this knowledge face some degree of the unknown.

This uncertainty can be frightening. Indeed, there is a psychological theory [1] that suggests that anxiety comes from uncertainty, and that the way to deal with such anxiety is to make peace with it.

One of my favorite quotes is "If you get too worried about what could go wrong, you might miss a chance to do something great. [...] Go. Be great" [2]. It, like most of us, treats fear as an obstacle to be defeated. This makes sense -- as someone with an anxiety disorder, fear is often debilitating. On the other hand, wise people from Franklin Roosevelt to George R. R. Martin have said that courage is not the absence of fear [3], but rather that a person can only be brave when they're afraid [4].

To make peace with fear is to treat it much like this. If you cannot be unafraid, be afraid and brave. And if you cannot be unafraid, be afraid and happy [5].

I invite you to focus on the *and*.

Here is what the *and* tells us. It is that "Life happens wherever we are- whether we make it or not" [6]. If we wait to be unafraid- for a time that is solely security and comfort, or even for more conventional markers, such as graduation, marriage, the end of our mourning, to try and make the life we want happen, then time and opportunity will simply pass us by. Instead, we must start where we are. Use what we have. Do what we can [7]. *And* also tells us to enjoy the space in between. That is, after all, what transition is. Moving in between one thing and another. Rarely to do we take time to be mindful of the little things and the small adventures. Every day is a new day you have never experienced, a personal record for longest time lived. Every day you say a new sentence that has literally never been said before, and you made it.

And tells us that we can do these things and be afraid, and that our fear does not diminish or impede the richness of our lives.

In hindsight, everything is sure to work out one way or another. We must first muddle through to that point. With that comes the uncertainty of happiness that is the topic of this speech. The

same psychological theory I mentioned early suggests that suffering also comes, in part, from a sense of isolation -- that we are the only people to ever have been so uncertain and so worried. And while we are gathered here together, I would like to impart one of the truths of life that I have discovered in my twenty-three years- which is that no one knows what they're doing. We have one-eighth of a plan and seven-eighths of a prayer [8] and we do the best we can. And that's enough.

And so, to end, a recap:

Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.

Life happens wherever you are.

And with worry or without, go. Be great.

Citations

[1] This theory comes from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. I recommend "Things Might Go Terribly, Horribly Wrong" by Kelly G. Wilson and Troy DuFrene. It's a short, DIY, introductory approach to ACT.

[2] Voltron: Legendary Defender : Season 1, Episode 1 : Shiro

[3] Franklin D. Roosevelt's full quote is "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the assessment that something else is more important than fear."

[4] George R. R. Martin's full quote is "Bran thought about it. 'Can a man still be brave if he's afraid?' 'That is the only time a man can be brave,' his father told him."

[5] From Maggie Stiefvater. Full quote is "If you can't be unafraid, Henry said, be afraid and happy."

[6] Avatar The Last Airbender: Season 2, Episode 14 : Iroh

[7] Arthur Ashe

[8] A phrase from Tumblr user dimir-charmer. I found it to be resonant.