

The Avon Theater held a viewing of the documentary *Sacred* last Thursday night. It was an amazing visual journey that travelled the globe and our lifecycle to provide glimpses into the various ways that religious traditions mark time, highlight moments of change, and honor the sacrality of the human and the bond we seek and create with one another and the larger world. Footage shot by over 40 filmmakers around the world was used in an un-narrated film that didn't need the commentary. Rather, the documentary spoke for itself in images, movement, and the natural expression of the events and actors themselves. Needless to say, it is well worth seeing if and when you get a chance. (You can see the trailer at [Sacred](#).)

What is fascinating, in part, about the documentary is the diversity of life that is expressed and the common search for meaning and purpose and connection that runs through all societies, cultures, and peoples. It is a sober reminder that while we may prize or value our place in the world over others, we are, at the core, very much the same. In a paradoxical way, this recognition and acceptance of our commonness is, perhaps, one of the elements that allows the flourishing of creativity, insight, and uncommon acts. While a desire to deny and transcend our ordinariness certainly drives many to achieve, there may be a brilliance that shines brighter and longer when rooted in the recognition of our mortality and mutuality.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that we participate in some macabre or morose self-debasement because we understand our commonality. Indeed, such debasement is often the symptom of an underlying malady of our being where we deny our humanity. *Sacred* was filled with expressions that were quite the opposite. People in the very ordinariness of life expressing the extraordinariness of the moment and being. A comment from the documentary on James Baldwin, *I Am Not Your Negro*, haunts me and underscores the import of our recognition of being. Baldwin, presenting to a group, casually yet poignantly notes, "I cannot be a pessimist, because I am alive."

Which, it seems to me, is the work of thinkers and writers like Baldwin and the function of the religions expressed in *Sacred*: to remind us that we are alive and to mine the meaning of what that entails for each of us individually and collectively. How do we live this one priceless, precarious, painful, and poignant life? This question is at the heart of our rhythmic reflection from week to week and very much informs the flow of our yearly liturgical calendar, placing us near those texts, experiences, and rituals that highlight aspects that are central to life and life lived well.

Of course, to entertain the challenges of thinkers and writers and to engage in the work of any religious tradition, one needs the fortitude to face the truth. Which is already difficult given our penchant to smooth over or hide altogether the blemishes or complexities that meet us in life. Not to mention that the world in which we live provides all sorts of diversions and distractions that allow us to evade the truths we would rather not acknowledge. It goes without saying—but, of course, I am saying it—that this is why such blatant disregard for facts and truth that is playing out in our public discourse these days is so very troubling. It is difficult enough to be honest with ourselves about our reality and that of the world around us. It is bewildering to try and seek the truth with people trafficking in alternative facts.

Obviously, people can say what they would like. It is a free country. However, our ability to live fully into the lives that we have been given depends, in large part, on the ability to be honest about our condition and the world around us. We don't desire pablum. At our core, there is a longing to know the truth. It is no accident that Jesus declares that in knowing the truth, "The truth will set you free." Yes, our ability to not just live but do live free is directly related to this activity of truth-seeing and truth-telling. Furthermore, our ability to peer into and recognize the realities of others—particularly those less fortunate or seemingly *unlike* us or just plain different—depends upon an honest accounting of the world around us and a recognition that in the wild diversity that is our world, we, indeed, are so very much the same. My sense is that fear is at the heart of our denial of so much that is true. May we not give into the fear. Rather, may we live. May we be honest. And in doing so live free.