

Vestry Reflection – Jessica Lombardi  
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For as long as I can remember I have been fascinated with anything related to personal growth, development, habits, and the concept of living into one's full potential. About 8 years ago I decided to act upon this passion and received my certification in Life Coaching from NYU. I am slowly but surely working to gain experience - and confidence, because there really is no better feeling for me than helping to facilitate or support any positive personal change in another person's life – no matter how big or small. The very first thing I learned from my program and the first exercise that my own Life Coach did with me 8 years ago, was something called the "Values Exercise." It is simple enough – you look through hundreds of different "values" and choose the 5 - 8 that really speak to you and embody who you are. They're the ones that you can't imagine your life without because they are just so intertwined into the fabric of your being. The real core of your onion. You then write about each one and define it, elaborating how it feels and what it looks like when you're living in line with that value – like how it shows up. My coach said that people often feel really "yucky" (I think that's the technical term) when they are not living by their values. The exercise was exceptionally powerful for me and provided a simple framework and new lens for identifying and addressing any areas I felt "stuck" or out of sync within my life. Ahhhh of COURSE I don't like working alone in an isolated office job completing the same task over and over again because "connection" and "creativity" are two of my top values. You can see how powerful this information could be. Aristotle said "Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom," and it's hard to disagree.

I also should mention that as I was embarking on this new endeavor in life coaching, 8 years ago, I was newly pregnant with our first son, Albie. My "Mama Bear" instincts were strong, pushing me with a force I had never previously experienced before to get my feelings about life and actions all figured out. I essentially looked long and hard at my life and decided that it was imperative for my health (and my growing future baby's health) to start truly living into my values... I wanted to lead a purely authentic life so that when he arrived I could say to him – "Ta da! Your Mom has her life all figured out and you are joining a completely organized and authentic family with all of our ducks in a row!" Hahaha. I sort of made it my life's mission at that time to sort out those proverbial ducks. As a result of my work, I quit my job, took up a daily yoga practice, taught myself to sew, and created the perfect nursery. I then turned to the large elephant in the room... my Catholic religion.

We had always been a "Cafeteria Catholic" family, happily picking and choosing the parts that applied and ignoring or dodging the aspects that didn't. That had worked for a long time (dare I say hundreds of years for my family) but not so under my newly pregnant and value focused microscope. The gap between my relationship with God and my feelings about my Catholic "religion" had become so wide that I knew it was time to make a hard choice.

This was a value problem that had to be addressed. It was a pretty hard choice at the time and one that my husband and I spent a countless amount of time considering.

The Philosopher Ruth Chang, in her TED Talk titled “How to Make Hard Choices” argues that it is precisely when we’re making hard choices that we become the “authors of our own lives.”

“When we create reasons for ourselves to become this kind of person rather than that we wholeheartedly become the people that we are. The lesson of hard choices? She says “it is here, in the space of hard choices that we have the power to create reasons for ourselves to become the distinctive people that we are. And that’s why hard choices are not a curse, but a godsend.”

Well, here I am with you, at St. Francis, which I also consider a Godsend, and the rest is history.

But not ancient history. A pretty cool thing just happened in my life that caused me to reflect on that values exercise and that “hard choice” that brought me here to St. Francis. A moment in time that I’ll never forget, that brings this entire experience full circle for me.

It was 6am on a Sunday morning very recently when my younger sister Paige texted me and asked if I could talk. I can always talk, but I can especially always talk when someone’s request sounds urgent. I have always felt more like a mom to her, because of our 16 year age difference, and of course my mind was racing with possible worries. She called a minute later, and I could immediately feel her bubbling positive energy pour through the phone. Phew, I thought, this is a good news call. Then she told me that she had just figured out that she was gay! And I’ll never forget the next sentence out of her mouth – “THERE’S NOTHING WRONG WITH ME AFTER ALL!!

Well, the truth is I felt overjoyed and beyond excited. She had made a huge discovery about herself. And then my whole body just melted into my bed and a love came rushing over me like relentless waves on a rocky pier. This perfect child had felt something was wrong with her. Dear God, please and thank you. Thank you for right now. In that vulnerable moment I felt so close to her and God, and so close to the purest form of love that exists... the unconditional kind. This must be how God feels about us at all times.

And the next thing that happened was love and gratitude for my own values and conviction and for the life I had “authored” long ago. I had unknowingly planned and prepared my life years prior, for such a monumental moment as this. In that minute my “hard choice” to join a faith community built upon acceptance and inclusion had proven to be more critically important and personal than I ever could have known. I didn’t have to worry about saying or doing any “right” or “perfect” thing in that moment. It was done. She knew how I felt because I lived it. There was no question of my unconditional love, acceptance, support, and excitement.

I know this was a long and circuitous journey – much like the last 8 years themselves, but the interesting thing that I have found in becoming crystal clear about my values is that the “hard choices” simply don’t feel that hard anymore.