

Message for 8-24-25

Shared by Rev. Ken Heintzelman

We are familiar with the idea that we have an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other. The idea is that they are whispering in our ear, trying to influence us. Is it a problem if we are deaf in one ear?

The idea is that we have in ourselves competing natures. The meme, where one is represented by an angel and the other by a devil, promotes the notion that one is bad and the other is good. Sometimes this is true because there are some people who all they want is to watch the world burn down around them. While this is true and evil is real, I also think it is rare.

The suffering of millions of people is not caused by the choices of those people. It is caused by the selfish and fearful decisions of a few who want to preserve their power. The problem is not the number of destructive people. The problem is that many people follow the destructive path due to their own fear.

I want to offer a different perspective that requires a deeper discernment. There is no an angel and devil sitting on your shoulders. There are many times when there are two angels. There are many times when we must discern between two goods.

We can be at a crossroads, and a decision is required of us. The choice may not be obvious. At this point, we would like to gather more information. Getting more information might show the way forward or tip the scales. As an analytical blowboater thinker, this is often my default setting. This does not always work. Sometimes, more information can lead to more quagmire. Let me offer another way to discern, which I have been doing with you for a long time.

We can have a challenge laid out before us, and we can look at it as a technical challenge or as an adaptive challenge. The same situation. The same set of circumstances. The same people.

A technical challenge can be solved with existing knowledge and expertise. An adaptive challenge requires new knowledge, new expertise, and changes in behavior. The thing about an adaptive challenge is that the knowledge and expertise may not exist yet. In adaptive challenges, we may have to make it up as we go. We may have to build the plane while we are flying.

Technical challenges are problems that can be clearly defined, and solutions are straightforward and predictable. For example, fixing a flat tire on your car. If you're unsure how to do it, there are people out there with the knowledge and skills to help.

Adaptive challenges are different. Adaptive challenges are complex and have yet to be defined because they are still playing themselves out. They require new learning, changes in behavior, and the involvement and collaboration of multiple stakeholders to develop solutions.

I see a lot of videos on social media about weight loss and getting healthier. They appeal to us by offering tests, suggesting we take this supplement, or advising us to stop eating these three foods. They are offering overly simplistic technical solutions to the adaptive challenge of getting healthier.

Let me give another example that fits Shadow Rock. We miss seeing 30-40 youth sitting on this side of the church. We grieve the loss of those days. This is a challenge. The technical solution involves copying the churches with a high number of youth. This means giving them a space for their own worship service, their own band, and their own leaders. It means dedicating hundreds of thousands of dollars to

dynamic programming and undertaking exciting mission trips. It also means adopting some of their theology as it may be the proper theology at that time in their spiritual and cognitive development.

We cannot do that. Instead, we brought adaptive solutions to the challenge. We recognized that we do not want a youth ministry for the sake of gaining their presence with us. We wanted a youth ministry because we recognized that youth needed to be ministered to. Given the challenges they face and where they are in their own development, we launched Our Whole Lives, OWL. We offered them and their families an experience of education and spiritual formation around the idea that youth needed and wanted guidance when it came to the issues of their sexuality. For several years, we had 20-30 children and youth in our space. Not the space in the pews but under our roof and under our care. We offered a life-saving adaptive solution.

This is where we are as a congregation. We are facing the adaptive challenge of our future. There are technical solutions for some challenges, but our most significant challenges require new knowledge, new expertise, and new behavior to meet a challenge we do not yet fully understand.

This is why the governing board and several teams have worked hard to imagine the future, understand our challenges, and develop a new staff configuration that meets our organizational needs, our pastoral needs, and builds in some flexibility on the cost of the pastoral position, given our priorities, core values, vision, and mission. A collaborative effort is required to bring adaptive solutions to our current adaptive challenges.

Cameron Trimble shares a story that is well known among Indigenous communities across the Americas. It's been passed down through generations—not as a warning, but as a promise.

The story tells of two great birds: the Eagle and the Condor.

The Eagle comes from the North, carrying the gifts of the mind—rational thought, technology, strategy, and vision. It flies high, fast, with a clarity that cuts through confusion. The Condor comes from the South, carrying the gifts of the heart—intuition, feeling, embodied wisdom, and connection to the sacred. Its flight is slower, its presence closer to the ground, its knowledge drawn from silence and ceremony.

For hundreds of years, the prophecy says, the Eagle would dominate the skies. The world would be shaped by intellect and invention, but at a cost. The more we prized progress, the more we severed our relationship with the land, with one another, and even with ourselves. As the Eagle flew higher, the Condor was nearly forgotten. But the story doesn't end there.

The prophecy also tells of a time when the Eagle and the Condor would fly together. A time when the world, exhausted by imbalance, would begin to remember that the mind and the heart were never meant to be split apart. That time, some elders say, is now.

All of creation is living in a moment between stories. We feel the ache of what's breaking—ecological collapse, political unraveling, the erosion of truth and trust. But beneath the despair, there is a more profound longing—a longing for home, for kinship, for a life that makes sense not just in our minds, but in our hearts and in our bones. We are aching not only because things are falling apart, but because we remember—somewhere inside—that things could be different. We remember the past when life seemed simpler, and we hope for the future.

This moment calls us to become something more whole than we have been. We are not to discard the gifts of the Eagle, but to temper them with the wisdom of the Condor. We should not retreat into nostalgia or cynicism, but live as if balance were still possible. Because it is.

To walk with both wings is not a metaphor. It is a way of being in the world. It is a way of seeing every policy, team, committee, every prayer, every act of love or protest, as part of the great remembering and the great hope. We are not here simply to mourn what is dying and try to resuscitate the past. We are here to help midwife what is being born.

Perhaps we do not have to choose between two goods. We can bring the condor and the eagle into our work. Let us become people who remember the prophecy—not as myth, but as a mandate. Let us become a discerning people who refuse to give up on the future, because the future has not given up on us.

The sky is still vast enough for both wings. Our challenges are vast enough to apply both kinds of solutions, but let's apply them appropriately to the right challenges.