

Recommended Viewing

"Junior", starring Arnold Swarzenegger, Emma Thompson, and Danny DeVito. Though presented as a comedy, I found the movie quite poignant and profound in its treatment of Life, relationships, and the unpredictable changes both of these can include.

While the scientific discussion could be quite distracting, the real value of this movie in my opinion is to be found in the lessons of empathy, understanding, and open-mindedness. It is not so much a question of what happens as the story unfolds, but rather of how each of the individuals is confronted with unique challenges to love in new and different ways than they ever have before. The triumph of the movie is that they succeed in doing so and simultaneously find a much larger definition of themselves.

The questions that remain, however, are whether the world will ever understand and how they will go forth to live in a world which may in fact have less ability to understand than men have to be pregnant. Perhaps, as seems to have been the case with so many other anomalies throughout history, they will never fully understand how to go forth and live in such a world until after they have done so.

While it is true that there are many things we share and many ways in which comparing experiences is very helpful, it remains that in its specific details, every life is without precedent; every life is a moment to moment invention. The quickest and easiest way to sabotage the new creation, is to demand and perhaps even to force it to conform to some societally dictated pattern rather than its own God-given self. How very often this has been done with the best intentions!

The doctors and scientists within this movie somehow knew that it was absolutely essential that they listen to the life that was unfolding and provide whatever it needed, even if that meant hiding within a health resort for pregnant women for the last two months of the pregnancy. Somehow gender had to take second place to personhood, if a new life was to be successfully brought into the world.

For us, perhaps each and every day in ways almost too tiny to notice, gender, race, orientation, religious background, age, disability, and a dozen other things must take second place to personhood, if the new life that humanity so desperately needs, is to be successfully brought into the world. Love must rise above it all and lift us to a better way of being than we have so far succeeded in practicing.

Perhaps the most obvious lesson of the movie regarding this process, is that it is rarely comfortable, rarely convenient, and rarely without some sort of cost. Indeed the entire venture would have failed if any of those directly involved had been unwilling to be exactly that: very involved, willing to pay the cost, willing to accept the inconvenience and even the pain inherent within the process.

So what I want to know, is just how exceptional is this young lady going to be when she grows up, considering the exceptional love and dedication and creative vision which will surround every day of her formative years. It could be one incredible sequel.

Subscription Information:

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Sister Who's Perspective

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Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding. Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed. Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified. Blessings, love, and peace to you.
---Sister Who

Autumn Leaves

It is curious, I think, that of all the seasons, Autumn is more often than not the most brief and is also the only season with two names: Autumn and Fall. What a strangely negative nickname for such a beautiful and peaceful season.

Perhaps it is because it is quite specifically a season of transition and changes are nearly always difficult, to some degree or other. When we do move through changes, it is nearly always a case of being either pushed from behind by some circumstance or greater force or else drawn toward some vision of life we may glimpse or imagine to exist, somewhere on the other side of the transition's struggles. Rarely is it a case of simply moving consciously along the next segment of our lifepaths, but by traversing Life in this way, we miss the beauty of the transition itself.

Trees' leaves change color, not because the tree is dying but rather because it is preparing for a restful quiet period in its life during which roots will continue to grow in hidden places of which we are quite unaware.

In some ways, Autumn is a time for celebrating a specific kind of change, a change which holds at its core the essences of deepening into one's self, of deepening into one's roots, of deepening into the earth which offers sustenance and support to every living thing on this planet. It is therefore perhaps more accurately described as being one of the year's rites of passage.

Autumn is also a time for gratitude, most especially for those simple things it is so easy to take for granted. I could not help but wonder, as I reflected upon the possible end of the world during the last few weeks, at how sad it would be if there were suddenly no more trees, no more mountains, no more brilliantly painted sunsets, no more billowing clouds

dancing in the wind.

If that is simply the unavoidable future of this planet, however, then I am very glad and grateful to have been blessed with being here to see and experience all of it before it was swept away. If eventual separation from my lifepartner was unavoidable from the first day we met, then I am glad and grateful for the nine years of wonderful memories we were able to craft together and that we remain friends.

I remember a time when I was in second or third grade in elementary school, when the teacher lead all of us around the neighborhood and instructed us to collect one example of as many different kinds and shapes of leaves as we could. When we returned to the school, we then did rubbings of the leaves, using plain white paper and crayons, positioning the leaves in interesting and sometimes overlapping ways beneath the paper. The rubbings, I realized, could last for years, even decades. The leaves would be gone before springtime returned again.

Often during the last few weeks and months of struggling to stay focused and continue my preparation for participation in the sixth international Gay Games in Sydney, Australia, I have found strength by reviewing movies from my collection of videotapes and realized (or was reminded) of how important it is to remember and recall the stories that give us hope and insight, just when the world seems to have gone completely and irretrievably insane.

There have been many other times when the world seemed to have gone completely but (thankfully) temporarily insane and for those who saw and understood what was happening, it was a time of great anguish. Yet they survived and often were the ones to tell the stories by

which the world once more healed itself.

The movies are the leaf rubbings, dramatically revealing the patterns, the lifelines, by which the tree of humanity was, is, and will be nurtured; boldly making visible the wisdom by which I can face, work through, and overcome whatever struggles the present moment supplies to me. In most cases, strength increases through the ministry of the struggles as well, but this is something more properly appreciated afterwards rather than during the struggles. In the latter moments, my attention is more likely to be focused upon simply surviving, upon doing whatever is necessary to get through the experience in a positive way.

Of late, I have been rereading, a few pages at a time, Scott Peck's book, *The Different Drum*. I have most noticed, this time around, how the very difficult challenge of emptying one's self of expectations is essential to any true progress or healing. It's as if we must let go of our dreams in order for them to find the strength to fly.

In another book I read many years ago, *Tramp for the Lord* by Corrie TenBoom, the author, a Dutch survivor of a World War II Nazi death camp, remarked, "I try to hold things loosely because it always hurts so much when God has to pry my fingers open."

So I strive to be like a tree, putting out new leaves when Spring is in the air and letting them float into the wind when Autumn's face appears. Sometimes I manage to do this with relative grace, casting brilliantly colored leaves and dancing seeds into the wind like the Maple tree. At other times I stumble along more like the Pin Oak, holding onto brown curled remnants of summer long after Winter has wrapped the world in its snowy mantle.

And again I strive to be like a tree, standing tall, seemingly oblivious to the range of things that land at my feet. One day may see a careless irresponsible person leaving a bit of garbage behind as they wander on their way. Another day may see a weary traveler stopping for a moment to rest. On yet another day, a children's picnic might unfold in the shade at the bottom of my trunk.

Through it all, the tree stands and grows, not in the least discouraged by

humanity's treachery toward each other. I suppose it is especially because of evil in the world that it is all the more important to shine, share, and create whatever beauty in Life one can create. What greater answer to evil can there be than to do something good and thereby prove that it is neither as omnipotent nor even as successful as it may claim to be?

This is perhaps the most beautiful and deeply hidden treasure of Autumn, that the brilliant rainbow of leaves so often mistaken for the death of the earth's fertility is in fact simply the cocoon from which the next Spring will burst forth to bless the world.

The Autumn leaves then are the weavers in the wind of the invisible chrysalis of Spring. To use another metaphor, Autumn is the dress Cinderella wore to the ball, followed by the Winter of the Prince's search for her and the eventual rebirth of Spring when he found her again at last.

For us, the seasons are also repeated, over and over, according to whatever pace the events of our individual lives dictate. As with the more obvious seasons of the natural world, we can move in either harmony or discord with their greater Life-encompassing rhythms.

To the extent that we learn to move in harmony with our own seasons, I suggest that we will also find ourselves moving in harmony in many ways with that which is truly God, who is the conductor of the orchestra which plays all of Life's music.

I maintain, as I think I always have, that there is within each of us a divine spark from which comes the unique music of all of our best qualities and the purest essence of our divine purpose for being here in this time and place.

All too often our leaves are killed by an early frost before their brilliant colors are revealed. They fall to the earth a mottled combination of brown and green and are quickly trod into the mud beneath hundreds of passing feet.

Love is the miracle, however, which we can share with each other and thereby accomplish a more brilliant Autumn.

Seasonal Migrations

Without words or any sort of specific instructions, the entire flock began to rise into the air and fly away with the morning sun warming their left shoulders. The young gander felt the strange compulsion also, if only for the very first time.

Some laughed at them and derided them for always moving in circles, for not following a single line of progression toward a specific ultimate goal. The whole venture was futile, they would insist, because the flock always wound up exactly where it started.

But the flock had an intimate understanding of the places along their route which those more prone to judgmental criticism did not. They understood also how essential it was to help each other along the way, each taking a turn at carving a path through the cold thin air, high above the earth.

As if with one mind, when the sun's light had passed to the opposite shoulder, they would descend to a nourishing resting place to wait for the dawn again. Then it was back to the air again, as hills and plains and mountains and rivers passed by far below.

Fathers and grandfathers, mothers and grandmothers and sisters and brothers and cousins, working together but making no great attempts to control each other in any detailed or authoritarian way.

The young gander felt his own individuality and knew of others who'd not survived to make this present journey, whether shot by hunters or killed by stray dogs or lying still in some field for some other reason. There really was a sort of joy in the sensation of wind passing beneath his wings, of feeling the wetness of a lake or the softness of muddy shores under his feet at the end of the day.

There was a sort of joy in feeling his hunger subside as he filled his belly with delicious seeds and grasses. There was a distinct comfort in feeling the warmth of others next to him, as they all settled down to sleep for the night. There was even a sort of holy blessedness in being exactly and completely what he was, without any pretensions or illusions of being anything else.

Arriving in a place which for him at least was completely new and unexplored, he felt a little uneasy. Not so much frightened as simply unsure of himself, he sampled new flavors of seeds and grasses, quite different from those which had surrounded the first months of his life. It was all good, he decided at last; different, but good in its own way.

Just when he was beginning to quite accustomed to this new place, to his new diet, and to the more restful way of life here, the flock again rose into the air and began heading in the opposite direction.

Perhaps this was what those who'd mocked them had meant, when they spoke of the flock moving in circles. He'd not really even known what a circle was, when he'd first heard that comment. They seemed to be headed back to the familiar places of his childhood and he looked forward to returning to the safety and security he'd felt there under the watchful eye of his parents and other relations.

But the field was not as he'd remembered it. Instead of welcoming grasses, the earth had been carved into long rows of rounded dirt, almost to the very shores of the small lake. A few miles away, a better field was found which had been similarly uninviting the year before but was now filled with all sorts of tender budding grasses.

Although it was not exactly the same, it was close by and seemed to have all of the same good qualities of the field and the pond he remembered. He settled down with the others for the night, knowing that he could certainly have gone to the same field in which he was born, but that if he had, he'd still be hungry at this moment instead of satisfied.

The days grew longer and warmer and again the flock seemed to have settled in for good. It was certainly a lot less work than all that traveling had been.

In the natural order of things, the young gander found a mate for himself and they soon had their own brood of goslings to watch over, to teach to fly, and to release to the greater care of the flock when the time came.

There were still occasional tragedies, due to the ongoing presence of predators of all kinds, but Life seemed to roll along smoothly in spite of whatever setbacks occurred. It was only in the moment-to-moment measuring of experiences that he could find more reason to be afraid of whatever might happen in the future.

The greatest joy of all, however, he found in simply being himself and making as positive contribution to life around him as he could. Perhaps someday the fields would no longer be there at all--which was clearly something over which he had no control--but until then he would savor every moment, sing as he could, and fly through the sunlight as other creatures could not.