

Karen Bellacosa preached on 7/30/23

Only connect...

Only connect is the epigraph to *Howards End*, E.M. Forster's 1910 novel, written in a time that bridged the enormous cultural gap between authors of the Victorian era and Modernist writers of the 20th century. I studied it as part of A level English at school...and even though I hated school and exams ...I always thought of *Howards End* with great affection.

The novel concerns a house... *Howards End*, and the relationships that develop between the Schlegel and the Wilcox families. While the former is devoted to art and the imagination, the latter are dedicated to business and imperialism. Forster was also trying to impart his anguish of the impact that the increasingly technological age was having upon people and their environments.

Long before the movie of the book was made, I envisioned the house *Howards End* as being like the stone, slightly scary old house, and garden of one of my great-Aunts. Much later when the film of the book came out in 1992, the house was much grander, but the location on an unpaved road in a rural area on the outskirts of a sprawling city was the same.

On the first page *Ruth Wilcox*, the family matriarch is described in a letter from Helen Schlegel to her sister Meg, having been seen from her window walking alone through the garden and meadow early in the morning, her long dress trailing wetly through the dew-soaked grass, lost in thought and communion with nature.

To this day, when I cross my small lawn to fill the bird feeder early in the morning, I think of that description and imagine the shushing sound Mrs. Wilcox's silk gown made as she walked. I am also transported back to my Aunt's garden, as well as to my time studying and living in the pages of the book as a teenager. Three moments in time strung together by the slenderest of threads.

Something about this entrancing and romantic description really resonated with me as a teenager. I badly wanted this to be me, out in the morning after the night before, in a long trailing ball gown and wellies collecting still warm chicken eggs for breakfast with the rising sun. Sadly, this has never happened.... well, I have collected eggs, though not in a ball gown.

But beyond the novel itself, the two simple words *only connect* from the frontispiece have resonated as a constant in my life, I'm not sure why, but they often popped into my head, I murmur them to myself occasionally and they have been comforting.

The extract is taken from the following statement when Margaret Schlegel is musing how to help her future husband Henry Wilcox reconcile his life.

"Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer."

Connection is a word used a lot now. Brene Brown talks marvelously about courage, compassion, and connection in her book *The Gifts of Imperfection*. I'm sure many of you may have heard her Ted Talk, she's talking about the scientific research of shame, but her openness and vulnerability are so moving as well as funny, we can easily connect to her because we share the same human emotions.

For me it's always been about stories. Our stories connect us to others and place markers in time through the descriptions of events and the images we create in our minds. The best of these can convey such awe and wonder that they live within for our entire lives.

My Dad and Mum died less than three months apart from each other at the end of 2019. My Dad who had always been very healthy, died very suddenly on October 12th and then my Mum who had had Alzheimer's died from a fall just after Christmas. It was a very difficult time, between clearing out their house and traveling back and forwards to Canada and worrying about my Mum.

I finally got back home after driving from Canada totally exhausted on New Year's Eve. My sister, brother and I had finished clearing out their house just after Thanksgiving and I was finally bringing the last of their furniture that they had originally brought from England when they moved. I had always loved this mid-century furniture, but it was all in a sorry state.

On New Year's Day very early in the morning I was checking my email as I had coffee, there was the daily blast from The Centre for Action and Contemplation, this was a special New Year's message titled.

"Moving Forward by Looking Back."

It was a lovely piece inspired by Shane Claiborne about building the new from the old, about God restoring all things. I casually thought that's a nice message and began to get on with my day.

I wanted to make a start on figuring out what to do with the furniture that was piled everywhere. I decided to check the Ercol website for a cleaning recommendation. After a little noodling about, I found they had some facsimile catalogues from the time my Mum and Dad bought their furniture in the late 60's. Very retro cool.... The catalogue cover even had a picture of their sideboard complete with a cartoon Spokes-Lion! The Ercol Lion!

A few pages into the PDF.... the heading on the page jumped out at me... "The Ercol Lion looks back to go forwards."

I sat and looked and for maybe a minute I was completely stunned. I felt the hair on the back of my neck stand on end and I just sat and tears began to roll down my face.

After my parents died, I felt nothing but numbness and despair at the hole that was left, a deafening silence and no comfort. But I found that repairing and restoring the furniture formed a basis to heal that lost space in my life.

Carl Jung came up with the term Synchronicity to describe the principle that he believed served as a connection between seemingly meaningful coincidences, that cannot possibly be causally linked. For example, you think of a friend you haven't seen for years and suddenly out of the blue they contact you.

I think the clue here is the word meaningful. We most often encounter experiences like this during times of intense emotion or major life transitions or stress, while these things may seemingly have no causal connection, they often offer a sense of deep meaning to those who experience them.

For a while now I have been struggling with some major changes I want to make in my life. As part of this I have been exploring several new things and ideas, one of which is being part of a study group, this summer discussing the gospel of John. Actors are reading the passages in a slow dramatic way, creating a contemplative mood. When,

"All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made."

was spoken, I felt an instant feeling of recognition flooding me, not for the words, which I have heard many times in my life, but in the meaning.... Of course, we have always all been connected! I knew it to be true in a way I had never felt before. It was a remembering. I realised the words only connect have been a signpost in my life, back to knowing and oneness.

As John said in his first letter "I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, I am writing to you here because you know it already"! 1 John 2.21

And as Julian of Norwich observed.

"The love of God creates in us such a oneing that when it is truly seen, no person can separate themselves from another."

So now when I think of connection, I feel this knowing and oneness.

I believe as humans, our time on Earth is to be used reconnecting.

Connecting past and present.

To connect to all other humans, no matter how different we may find them, with compassion, through our common experiences.

To connect our way of living and using resources, with the impact it has on everything surrounding us in the natural world.

And finally our connection to the Divine whole.