

EXPLORATION (from 10/18/15 Sundown Celebration)

By Mike Ludwick

When I was 16 years old and got my driver's license, I was very fortunate that my parents had a car for me to drive. It was the car I was brought home from the hospital in after I was born: a 1969 Oldsmobile Cutlass convertible. My parents had kept the car going for me so I could drive when the time came. That car was amazing. It had a powerful V-8 engine, maybe too strong for a boy of 16, and it meant freedom. My then girlfriend, now my wife, and I used to ride with top down all the time, letting the wind blow through our hair. Yes, there was a time when I had pretty good hair! Even when it started to get too cold, we sometimes would still put the top down and then turn on the heater. It truly was a dream machine.

But after I graduated college and we got married, the car started having trouble. We didn't have much

money and I didn't know enough about cars to fix it myself and it needed a new engine. As great as the car was, I thought I needed to let it go. So I sold it. I let it go. But I never really have let it go. Yes, now and then I kick myself for selling it. But even beyond that, I've not let go of the memories. I can still recall the times spent in that car and that time in my life, and it makes me smile. While I had to let go, I didn't totally have to let go.

Now it's one thing to let go of a car. It's another to let go of a dream, an idea, a pet, a person. Letting go is hard. I guess we all figure out how to deal with it our way. It may involve some kind of emotional release. Unfortunately our culture has sent the message, particularly to men, that an emotional release, like crying, is not acceptable. That said, when my wife and I left our daughter at college for the first time, as we drove home I blubbered for hours.

I finally started to settle down and then a song came through the car stereo by Brother Sun (a band some of you may know since they have played here in the sanctuary a couple times). The song was called "Sad". And it goes like this: *Well I'm sad, so sad, and I'm tired so tired, and I'm hungry so hungry, there's a hole in my soul. And it swallows me up, and pulls me into the darkness. There's a hole in the center of me. There a hole in the center of me.*

Guess what happened? Yes I started blubbering even harder! That song shows how music can intensify a feeling you already have. Sometimes if we're down we need to go deeper into that feeling, and music can help us feel and express pain we may not be able to feel or express otherwise, and help us with the process of letting go.

Fortunately for me in that situation, my wife was there to help me. She suggested we stop by one of our favorite places, the Washington DC Zoo, that we used to visit frequently when we lived in Northern Virginia. Letting go can require help and it is important that if you need help, you get help. I encourage you to reach out to family and friends, reach out to someone in this congregation. That person may not be able to help directly, other than providing a listening ear (though that may be enough), but they may be able to help you find resources that can help you. It's what being part of a beloved community is all about.

Finally, the quote that is being projected behind me. Let's say it together:

May I have the courage to let go of the things I need to

The strength to hold on to the things I need to,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

It's an adaptation of the Serenity Prayer that many of you may be familiar with and it has been on my mind a lot lately. As I've spoken with many people in the congregation I've heard them express the importance of balance between holding on and letting go. Some people are too busy and need to let go of commitments.

Some people are having problems with a relationship and are struggling with letting go and holding on. Some people are considering letting go of their jobs for new ones. How do we get that wisdom to know the difference, and how do we know we made a good decision about letting go or holding on in any particular situation? We not know right away. We may not know for years. We may never know. We are all making the best decisions we can, at the time we make them, with the information we have.

May we be gentle with ourselves, as we search our hearts and minds, and seek out each other and

other friends and family and professionals if needed for wisdom, when we make these decisions. And may, one day, I get that convertible back (or something like it)! Blessed be.