

Affirmation

Given by Bruce Bendix

March 23, 2003

Good Morning,

I read this week that moments after a bomb blast, there is a short, but terrifying period when, according to survivors, you lose all sense of direction. Similarly, I wondered during these weeks' events if it was even appropriate for me to give my affirmation this morning. But perhaps now, it is even more important to regain our direction and reconnect with what we all personally believe. I hope that by sharing my affirmation, that you too will feel better grounded in your beliefs.

I will give you the quick version of my religious background. I attended Mormon Sunday School in Southern California until I was about 11 years old. This was the religious background of my mother's side of the family. When my family moved to Chicago we became less active and I really had no formal church affiliation until I met Peyton. Peyton was raised an Episcopalian and I agreed to be married in the Episcopal Church. We stayed there until we found that we both wanted a church that allowed us to explore our spirituality that led us here about 2 years ago.

As for my personal beliefs, I am basically an agnostic. I believe that the cosmos is infinite and that my brain and the time I have on this earth is finite and therefore I will never know the ultimate truth.

But at the same time I am in awe of the unknown. Joseph Campbell said "Awe moves us forward" and if we excuse the unfortunate use of this word to describe this week's bombing, this might be my closest synonym to God.

I do believe there are higher levels of insight and multiple paths to gaining that insight. Although I love science, it alone cannot provide complete understanding because there is a reality beyond the external world.

I am open to accepting all sorts of fantastic possibilities. Worm holes, multiple universes, and communication with spirits, possibilities that others

might dismiss. We will never understand it all. It is for that reason that I love a church that appreciates the mystery of the unknown.

I do not believe ethical living depends on theology and so my agnosticism does suggest that I do not have firm ethical principles. In fact, it is frightening today that world leaders and terrorists alike suggest that God is exclusively on their side. I agree with Desmond Tutu when he once described “Religion as amoral”

So, then, what grounds me day to day and provides purpose in my life? What can I truly affirm?

Ultimately, I believe my life is about fostering authentic loving relationships with myself, my family and the world at large. This is my trinity.

I believe authentic love with oneself is fundamental to loving relationships with others. I believe self-knowledge is the font of true wisdom and that contemplation and meditation help us understand and accept our true selves. When Jesus said, “Love thy Neighbor as Thyself”, I believe he implied that we need to love ourselves too, if we are too love our neighbor.

My family is my crucible for developing my love for others. Peyton, my wife of 19 years is the most important person in my life. She is my sole mate and I love her deeply. And if nobody remembers anything in what I am saying this morning but one thing, I want to publicly affirm my deep love for her.

My two children, Will and Jamie are of course very dear to me. I try to show my love for them by fully accepting their unique and beautiful individuality and through gentle coaching and personal example, enhance their ability to be happy and fulfilled adults.

I seek to have authentic, loving relationships with my people in this congregation, my coworkers, my clients, and the broader community. My life’s work is working with companies to foster more effective relationships with their sales and service partners. I have found that with a win-win spirit of abundance, that there is far more that can be collectively gained than under the win-lose paradigm of greed and selfishness.

When I pass from this life, I would like no further tribute than for people to say that I had many loving, authentic relationships with others as best captured by Emerson's definition of success:

To laugh often and much;

To win the respect of intelligent people and affection of children

To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends

To appreciate beauty

To find the best in others

To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition;

To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived

This is to have succeeded.