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Arlington Street Church
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Turn It Up!

Two of my colleagues sent me the same 3-minute video this week with the same message: “Watch this,” they said, “because it’s such a relief to cry happy tears.”

Produced by TV2 Denmark, it opens with people walking onto a stage in small groups. The narrator says, “It’s easy to put people in boxes. There’s us, and them. There’s the homeowners, and those just barely getting by. There’s those we trust, and those we try to avoid. There’s the new Danes, and those who’ve always been here. The people from the countryside, and those who have never seen a cow...” As the narrator continues, we see teenagers. A man in a bright orange suit. Dancers. An old man wearing suspenders. A soccer team. Women in nurses’ uniforms, and a woman in a doctor’s coat. A young man in a Red Sox cap. A little boy. A woman in hijab.

And then the voice of an announcer, speaking in Danish, says he’s going to ask some questions, and asks the assembled to participate honestly in a “fishbowl” exercise. He begins, “Who here was the class clown?” A little raucously, apparently diverse people step into the middle, and everyone is smiling.

“Who are stepparents?” A tattooed man with huge muscles joins a man in a tweed jacket; a woman in jeans stands next to a man in a bowtie.

“We who love to dance.... We, who’ve been bullied ... and we who’ve bullied others.” People make their way to the center. The little boy begins to weep. “We who are broken hearted. We who are madly in love. We who feel lonely.” Courageously, people step forward.

“We who are bisexual.” A young man with shoulder-length blond hair steps into the middle and stands alone. For a moment, it’s very quiet. And then, spontaneously, everyone begins to applaud him.

“And we,” says the announcer, “who acknowledge the courage of others.”

“And then there’s all of us,” he concludes, “who just love Denmark.” Now they are stepping toward each other, shaking hands, embracing – all of them, reaching across the visible differences to the invisible.

And yes, with them, I am weeping tears of joy.

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What do you want to amplify in your life? How are we called to turn it up and take up more space with goodness?

Thanks to Sharran Hariry for sharing an article by George Lakoff. Professor Lakoff, a cognitive linguist, teaches that the metaphors we live by are very powerful. For example, he says, both conservatives and liberals think about our relationship to government through a metaphor of family: Conservative voters embrace a “strict father” metaphor; progressive voters subscribe to a “nurturing parent” metaphor.¹

And when we disagree with one another, rather than thinking of it as sharing ideas or even intellectual debate, unconsciously, we tend to fall into the trap of thinking of argument as war: He *won* the argument. Her claims were *undefensible*. Their criticisms were *right on target*. They *shot down* all my points.

Being aware of the metaphors we live by while communicating good ideas is a great tool in amplifying goodness. Here are George Lakoff’s three directives:

First, undermine lies, keep repeating the truth, and stay positive. If you hear something ugly, or false, don’t repeat it. Instead, “go positive.” The best ideas are positive not negative; proactive not reactive² ... and these ideas need to be communicated out loud, every day, in public.

¹ This is a simplification of his work as put forth in George Lakoff, *Moral Politics* (1996).

² Please see chelseagreen.com/elephant

Second, consider how an issue is framed. How can we reframe it? “Go beyond the typical laundry list of facts, policies, and programs and present a clear, moral vision” of vintage American ideals that upholds citizens’ wellbeing and freedom.³ Start with values. For example, to amplify the “nurturing parent” metaphor, we can speak about the power of empathy: citizens caring for other citizens and working through our government to provide public resources for everyone. In a time when the government is committed to privatization and to eliminating funding from most public resources, let’s talk about the contribution of public resources. Use history: This is how the United States was started; the public resources used by businesses were roads, bridges, public education, public banks, interstate commerce, courts. Both private lives and private enterprise utterly depend on public resources. “Talk about the public,” says Professor Lakoff. Say what you believe. Talk about freedom.

And third, stay out of “nasty exchanges and attacks.” We can speak powerfully without shouting. As he left office, what did people lift up about President Obama? His civility, elegance, positivity, empathy, and good humor. A special shout-out to the power of empathy: We may be angry at Appalachian and Rust Belt whites who voted against everything we hold dear, but surrendering their fate to this administration will only increase their suffering. *And then what?* If we lead with and amplify our values – especially the values on which our country was founded – it will all go so much better.⁴

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Based on the 1975 novel by E.L. Doctorow, the musical *Ragtime* follows the intersection of three groups in the United States in the early 1900s: African Americans, represented by a Harlem musician; white people, represented by the matriarch of an upper-class suburban family; and immigrants, represented by a Jew from Eastern Europe. Suddenly, once again, the show is stunningly relevant.

Toward the end of story, an African American is speaking to a radicalized young white man, telling him and his men that violence will never solve injustice. He instructs them to change the world through the

³ Please see chelseagreen.com/elephant

⁴ George Lakoff, *Understanding Trump’s Salesman Techniques*, July 23, 2016. Please see georgelakoff.com

power of their words and by telling their children their story. The song he sings – you’ll hear it from our choir in a moment – is *Make Them Hear You*.⁵

Go out and tell our story; let it echo far and wide.
 Make them hear you, make them hear you.
 How justice was our battle and how justice was denied.
 Make them hear you, make them hear you.

And say to those who blame us for the way we chose to fight
 That sometimes there are battles
 that are more than black or white
 And I could not put down my sword when justice was my right.
 Make them hear you, make them hear you.

Go out and tell our story to your daughters and your sons.
 Make them hear you, make them hear you.
 And tell them, in our struggle, we were not the only ones.
 Make them hear you, make them hear you.

Your sword can be a sermon or the power of the pen.
 Teach every child to raise their voice and then, my sisters, then
 Will justice be demanded by ten million righteous men.
 Make them hear you.
 When they hear you, I’ll be near you.

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This past week marks the sixth anniversary of an 18-day revolution in Egypt that swept the autocratic Hosni Mubarak from power. According to human rights groups, the situation is far more dire today. The young man who got my attention this week is Mahmoud Mohammed Hussein. I’ll close by amplifying him, now.

When he was just 18, Mahmoud marked the first anniversary of the revolution. “It was a day of celebration for me,” he says. “I wasn’t a part of the revolution, but I believed in it and its goals. It made me feel like a human being, with rights and duties.” Although he didn’t join the demonstrations in the streets, walking home, he was arrested for the tee shirt he was wearing. It said, “A nation without torture.”

⁵ Wikipedia: Ragtime

“The tee shirt was inspired by the revolution,” says Mahmoud. “I saw it as a beautiful thing, not a crime. A country without torture is a dream that everyone wishes for.”

The police viewed it as a personal insult. They took him into custody, tortured him, and imprisoned him. “Prison is like a tomb,” he says. “It’s a place that takes away your soul, and kills everything beautiful in you.”

Last March, following worldwide campaigns, after almost 800 days in unspeakable conditions, Mahmoud was released. The 21-year old is a beautiful, curly-haired young man with shining eyes and a beatific smile. His voice is sweet. But he walks painfully now, with a crutch, and still appears frail. And his life remains in danger – President Sisi’s men are after him.

But Mahmoud Mohammed Hussein refuses to be silenced. “In Egypt,” he says, “my rights and the rights of thousands of others like me are violated, just for dreaming or hoping for freedom.” When asked if the revolution is dead, Mahmoud insists that it is not. “No, not at all. 25 January is a dream that will never die. The revolution lives in the hearts of people like me, of everyone who believes in it.” And as for the tee shirt that cost him his freedom, he has no regrets. “I always say that if I could go back, in spite of all the abuses I suffered, I would wear the tee shirt again.”⁶

Beloved spiritual companions,

What do you want to amplify in your life?

How are we called to take up more space with goodness?

Let us undermine lies,
keep repeating the truth,
reframe:
Start with values,
stay positive,
talk about freedom.

⁶ BBC News, “One protestor’s Story: Paying the price for seeking freedom in Egypt,” 1/25/17. Please see bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-38730565

Say what you believe,
Remember empathy.
Make them hear you.

We who are broken hearted,
we who are madly in love,
we who feel lonely,
and we who acknowledge the courage of others:
The revolution lives in the hearts of everyone who believes in it.

Let's turn it up!

Amen.