

Robin's Bird's-Eye View November 2019

For millennia, philosophers have asked: "Can you have too much of a good thing?" Um, two words – pumpkin spice! It is just EVERYWHERE and in my slightly grumpy opinion, should confine itself to the province of baked goods, seasonal beer, cider and hot beverages. I might have been more willing to be flexible if the whole pumpkin spice shebang had not mutated into a free-for-all of spaghetti sauce, tortilla chips, jellybeans, instant oatmeal, nut butter, liquid creamer, and stomach-turning frozen pierogis. Just make it stop! (which presumably, it will, to be replaced in December by candy cane *Milanos* cookies, eggnog-gussied creamer, and fruitcake-y granola!)

During the holidays, we can often feel like we have too much or too little, and not always of "a good thing." November brings an annual hope of warm gatherings with family and friends, enough resources to feed our guests, and a dose of joy in the mix. Yet, experience may cause us to anticipate a quite different scenario rife with tension or scarcity.

You may be bereft of companions and feel the foreboding of a lonely season. If so, lean into the Beacon community and ask for what you need. You may be concerned about consuming too much food or alcohol, or spending excessive amounts of money. Or, conversely, not having the funds to purchase even the necessities of life, let alone a 20-pound bird and pumpkin spice stuffing (yes, it's a thing!).

Yet, perhaps the spice of life isn't found in the mythical pumpkin patch (or its artificially-flavored derivatives), after all. Scientist Dan Gilbert helps us understand in his TED Talk, "The Surprising Science of Happiness," that genuine and deep contentment is more often found in "synthetic" happiness – the kind that arises from making the most of what we get, than in "natural" happiness – the kind that derives from getting exactly what we want.

He tells us that we have within us the ability to synthesize happiness, and that studies with paraplegics as well as lottery winners prove his point. One year after these two groups had their distinct experiences (paralysis and instant wealth), they both scored in the same range of happiness.

The holidays fool us into believing that joy and love are finite and that we either have them or we don't. I say, let's be mindful of what's real and what's possible, what we have and what we can give, and consider whether happiness might be stirred in or sprinkled on. You can never have too much of those "good things" called gratitude and generosity.

In faith,

Rev. Robin

