

The Gift of Jesse

Remarks by David Fisher and Jan Ryan 3/11/17
St. John's Church, Keokea, Maui, Hawaii

Thank you all for being here with us. Especially Jesse who is very much here.

Some of you may know that Jesse was interested in a form of Japanese stand-up comedy called Manzai. Manzai involves a duo. This is certainly not a comedy routine, but we hope that you will have some smiles as well as tears. We have also been thinking of each other as tag team - if one person loses it, the other takes over.

Jesse, there are three inter-related messages that rise to the top as part of your gift to us that you provided by example.. The first is the importance of developing, maintaining and honoring friendship; the second is the importance of being in the moment; and the third is the need to bridge cultures.

The quality of friendships and relationships is an important part of how we make a difference in the world and indeed may be one way we achieve eternal life. Today, Jesse, we can see and experience what you have accomplished in terms of friends. We are blessed to be with our combined ohana – some of whom have traveled long distances to be with us, to shed tears, to sing songs, eat great food, share wonderful memories and to work on skills at communicating with you in your new form. There are also people with us in real and asynchronous time from Japan and all over the world via digital pathways.

Being in the moment whether it was doing improv theatre, singing “extempo” calypso or rap, or doing a first take YouTube video is what Haiku resident Ram Das wrote about as “Being Here Now”. In meditation practices it is described as opening yourself up to the divine. It is about taking risks, being vulnerable, and accepting whatever happens as the raw material for creativity and making something fresh and wonderful - including friendships and learning outside of your bubble. We are all experiencing you doing this as we listen to and play your songs, and watch your videos, appreciate your photos and listen to stories. You also made it part of your teaching, as you encouraged your students to jump right in with ukulele songs and interactive lessons.

Bridging cultures was much more than being an American in Japan. More accurately you were a Huelo boy or Sue Loudon Drama kid in the Japanese public elementary education system, or with native English speaker-colleagues from all over the globe, or with the internationally minded yoga students in Kyoto,

or with the Tsushima rice farmers and squid fishermen, or with the Hawaiian language immersion school where you taught as a sub.

You knew that cultures are about much more than national cultures. What your dad called “the cultures without flags”. The actor culture, the musician culture, the Maui hippie farmer culture, the school teacher culture, the struggling millennial culture.

You knew that to bridge cultures you needed to listen to, observe, and be in the culture that you wanted to bridge. If it was a friend who was sad, you had to feel their pain. not ignore it or compete by sharing your pain story.

Your friend Dallen who was your roommate in Kobe said it well: "Jesse was a true friend. Because when your heart was breaking, his heart would literally break with you. When you were depressed, he would be depressed with you – for about a minute. Then he would cheer you up. But when you were happy... it was crazy. Every time I told him good news, he was happier than me. He made good news into great news, great news into incredible news.”

We are all in a thin space and time, a place where Spirit is close. It is a place whose main feature is immense paradoxes: pain and beauty, tragedy and humor, getting a grip - being open, separation and miraculous connection, mortal death and eternal life.

Jesse you are still with us and will remain so. Acting in and through us, blooming and flowering.

We see, feel, and hear you in each other - we share DNA, speech and thought patterns, sparkling eyes and warm voices.

We also see, feel and hear you in all your friends, many of whom are with us here today.

We also see them in you. We realize that our physical boundaries are an illusion and much more permeable than we might sometimes believe. We all influence and draw strength from each other, but we also experience pain, suffering and brokenness. That is if we are alive or awake.

We are grieving, but yet as with the sleepers in the hymn, we are waking. We are all astounded. And indeed, the shout of rampart guards surrounds us. Your timing is pretty interesting - Martin Luther King Day in the U.S. and the anniversary of the Kobe earthquake in Japan - plus the inauguration of a challenging political reality. And our own unintentional scheduling of today's celebration on the anniversary of the Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami.

We are listening to and singing your music with new ears, we are watching you on videos and looking at photos, we are telling our Jesse stories with new meaning and wonder. Our own atoms, micro-organisms, and neuro- circuits are reconfiguring....and thanks to you, most likely for the better.

Friendship, being in the moment, and bridging cultures are important in all our lives to day. As you said in your song Back to Nature, Broadband is indeed too slow. Your new level of connectivity is beyond time and space. We can access this connectivity with you and with each other by following your example of developing friendships, being in the moment, and not getting stuck in our cultural bubbles.

Thank you for being such a wonderful gift for all of us.