

UUFS

Mach 20, 2022

Theme: Mercy

Talk: "Do Not Lose Heart: We Were Made for these Times"

Today, I will read for you a talk that was written by Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes in 2001. I will ask you to keep that date in mind as you listen to the message and consider what the world was experiencing then & how much has changed in the intervening 21 years.

I was moved by this piece when Victor sent it to me, and I was excited to read it because of the rousing inspiration and energy it gave me.

Also - I want to offer a few of my own musings just before getting into that. As I was preparing to read this, I was thinking about the month's theme: mercy.

The piece by Dr. Estes was originally titled 'Letter to A Young Activist During Troubled Times,' and it has me thinking about a book I recently read called "Laziness Does Not Exist" by Dr. Devon Price. This book is full of merciful research that provides an antidote for the state of being continually stretched too thin. This is useful for all kinds of folks - but especially for activists and people who work hard to make the world a better place - the same people who Dr. Estes is addressing in her letter.

I recommend you all read this book, but I will give you just a little sneak peek. Dr. Price outlines the Laziness Lie as founded on three main tenets:

1. Your worth is your productivity
2. You cannot trust your own feelings and limits
3. There is always more you could be doing

Dr. Price explains: "The Laziness Lie is deeply embedded in the very foundation of the United States. The value of hard work and the evils of sloth are baked into our national myths and our shared value system. Thanks to the legacy of imperialism and slavery, as well as the ongoing influence that the United States exerts on its trade partners, the Laziness Lie has managed to spread its tendrils into almost every country and culture on the planet."

Grace Cannon

“When we feel unfocused, tired, and lazy, it’s often because we desperately need some time to rest our bodies and brains. Research has repeatedly shown that a person on the verge of burnout will have trouble staying focused and productive. No amount of pressure and stress can magically help a person overcome that lack of focus and motivation. The solution is to cut way back on expectations for a while. Overextended people have to find space in their lives to sleep, power down their stressed-out minds, and recharge their mental and emotional batteries...”

“The Laziness Lie has tried to convince us that our desires for rest and relaxation make us terrible people. It’s made us believe that having no motivation is shameful and must be avoided at all costs. In reality, our feelings of tiredness and idleness can help save us by signaling to us that we’re desperately in need of some downtime. When we stop fearing laziness, we can find time to reflect and recharge, to reconnect with people and hobbies that we love, and to move through the world at a more intentional, peaceful pace.”

So - why am I talking so much about laziness - how does that relate to mercy?

Well, I think Dr. Price’s work, which seeks to embolden people to let go of the moral judgment attached to nonproductivity, is all about granting ourselves and our neighbors compassion. Mercy can be defined as the act of showing compassion or forgiveness. Dr. Price says explicitly that “compassion kills the Laziness Lie.” This can happen in many ways, but some things to keep in mind:

1. Practice compassionate curiosity (about people you are assuming to be ‘lazy’)
2. Look to the broader context (what is the situation or circumstances?)
3. Stop associating Productivity with Goodness (there is plenty of goodness to be found in taking breaks, reflecting, setting boundaries, getting in tune with your needs)
4. Be gentle with yourself
  - a. It is not your job to save the world
    - i. Set goals based on compassion, not guilt or fear
    - ii. Grieve the things you cannot change
    - iii. Make your activism small

Stuff I’ve been thinking about...

These are things that feel connected and complementary to the main talk I will now present to you.

Grace Cannon