

“One More Day”

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Izzy’s kitchen, Izzy’s living room, Izzy’s front porch—meeting places all for young people who were drawn to her home, her warmth, her wisdom. My brother Jeff and I were fortunate to grow up with an extended family—not just a loving Mom and Dad, but an array of aunts and uncles and cousins who weren’t conventionally our aunts and uncles and cousins, but family friends who felt like family. Among them were the Eastlunds—Izzy and Roy (not long gone) and their kids Larry, Donnie, and Kay (all now in their last half century). I used to wonder how Izzy and Roy made a match, but they did. Roy was a butcher and an avid—understated avid—Denver Broncos fan. Izzy was a wife, a mother, a scout leader, a scholar, and a mystic. From the time I was five or so, we had conversations dipping into the meaning of life, the spiritual dimension of life, and the inexplicable mysteries of life and death.

Lucky for me that the Eastlunds moved from the small Iowa town where we first knew them to Denver, just a half hour from where I went to undergraduate school—the University of Colorado at Boulder. On so many weekends I would take the bus south to Denver for a “re-charge” of family life and reconnection with my second Mom. Izzy would just have returned from the Denver Public Library with a stack of books by the likes of P.D. Ouspensky, Edgar Cayce, Rumi, and other out-of-the box thinkers and seekers.

So it shouldn’t surprise you that one morning I was hanging out in Izzy’s kitchen as she was making breakfast, when she shared the story of her mystical encounter with a pair of sunny side ups earlier that week. “I cracked the eggs into the skillet, and suddenly I saw in one of them two yolks that reflected two suns looking up at me. We—those sun-yolks and I—connected in a way I can’t explain. It was mystifying, like I was witnessing two sunrises in a frying pan.”

That image of two yolks, two sunrises, returns to me this morning as I consider today and tomorrow in the chronology of an *extra* day tagged on to the end of February once every four years. This is the year; tomorrow is February 29.

It’s not quite that simple, because if you’re six years old now and you live at least another 84 years, you’ll ring in 2100, BUT on February 28, 2100, the next day will be March 1, not February 29th.

Time and its measurement have been grist for emperors and theologians for a very long time. Julius Caesar wrestled with the reality that our earth takes 365 days plus a maverick five hours, 48 minutes, and 45 seconds to orbit the sun. In his dalliance with this dilemma, he instituted Leap Year, adding an extra day in February every four years. This arrangement still left us with three fewer days every 400 years. Time is relative, but by the 16th century AD, this relatively brief time span put the so-called Julian calendar behind the solar calendar by 10 days.

Pope Gregory XIII to the rescue. In 1582, Pope Gregory ordered the advancement of the calendar by 10 days. Theoretically there were ten fewer days that year! AND he introduced a corrective to minimize further error. Leap Year would be eliminated in all centenary years, except those divisible by 400. This meant that the years 1600, 1700, 1800, and 1900 were not Leap Years; but the year 2000 was, since it's divisible by 400. Back to the six-year-old. No Leap Year for you when you turn 90 in the year 2100!

Even the Gregorian solution left some loose ends—an extra 26 seconds every 3,323 years. I'll bet there are some folks who really worry about this—just as there are some folks—many perhaps—who would flee to the mountaintops if convinced that time moves more slowly the farther we are from the center of the earth, implying that they would live longer if they resided at greater heights. Such was one of the time dreams fabricated by physicist Alan Lightman that I shared moments ago with our youngsters. What if we could extend our lives by radically changing our relationship with the earth? I realize that this question is ripe with nuance; but for now, what does it mean to have one more day on our calendar? Technically, it does not mean that we have one more day in our lives. Psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, it can mean exactly that.

Back to Izzy's double-yolked eggs mirroring a double sunrise. Back to an intimate connection with such phenomena. Might that double sunrise suggest a two-fer of time? Such is the possibility of one more day in our lives.

We haven't fled to the mountains. We deem it healthy to be grounded. So why not, from the ground of our being, consider this extra day on the calendar as one extra day of our lives?

You're looking at someone who is neurotically task-oriented. One more day? Hooray, it's even Monday, my day off. I can work out at the Y, still have breakfast with Dan, do more work on our taxes, clean the refrigerator, paint some bookshelves, make some pastoral phone calls, outline a few sermons... Oh yeah, it's my day off; so I'll just hone in on the domestic front, with the caveat that I really do enjoy working out and having breakfast with my husband.

Time for a deep breath. Time to stretch my mind and open my heart to that second sunrise. I/we are given one more day, one more precious day of our precious lives.

Thank you, Rev. Tim Kutzmark, for your wise musings on Leap Year, for asking from the other side of February 29:

“What did we do with this extra day of life,
Those precious additional hours,
Those 1440 extra minutes filled with breath and possibility?

Did having ‘more time’ make any difference?”

What difference might the prospect of “more time” make to us this morning as we gather presumably to consider what matters most as we light our chalice, heed the wisdom of our children, ponder what we hear, lift our voices in song, and hold silence in meditation? How might our thoughts and plans shift as we take even a few steps toward envisioning a tomorrow that is different, a tomorrow that can be a time out of time in time?

Some of us will definitely head to work. Before then we’ll perhaps take a shower, make our beds, walk the dog, feed the cat, make breakfast, get kids off to school. Some of us will remain at home, caring for a loved one, maybe struggling to care for ourselves. There are after all the “must-do’s” and the “must-be’s” of this precious day. There are also the loose ends, not yet mapped out, not yet woven.

Tim offers more good counsel—hugging loved ones closer, calling a friend we haven’t spoken with for ages, taking a walk, sitting quietly in gratitude, letting some tears flow over what hurts, mending a tattered relationship, having a pizza without guilt. Thank you, Tim.

The sun is rising on February 29. I think I’ll tell Dan I love him again, with a big hug and kiss. I know I’ll get up and take puppy Pablo for a wild and wonderful walk. I think I’ll head to the Y and swim, then meet Dan for breakfast and instead of Tim’s pizza without guilt, indulge in a guilt-free cheddar bagel. Then—no, I won’t come home and clean that blankety-blank refrigerator. I’ll put off—one more day at least—digging into the compost pile of tax data. And yes, those bookshelves can wait. But it’s been a long time since I’ve spoken with some dear friends—and my brother, Jeff, and my cousins Jim and Virginia. It’s a fine time to connect on Facebook with our goddaughter amid her sojourn through South America. I think I’ll try to reach our daughters and grandkids too.

Okay, it’s dinnertime. How not to make it a task? Indulge in something delectable from that outsized cookbook library. And don’t forget dessert! Then maybe a movie, or curling up in front of the fire with a book and Dan and Pablo. As for the waning hours of one more day, why not another “I love you?” “I love you, Dan and kids and grandkids and friends and family.” “I love you, UU Meriden—you and you and you and you—and our deliciously disarming youngsters.”

I screw up, I over-task, I hold on to what really can wait at the expense of what my heart is telling me. But tomorrow is another day, another day for each and all of us. Tomorrow is one more day ripe with the possibility of becoming honest-to-goodness sacred.

Eggs anyone? Love you, Izzy.

Amen.

Sources:

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