

2018 Zeal and President Theodore Roosevelt

Today's power is zeal! It is so interesting to live the sermon writing itself in me. During the past week I have been traveling and working with some late hours and long days. There were several times I felt the power of zeal was a distant ideal. I also had the opportunity to feel the energy of new work unfolding at our Unity World Headquarters and I got to see a display of Rickert Fillmore's paintings. Rickert was the son of Charles and Myrtle who was the architect designing most of the buildings at Unity Village. There were models of the buildings found in an attic. He was also a painter in the Impressionist style. His granddaughter has loaned the Unity Archives 10 paintings previously unseen. Rickert was very prolific in his creativity and it was exciting to see it as part of our Unity heritage.

Zeal is one of those powers we might feel a little more comfortable with our grasp and understanding of. Our Unity co-founder Charles Fillmore was 94 when he affirmed, "I fairly sizzle with zeal and enthusiasm and spring forth with a mighty faith to do the things that ought to be done by me!" I just have this image of Charles doing some James Brown moves and shouting, "I feel good!" In the Revealing Word dictionary, Fillmore describes zeal as "the affirmative impulse of existence; its command is 'Go forward!' Zeal is the inward fire of the soul that urges man onward, regardless of the intellectual mind of caution and conservatism." That phrase, "the inward fire of the soul", captures the vibrant energy of zeal.

When we are "on fire" about something, we are enthusiastic! It is easy to give ourselves to a project or activity because we have this inner urging forward. Zeal is our big, loud YES to ideas and collaborations and endeavors. The enthusiasm of zeal doesn't always pause to weigh options or even consider consequences. Fillmore says, "regardless of the intellectual mind of caution".

As easy as it is to grasp zeal, we sometimes forget the negative aspects to our human expression of zeal. In Fillmore's own affirmation, tempered by 94 years of experience and study he adds a couple powers to zeal: faith and wisdom. The end of his affirmation says, "to do the things that ought to be done by me". Wisdom is discerning what is mine to do. Not everything is mine to do. We can expend a lot of energy racing around to do everything in our zeal and enthusiasm. Not only can we burn ourselves out, we may not do everything with the care and attention it deserves. So then our enthusiasm and zeal don't look as attractive to others as we might have hoped.

That phrase “regardless of the intellectual mind of caution and *conservatism*” leads us to the BOLD nature of zeal. Not everyone is a fan of boldness. Bold is out of the comfort zone. While one of the definitions describes bold as “confident and courageous”, another describes it as “not hesitating to break the rules of propriety”. Some of us are rule breakers and some of us are not! And honestly, some rules need to be broken to move us forward and other rules might be more like elements of community and respect. Wearing white before Memorial Day used to be a bold fashion statement. That is not on par with the boldness of Mildred Jeter and Richard Loving marrying despite the rule banning inter-racial marriage and challenging the state of Virginia. That is not on par with the boldness of Harvey Milk pursuing a political career in California as an openly gay man. Zeal propels us past our fears and into the next bold step we need to take to move not only ourselves but often our greater consciousness forward.

One of the attributes of many people described as zealous is a laser-like intensity. Like boldness, not everyone is a fan of intensity in others. The Bible character often used to exemplify zeal is Saul/Paul. As Saul, the man was consumed by the intention to wipe out all of the followers of Jesus. His persecution of this new sect was well known. After being blinded on the road to Damascus, his intensity is simply honed and pointed in a new direction. With the conversion in consciousness, he is now called Paul and is generally considered largely responsible for the spread of early Christianity. His passion for the teachings of Jesus consumes him and compels his every action.

Which brings me to a Theodore Roosevelt quote you may not be very familiar with but it is a statement of zeal. “No man is worth his salt who is not ready *at all times* to risk his well-being, to risk his body, to risk his life, in a great cause.” Finding that quote made crystal clear to me that Roosevelt was the one to embody zeal. Although his early life may have made him seem an unlikely candidate.

Roosevelt, unlike many presidents before him, was born into wealth. He lived in New York City and suffered from asthma. He spent much of his time indoors and isolated from other children. In 1883, at the age of 25, he headed out to hunt bison in the Dakota Badlands as the archetypal “dude”. Thin, pale and wearing glasses, he learned to love the wild land. The following year, his wife Alice and his mother died hours apart in the same house. Roosevelt retreated to the ranch he had purchased in the Badlands and remained there for two years, healing his grief and acquiring a zeal for life.

However frail he had come to the Dakotas, he returned to life in New York City with an enthusiasm and intensity for whatever work he turned his attention to. In 1895 Roosevelt was appointed to the New York City Police Commissioners and began a campaign to reform a corrupt force. In part in response to his success, the Police Commission was legislated out of existence. Roosevelt resigned an appointment as Assistant Secretary of the Navy in 1898 to fight in the Spanish-American war. He formed what would be a temporary but diverse regiment of soldiers who became known as the Rough Riders and gained fame in battles in Cuba. Roosevelt commented on his role in the battles: "On the day of the big fight [at Kettle Hill] I had to ask my men to do a deed that European military writers consider utterly impossible of performance, that is, to attack over open ground an unshaken infantry armed with the best modern repeating rifles behind a formidable system of entrenchments. The only way to get them to do it in the way it had to be done was to lead them myself."

In 1900 Roosevelt, who disliked being called "Teddy" and was currently governor of New York state, became William McKinley's running mate. He took office as Vice-President on March 1, 1901 and on September of that year, he became President after the assassination of McKinley. He was just shy of becoming 43. Roosevelt and John Kennedy are both listed in various places as the youngest president. In 1904 Roosevelt was elected to a full term on his own.

Roosevelt brought 44 anti-trust suits under the Sherman Anti-trust Act; more than double the number of suits brought by the combined three presidents before him. He also sought and gained legislative creation of the Department of Commerce and Labor.

An avid conservationist and naturalist from his days in the Dakotas, Roosevelt set aside over 200 million acres for national forests, reserves and wildlife refuges. He established the United States Forest Service (and appointed our friend from the power of Understanding, Gifford Pinchot its first director), signed into law the creation of five National Parks, and signed the 1906 Antiquities Act, under which he proclaimed 18 new U.S. National Monuments. He also established the first 51 bird reserves, four game preserves, and 150 National Forests. Roosevelt's enthusiasm for bison turned almost as dramatically as Paul's passion for the Christians. His first hunt to kill a bison in 1883 took him to the Badlands but in 1905, he returned to New York and was given the position of honorary president of the American Bison Society at

the Bronx Zoo. The near extinction of one of America's unique animals was a tragedy that touched Roosevelt and he became intense in his support of conservation activities to preserve the few remaining bison. Today, in large part due to Theodore Roosevelt's legacy, there are approximately 30,000 wild bison living on Federal, Tribal, State and Private lands—as their millions of wild ancestors did in our nation's early history.

During his presidency, Roosevelt also became the first American to win the Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating an end to the Russo-Japanese conflict. The parties met in Portsmouth, New Hampshire and the agreement is the Treaty of Portsmouth. Despite his renown for “speak softly and carry a big stick”, Roosevelt was involved in negotiating resolutions to several conflicts.

One of Roosevelt's advisors and collaborators was Booker T Washington, the African-American founder of Tuskegee Institute. In October of 1901, inviting Washington to a meeting at the White House, Roosevelt invited him to stay for dinner. It was a bold move that caused Washington to hesitate but ultimately accept the invitation. The wrath of reaction from the segregated South affected both men and after a time of vicious editorials and articles, no further invitations came for dinner.

One final tidbit of information about Roosevelt illustrates the negative side of unrestrained zeal. Roosevelt pursued what he referred to as a “vigorous lifestyle” and that included a love of boxing, reaching back to his time at Harvard. Even as President he invited sparring partners to come and engage in a bout of boxing. In the last match in 1908, a partner landed a blow to his left eye which resulted in hemorrhaging that led to a detached retina and ultimately blindness in that eye. It was the best kept secret of his administration and only 3 or 4 people knew of his blindness. He also protected the identity of his sparring partner.

Roosevelt left political life after his second term ended. He went to Africa on a safari to collect specimens for the Smithsonian Institute and the American Museum of Natural History. A total of 11,400 specimens were killed and collected which took the Smithsonian staff nearly 8 years to catalog. In 1912 Roosevelt took a run again at the presidency as the leader of the Progressive Party, affectionately called the “Bull Moose Party” after Roosevelt declared himself “fit as a bull moose”. Third party candidates tend to exhibit the boldness of zeal simply by their candidacy and Roosevelt wanted to reform the Republican Party controlled by Taft. Roosevelt was shot in the chest campaigning in Milwaukee but was protected by his steel glass case and a 50

page copy of his speech he carried under his jacket. He recovered from his wounds but lost the presidential race to Democrat Woodrow Wilson.

After the assassination attempt, Roosevelt said, "No man has had a happier life than I have had; a happier life in every way." Perhaps that is a testament to the power of zeal to compel us into living life to its fullest. Zeal calls us to be enthusiastic about the work before us and to live boldly. When rules need to be broken, zeal gives us the courage and confidence to move outside our comfort zone. Zeal focuses our attention with the intensity of a laser so we must pay attention to how we use our zeal. We use our powers of faith and love and wisdom with zeal so that we know what is ours to do and we do it with kindness and generosity.

Divine Zeal expresses through me as enthusiasm, intensity and boldness.