

“Stories of Serendipity and Awe”

Rev. Laurel Gray

May 16th, 2021

We’re continuing this week with more stories on a theme, this week we’re focusing on stories of serendipity and awe. I’ve found in my own life that noticing these moments of magic requires a degree of openness, a willingness to notice when life is dancing in harmony. Preparing for the service this week, I’ve been noticing a lot more of these moments of sweet chance and perfect timing - a call from a friend at just the right moment - I find that there’s so much relief in those moments of attunement. Because our interconnection becomes so clear. And the world feels kinder.

Later in the service, we’ll have views from the pews, and I’ll ask you to share moments of serendipity and awe in your own lives. But I’ll go first.

I’ve found in life that I often wake up with answers, a sense of clarity, sometimes to questions I didn’t know I had. Several years ago, when I was still in grad school, I had a dream about a curly red-haired puppy, with knowing eyes, an equal mix of earnest and scheming. And his name was Henry.

I told my sister about this dream and Henry became this elusive character who we were waiting to find. My sister, who was already married with two children and a cat, despite being only three years older than me, was particularly committed to finding Henry. I’d spent so many years moving and going to school and she wisely thought I needed a companion.

But my sister is a person who gets things done, and she was always trying to find Henry. In the fall of 2019, when I had just started here, she was pregnant with her third child, and her desire to nest kicked in. But as this was their third child, there wasn’t much they needed to do, so Linden became focused on the search for Henry. She even convinced the whole family to chip in, because I kept rebuffing her by saying the kind of dog I wanted was more than I could afford.

She kept looking and looking and two weeks before Christmas, she talked to a breeder near her house who unexpectedly had two puppies that were available to adopt. My sister lives in Minneapolis, and apparently two families had backed out after realizing they'd have to bring a tiny puppy outside in sub-zero temperatures. The summer litter already had 70 families on the waitlist, but the Christmas puppies were overstocked - suddenly two needed homes.

So of course, Linden called me. And I'll say that my sister believes you can get a 20% discount on anything if you just ask the right way, so she will win in a negotiation. And so I said yes, to this unexpected Christmas puppy. I was flying to Minneapolis on Christmas morning, after we had our last in-person Christmas Eve service - remember that?

And I was scheduled to fly back to Boston the following Friday, which was the day the puppies were going to the vet for their final checkups - perfect timing. The breeder agreed to have us meet her at the vet, so we wouldn't miss our flight.

Before "match" day, the breeder sent a video going over all the puppies in the litter and their personalities. We were last on the list, so I was nervous we wouldn't like the options that were left. I wanted to train the puppy to be a therapy dog for church, which meant temperament was really important. There were two puppies I knew wouldn't work - one was a really shy little girl and the other was an alpha boy who liked to sleep in the food bowl.

By the end of the week, when my sister went to meet the puppies, one other family had also dropped out, so there would be three left to choose from. Lo and behold, two of them were the two I knew I didn't want. But the third one, was Henry. In the video he had been the happiest puppy, the most curious and excited to meet people. And when Linden went to meet him, she confirmed that she had, in fact, found Henry, and he snuggled up to her pregnant belly and fell asleep.

Two weeks later, we drove to the vet and the breeder handed me all 3.8 pounds of

Henry. He was so small I was afraid I might squish him, but he was fearless and so excited. Even at the airport, which is a legitimately stressful place, especially if you're eight weeks old, he wanted to meet everyone and see everything. The flight attendants were so smitten by him and his trying to peak between the seats at people, that they had me hold him up above my head like Simba in the Lion King, so everyone could see him.

Little did we know, four months later the world would be shutting down because of this thing called Covid-19 and a few weeks would turn into a few months, which would turn into more than a year. There would be a shortage of animals to adopt because life became so lonely. He is equal parts earnest and scheming, but thank goodness I listened when my sister told me she had found Henry.