

All the Diamonds in the World

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Bruce Cockburn wrote “All the Diamonds,” the day after he realized he was a Christian. He saw those diamonds on a boat ride through the Stockholm archipelago of barren islands. So it starts:

**All the diamonds in this world
That mean anything to me
Are conjured up by wind and sunlight
Sparkling on the sea**

Cockburn said of this song, “What’s important is recognition that there is a spiritual side of life and that needs to be paid attention to.” We know that. In this song, the spiritual is conjured up by wind and sunlight sparkling instead of by actual diamonds we wear on our ring fingers. Cockburn says, “There’s a real distinction between materialism and a sense of the cosmos being a deeper place than that. If it’s a deeper place, then what does that ask from us? I don’t know the answer. I’m still working on it.”

Are we still working on finding that deeper place, too? I doubt that there is a single person here, this morning, who doesn’t believe there is a deeper meaning, a deeper and fuller way to live life, and more depth in each of us than we sometimes dare to explore. Going deeper can be very hard, even scary. Often, we’d rather go shallow. The next line of the Cockburn’s song explores “shallow.”

**I ran aground in a harbour town
Lost the taste for being free**

Cockburn suggests, here, that even if the universe is truly “a deeper place,” it is nevertheless full of temptation to live shallow. Here the harbour town represents all the things that get in the way of a sailor going deep. Wine, women, song, gambling, spending our pay checks recklessly.

But even if we are not ancient mariners, we have our own shallow temptations, too. Shallow can be as simple as the latest gadget that we don’t need but that we purchase for the endorphin-fueled thrill of hitting the “Buy” button on Amazon.ca. Shallow can be simple, like giving someone the finger at an intersection, or drinking a few too many glasses of wine.

But shallow—it can be a sort of relief, too. For example, ignoring the memory of parents who didn’t nurture us, or teachers who hurt us, or classmates who despised us. Not going there, not going deep, can seem like a relief, whereas cleaning the wounds of such hurts?

Probing for shrapnel or putting ice on the wound? That hurts, so we don't go there, we stay shallow.

Or again, shallow might be knowing, on the border of our consciousness, that the world—its climate, its refugees, its racism—is really complicated. Expensive, life-altering solutions are required—sacrifices. We know this, all on the border of our consciousness, but rather than go deep, we then ignore all that stuff, act as if these problems can't be solved, that they are not our fault anyway—and so we live shallow, because we, in our comfortable cocoons—we can afford to ignore these problems even though many of the most vulnerable in the world cannot.

Going deep, though? Spending more than enough time with our kids or partner rather than loosing ourselves at work? Backing up our glib “I love you's” with time and effort? Engaging in self-examination and reflection about morality, meaning, and the great issues of our day? Changing ingrained habits upon reflection? That is all hard stuff. It takes time and courage. The payoff is far in the future.

Not going deep also has a long-term and personal cost. For example, last year, a short article entitled, “The Top Five Regrets People Make on Their Deathbed” took the internet by storm. The article appeared in *Business Insider*, *Huffington Post*, *Forbes*, England's *Daily Mail*—everywhere. It struck a chord, but especially in the business press. **(One)** People regretted working so hard—because it was the thing to do—that they neglected their families, and **(Two)** they regretted not taking the time to express their true inner feelings to others or even to themselves, so they never knew their inner feelings. **(Three)** They regretted a lack of courage to live in a way that was true to their inner selves, rather than being carried along by fads and fashions and higher share valuation at any cost. **(Four)** They regretted not staying true to their best friends and **(Five)** wished that they had understood that happiness was, at least partly, a choice, and required doing the hard work of changing old patterns and emotions—what we call conversion.

I've been there. Especially on the inner feelings and happiness fronts, I think. For the last ten years of my time in my previous denomination, perhaps because I was on something of a nice easy ride, because I was out of touch with the deep in me, I grew increasingly unhappy. I sensed something was wrong, but I also liked the attention of being one of the most visible leaders of the denomination. I liked the perks—the travel, the pay that went with the presidency of a graduate school, I even liked the opportunity to retire, in a way, to the quiet of a little church in a house by the beach in a scenic Ontario Harbour Town.

Still, even though on the surface things were going swimmingly, I felt that something was wrong. I wasn't myself. So finally, encouraged by friends and family, I confronted the sources of my growing unhappiness. Again, with their support, I found the courage to be true to my inner self and to my doubts. I don't want to hold myself out as some sort of exemplar—it took me years, after all, to figure things out. I'm a slow learner. But I discovered that in my situation, at least, happiness was a choice, the choice to leave my past and its perks behind and

start over in the UCC, and here are LPCC. I left Cobourg, my Harbour Town and its simple pleasures and headed out to sea again. Bruce Cockburn uses the image of a ship.

**Thank God He sent some gull-chased ship
To carry me to sea**

And at the end of his song, the ship image returns:

**His ship comes shining
Like a crystal swan in a sky of suns
His ship comes shining**

Cockburn's ship image is crucial when considering what it means to go deep. As Cockburn well knows, from the beginning of Christianity, the story of how Jesus sat in a storm-tossed boat in the middle of the raging sea, and commanded the wind and the waves to be still, was a favourite. Thinking of the disciples and their terror, Christians adopted the ship as one of their first picture images for the church. So when Cockburn sings about a gull-chased ship carrying away from the harbour and out to sea again, he is probably thinking of the church as a safe place to explore the depths, even in the midst of life's storms.

Church should be a good, safe place to do the hard work of going deep. A good place to leave the shallows behind—or at least, to reconsider what is shallow in your life, or mine. This is so in a lot of ways. As a church that is United, Unlimited, and Unorthodox, we are invited to come here wondering and unsure, and to be receptive to each other's doubts—and crazy ideas, too. We have a meditation group where a number of men and women truly, really share and find community. Group B is a community too, one where, in a hundred small and significant ways, its members watch out for each other. This all takes vulnerability. It takes risk. It takes work. But in this church, people do it—or at least try, in book clubs and youth groups, pastoral visits and Bible studies.

Why do we do this stuff? Well, Cockburn sings, near the end of his song, these words:

**Two thousand years and half a world away
Dying trees still grow greener when you pray.**

These words are an allusion to Jesus' death on the cross. But in his comments on this song, Cockburn says more. He says that in Jesus' wounds, we see a mirror image of our own woundedness, as well as the hurts and struggles of our neighbours. Cockburn says, quote, "We are all bound by our wounds; we have no choice about that." He adds, "I suppose the wounds of Christ are archetypes for these wounds. It's in our woundedness that we have our connection point."

The temptation we all face, in choosing to go to church, in choosing to live in this space, is to be satisfied with church as a club, as a shallow place, as a social status symbol, as a service

delivery institution for rental space or organ music like the Granite Club is for sports or the Bank is for mortgages. The temptation we all face, when it comes to church, is not to think about church and its people and its spirituality very much at all. The temptation we all face, in choosing to go to church is choosing not to go deep.

But in the end, that kind of shallow church is an easy come, easy go church, a bauble, a decoration, a diamond for show, a piece of real estate.

On the other hand, real church—what we aim for here—real church is conjured up by wind and sunlight, sparkling on the sea. A ship that hovers over the deep. It is a place where we bear each other's wounds, where we learn honesty about expressing what lives in our hearts, where we make life-long friends, where we nurture family, and where we seek and embrace real happiness.

It isn't easy. It isn't shallow. But what I love about Lawrence Park Community Church is that we have definitely set sail—something we will celebrate not only by listening to Bruce Cockburn's song, but also in the closing hymn—"She Comes Sailing."