

Chapel Talk  
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“Live in the now!”  
Garth, from *Wayne’s World*

My students know that my love for our classroom mascot is unceasing. A modest turtle quietly observes all of our classes. “Señor Tortuga.”--Spanish for “Mr. Turtle.” He is clearly interested in every lesson I plan while diligently listening to what each student has to say. He only knows Spanish, however, and therefore, in order to respect Mr. Turtle, everyone must speak in Spanish, except when he is sleeping.

But Mr. Turtle never sleeps. His greenish-blue ceramic head is eternally frozen in a wide-eyed, alert stance with his head curiously stretched out of his shell. When some students decided to take him on a field trip and he ended up losing his way back, I told them how I was unnaturally sad, but I never explained exactly why I loved having him in the classroom.

On the many trips to Wawa, ACME, and Starbucks, students may have noticed I also have a turtle sitting on my dashboard. “He tells me to slow down,” I inform anyone who asks. For the past 10 years of my driving life, this figure has been a constant reminder to slow down, not only in easing up on the gas pedal, but in every aspect of my life. Turtles encourage one of my favorite mantras, “I’ll get there when I get there.”

St. Andrew’s is a buzzing community full of life. We pack each day with classes, afternoon and evening activities, and meals with friends. Some people thrive in structured, high-energy environments like ours. Sometimes it may be a bit draining. A part of me often feels a strong resistance to fast-paced environments. “Just be still,” my heart cries to me, while my mind says, “But I have to go to class! To lunch! To practice!”

What do you do when you find yourself going from one thing to the next, always feeling like you are catching up with something or falling behind? If you feel like there is no escape from some fire the world has or that you yourself have created behind you, what do you do? Personally, I play a

very entertaining game. You win by finding stillness even in the midst of the craziest and most frenetic situation. The goal is to find the “eye of the storm,” where you find the most calm space. For example, I won the game 2 years ago when I did dorm duty for the very first time for the fourth formers. Jessica Yanez, who I mention with love and I hope laughs at this, was one of my many contenders whose joking, purposeless screams upon my entrance to her room only made ME more of the winner. She gave me the extra energy I needed to find the eye of the “Fourth Form Girls Dorm Storm.”

All of my favorite hobbies are activities that allow me to slow down and focus on process. For example, my interest in running long distances is all credited to Aesop. His fable, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, gives me the mental strength to train for half marathons. Despite my visceral objection to clichés, “Slow and steady wins the race,” is a welcomed truism I tell myself. The 13.1 miles is doable if I remember to take a steady approach in the training process. Boston marathoners are reminded of this, when, at the end of their race, they see the statues of a tortoise and a hare at Copley Square.

Don’t get me wrong--I encourage tough training and I personally push myself to get faster and stronger. The trick is to listen closely to your body, and I’ve found that this requires the firm discipline of slowing down and being gentle with yourself. As a cross-country coach, I was so proud of the runners who worked hard all season to get stronger and faster. What made me even more proud, however, was when they took the time to listen to their bodies, stretching well before and after practice or races. Vivian Smith comes to mind, for example, as a beautiful demonstration of my point. Stretching longer than anyone else, she would always remind me of the importance of not just focusing on beating your PR, but also on the process of getting to that point. In my own experience, when I focus on process, breaking down my goal into steps, I find greater enjoyment in what I am doing. I end up feeling more alive and this sense of aliveness gives me the energy to run faster and longer, which is essentially my ultimate goal.

As it turns out, my four-year-old self understood this concept of slow process very well. My parents remind me of how absolutely determined I would be to color in every centimeter of a sky with blue crayon. I knew what I wanted it to look like, so I’d get to work: marking off one section in the far corner, carefully and thoroughly coloring it in, and then moving on to focus on another

small section right beside it. Hours later, I was left pleased with a huge, waxy, cerulean expanse in front of me...and a very small crayon.

I think children intuitively understand the importance of being patient and methodical, and enjoying the process of a task. I don't remember feeling overwhelmed by the big blankness of the white paper, or worrying if I had enough time or enough crayon. I didn't think so much about it. As my adult self, when I find myself worrying or just thinking too much in general, I have to remind myself of my coloring technique.

My other hobby of making mosaics is also an enjoyable process of patience and persistence. The designing, cutting, gluing, grouting, drying, and polishing is time consuming, but this long process is exactly why I make mosaics. In addition to treating myself to countless hours of KEXP radio in the process, I also have the opportunity to truly slow down and focus on one thing at a time. When I finish a mosaic, I get a deep feeling of peace while staring at it. I don't just see the final product; I also see the hours of meditation that quieted my mind from busy thoughts. As there is no way to complete one in haste, any mosaic I make is evidence of the importance of slowing down and focusing on process in order to produce something beautiful.

I can't talk about the importance of process and slowing down without mentioning a 5-day yoga retreat I took last summer. It was the ultimate personal challenge in slowing down my physical body as well as my racing thoughts. Despite having extensively traveled to many corners of the world, I never felt more out of my element than I did that week in Massachusetts. When I was strictly told not to burn sage in my dorm room, I knew from then on it was going to be a memorable week. As I mentioned earlier, I very often play my "eye of the storm" game to find peace in various life situations. To put it plainly, on this retreat I found the true eye of the Storm (with a capital S) and ironically, I desperately wanted to get out.

After the second day, I walked barefoot to the front desk to get my money back. I called my mom sobbing about how I was feeling so conflicted. I couldn't handle the quiet yoga sessions, walks and meals in social silence, and the stillness of meditation. The food was too healthy, people were way too nice, and there was no way you could have made me chant one more "ooooom". The more I realized I was surrounded by the most Zen people on the East coast, the more I felt extremely

uncomfortable, alienated, and anxious. Despite this, I ended up staying till the end because a) I'm not a quitter. And b) I couldn't help wanting to know what these people knew. How have they found peace while I am still a nervous wreck? I wondered.

I talked to a yogi about how I was having such a hard time, and when I was done ranting, he looked into my eyes and said very calmly, "That is beautiful." I then mentioned how I can't sleep at night and I really needed advice and help. And he responded with a smile, "you know what you need to do." I felt more furious than ever but I was also strangely intrigued. He knew something-- He was on to something. I didn't know what it was, but I had to find out.

So there I was, surrounded by what I like to call "human turtles," people who truly believed in the importance of slowing down, appreciating every aspect of life, approaching each situation or thought with non-judgmental reflection. When I realized this, I was absolutely paralyzed by the beauty of my situation. I was in the kind of utopia I had always dreamed of. I suppose instant paralysis was what I needed to get me to slow down, because from then on I had the most awesome end to my week and start to the rest of my life.

Some nebulous haze I used to see in many areas of my life was lifted. There was this loud melodious buzz of godliness in every second. I felt a bliss that involved neither refined sugar nor artificial sweeteners, and it was totally free and legal! I was floating in the sky, but at the same time I felt completely grounded in a new, inviting communion with everything and everyone around me. I probably looked like a smiling idiot that day, but now at least I fit in with the peace-loving people around me. It was as if Bob Marley's "Three Little Birds," Simon and Garfunkel's "59<sup>th</sup> St. Bridge," and Johnny Nash's "I can see clearly now" were all playing in chorus, along with Garth Algar's voice repeatedly telling me to "Live in the now!" My yogi was right—I did know what to do. Unfortunately, I don't know exactly what I ended up doing, but I apparently did it and I prefer not to question it!

Our lives here at St. Andrew's are full of stimulating activities all day long and this dynamic lifestyle is often energizing and very fulfilling. Sometimes, though, you may feel overwhelmed by the sheer speed of the hustle and bustle. My own instinctual brakes tell me to slow down so that I can feel more at peace with my surroundings and myself. One of my most successful ways of

“braking” is reflecting on progress and process: How have I arrived from Point A to Point B? What did it take to complete that mosaic, run that half-marathon, or, more applicable to you, finish that long, difficult homework assignment? My answer is steady intention and focus on the value of what I’m doing in the moment.

I highly respect anyone who demonstrates the ability to slow down in life. Mr. Roach, for example, always has a lot going on with places to go and people to see. I remember meeting with him in the Fall at a particularly busy time; there were visitors outside his office and people in and out of the admissions corridor. Yet, when he sat down with me to talk, he somehow made me feel that everything outside the office was not important. I felt that my voice was being heard and I could tell that he was truly present with me. This is the greatest gift he or anyone can give.

I encourage you all to reflect on process and individual progress in your own lives. This will involve slowing down and I believe that is the most beautiful, enlightening thing you can do. If you can’t remember the last time you felt your heartbeat, I’m specifically talking to you. In the end, my hope is that all my students remember Señor Tortuga (who was eventually found his way back to my classroom by the way) and realize the greatness of his stance: head stretched out of his shell, wide-eyed with an easy smile.