

Everything Is Holy for Songwriter / Poet Peter Mayer

KENT RAUTENSTRAUS

*This morning, outside I stood
And saw a little red-winged bird
Shining like a burning bush
Singing like a scripture verse
It made me want to bow my head
I remember when church let out
How things have changed since
then
Everything is holy now*
—Lyrics from “Holy Now”
(Mayer)

We live at the intersection of the human and the Divine where everything is holy, believes

Peter Mayer. His message is never more poignantly delivered than in December, when many religious celebrations of divinity are observed. A Minnesota songwriter and poet who studied to become a Catholic priest, Mayer believes that to embody the concept that everything is holy, we simply need to pause to reflect the spiritual truth of our divinity and to find a language to describe that which is inexpressible. Science is one way that helps define the Infinite, Mayer says, as is spiritual contemplation. These sentiments were shared by Ernest Holmes,

who writes, "When the mind takes its pattern after the Spirit, it automatically renews the outer man after true holiness or wholeness."

"We have this impulse to transcend and contemplate the All," Peter Mayer says, "but we don't always have the vocabulary to express at a deep level the nature of the Universe." Mayer's music and lyrics propel the conversation. "I want to pluck some strings rendering the reality of the world into poetry and lyrics."

This introspective poet/songwriter is doing some fine plucking, by all accounts. Sirius XM Satellite Radio's Mary Sue Twohy shares that Mayer composes "beautifully crafted songs that pose eternal questions." *Acoustic Guitar* magazine calls Mayer's artistry "music for the soul." Boston radio personality Marilyn Rea-Beyer says, "His guitar work is breath-taking; his lyrics mind-spinning; his singing soul-soothing; and his optimism nothing short of healing." Two-time Grammy Award-winning songwriter Janis Ian summarizes, simply, "I'm a huge Peter Mayer fan."

Catholic Roots

As a child, Peter Mayer attended private Catholic schools. A

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natural musician, he began playing the guitar and writing songs at age fifteen. Always contemplating the nature of the Universe, he decided to study music and theology "to ponder the big aspects of life" at the University of St. Thomas in Saint Paul, Minnesota, one of the oldest Catholic universities in the United States. The Catholic liturgy and ritual represented the essence of the Divine, Mayer says, adding, "Attending mass gets into your bones!" His lyrics to "Holy Now," one of his most impactful and requested songs, speak to his Catholic background and evolving consciousness.

*When I was a boy, each week
On Sunday, we would go to
church*

*And pay attention to the priest
He would read the holy word
And consecrate the holy bread
And everyone would kneel and
bow*

*Today the only difference is
Everything is holy now
Everything, everything
Everything is holy now*

—Lyrics from "Holy Now"
(Mayer)

Watershed Moments

In seminary, Peter set out on a path of learning, reading many books on theology and science. In 1992, two years into his religious instruction in the Jesuit tradition, he left the priesthood. "I read about global environment issues discussed at the United Nations Earth Summit. An article said that there were two factions breaking apart consensus—my country and my faith. For the United States, it was unlimited consumption; for Catholics, it was overpopulation." The article greatly impacted Mayer. "It was a watershed moment. I thought, 'We are laying our souls at the feet of growth.'" Mayer left the priesthood shortly afterward, in part because of his evolving global conscience, which didn't completely align with the teachings of the Catholic Church. "Being steeped in Catholic ritual informed my conscience, but the context no longer spoke to me." His heart also yearned for intimacy. "I didn't want to live a vow of celibacy."

Mayer took a part-time job as a music director at a small Catholic church in Minnesota, began performing music at clubs and colleges, and started writing and recording his original music. Word spread quickly and organically about his heart-

opening songs that resonated with authenticity and intimacy and also helped to describe the human/divine journey. Thousands of people suddenly followed Peter Mayer's career and his music. In 1995, Peter quit his job at the church and began touring full-time. That same year, great personal joy came to him when he married Beth Harrison, a social worker.

Eighteen years later, Peter and Beth are the parents of two daughters whom they cherish, six-year-old Ceci and two-year-old Luci. Beth is now an attorney and child truancy officer and also Peter's music agent. "We are a great balance for each other," he shares with a smile. In the summer, Peter stays home during the week with the girls, traveling only on weekends, while Beth keeps a more traditional Monday-through-Friday work schedule. Parenting is a holy experience for both.

Along the way, his musical discography has flourished with nine compelling CDs of original music (and a tenth on the way), selling more than 70,000 copies to date. He performs fifty to sixty concerts annually throughout the United States, and he also contributes music at his local Unitarian Universalist church. Mayer honors his Catholic roots, but now describes himself as

a “religious naturalist” like Ralph Waldo Emerson. An American essayist, Emerson led the Transcendentalist movement of the mid-nineteenth century, inspiring many New Thought founders, including Dr. Holmes, with quotes on nature and the nature of being—“Adopt the pace of nature. Her secret is patience.” Emerson also inspires Mayer:

*I dream I reach the end of the
journey I've been on
And all I finally find is a smiling
leprechaun
So I ask a wee impatiently, Tell
me have you seen a pot of
gold?
And he says, Have you seen the
rainbow?*

*Have you seen the colors gleam
And shimmer on a silent sea?
Have you seen the colors shine
Brightly in another's eyes?*

*Have you seen a firefly; have you
seen a lark?*

*Have you seen the light burning
in your beating heart?*

*Have you seen the way the
morning glows?*

*Have you seen the red and green
and gold?*

*Tell me, have you seen the
rainbow?*

—Lyrics from “The Rainbow”
(Mayer)

Energy of the Sun in an Egg

For as long as he can remember, Peter Mayer has been intrigued by a timeless question, “What is the nature of things?” Now fifty, Peter finds that science provides a partial answer. “The nature of matter is that we are all related. We come from the same life,” he says with awe. “We have deep instincts for survival—to find food and to mate—but we also have the gift of interconnectedness and consciousness, which cultivates a deep sense of wonder and appreciation.” This statement causes Mayer to reflect on the Buddhist question, “What is my greater self?” For Mayer, the answer lies in the premise that everything is holy—even, for example, eating an egg at breakfast. “I think about where the egg came from. Then I follow it back into the world. What did the chicken eat? I think about the chicken’s food being fueled by the sun. And then I think about the energy of the sun being contained in the egg I’m eating.” In that moment, Mayer sees that the nature of things is interconnectedness, which leads him to the next divinely inspired thought: everything is holy. “I may not always know how to pray,” he says with candor, “but I do know how to pay attention.”
There are a hundred billion

*snowflakes swirling in the
cosmic storm
And each one is a galaxy, a
billion stars or more
And each star is a million earths,
a giant fiery sun
High up in some sky, maybe
shining on someone*

*And deep inside a snowflake, I
am floating quietly
I am infinitesimal, impossible to
see
Sitting in my tiny kitchen in my
tiny home
Staring out my window at a
universe of snow*

*But my soul is so much bigger
than the very tiny me
It reaches out into the snowstorm
like a net into the sea
Out to all the lovely places where
my body cannot go
I touch that beauty and embrace
it in the bosom of my soul*

—Lyrics from “My Soul”
(Mayer)

“His music is so pure and grounded in science,” says Planetary Radio Host Mat Kaplan. “No one delivers the goods as well as Pete. So much of his music captures the joy, wonder, and awe that drive every great scientist I know. Pete’s passion, beautiful mind, and playful soul are in all his tunes.” Dale Connelly of

Minnesota Public Radio adds, “Peter does nothing less than address the very nature of our existence.”

Mayer’s Recipe for Cultivating a Sense of Awe and Wonder

When Mayer is asked how to build a sense of awe and wonder in one’s heart, he shares without hesitation, “Take time to learn and contemplate something in the world.” An example for Peter is his love of *National Geographic* magazine, in which he enjoys reading about new discoveries in astronomy and our origins linked to the Neanderthal man. “Take time to absorb” is another suggestion. “This puts me into a state of awe about our existence on this planet. Respect nature and be in nature. Think about the story of evolution and the way life works, how it is constantly changing and responding to the environment.” He pauses; then he says slowly, “Connect with the context of your own life.” He calls the latter point “visiting the subject of ultimate meaning.” And he reminds us, with reverence, “People have a need to lay themselves before that which created them.”

*Church of life
Ancient and bright
Life that inside us shines
Life that we share*

SPIRITUAL GOOD SENSE

Loving Our Teenagers

*This is our prayer
That we may always find*

*The heaven we seek
Here at our feet
Here in this sunrise
In this heartbeat*

—Lyrics from “Church of the Earth” (Mayer)

Thoughts for a Holy Season

A man accustomed to hanging out in soulful contemplation, Peter Mayer studies the human journey. He lives it like his listeners do and recognizes that, for some, the holidays can be stressful. Mayer once again offers the mantra: everything is holy. This statement is uniquely expressed in a light-hearted, yet profound lyric from the song “Christmas Morning,” featured on Mayer’s Christmas CD, *Midwinter*:

*There could be a blue kazoo, a
pair of ruby shoes
A silky new, fetching red kimono
A Pakistani rug, an Elvis
Presley mug
Or The Very Best of Perry
Como*

*There could be a handsome
blonde, a Harry Potter
wand
Or little strips to help you quit
snoring
An anti-aging cream, a healthy
self-esteem*

*Waiting there for you on
Christmas morning
Then again, in light of life’s
uncertainties
You may not find a single one of
these*

Mayer continues and then delivers the spiritual “hook” to the song:

*But guaranteed, underneath that
tree
Will be a brand-new day begun
The ones who love you, the
turning earth
And a great big shining sun
A big old shining sun*

*And on the earth, you read your
name
And cut the gold ribbons around
it
You still might be surprised, and
even realize
That you got everything you
wanted*

—Lyrics from “Christmas Morning” (Mayer)

That’s a holy realization, says Peter Mayer. ■

To listen to “Everything Is Holy” by Peter Mayer, visit scienceofmind.com.

Love means empowering teens to make their own decisions, to live with their own mistakes, and to grow through the consequences.

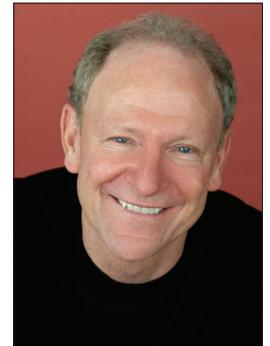
—FOSTER CLINE, MD, AND JIM FAY

One of the most difficult and frustrating passages for a parent or grandparent is guiding children through their teen years. There’s not much guiding, really. It seems that they go to bed one night as happy, well-adjusted kids and awaken the next morning as snarky adolescents intent on pushing against any and all limits. It all happens so quickly that we’re taken unaware and feel ill-equipped for the shift. What is the best strategy for survival?

Love is the answer. If we can love and respect our teens the way they are, in the midst of all of their confusion and change, we give them and ourselves the best chance to keep our precious relationships intact. Whether it is our own child, grandchild, or some other beloved adolescent, the gift of an adult’s unconditional love makes a huge difference in helping a child find his or her own way. This love can often be a scary proposition, as when we love our teens enough to let them fail. This is the kind of love that can do a lot more good than getting our teens out of trouble and then giving them a stern lecture.

I heard theologian Matthew Fox say that we are never more spiritual than we are as teens. I knew instantly what he meant and that he was right. This is where we begin to ask the big questions that have no easy answers. This is where we begin to move away from the path that our parents have so carefully prepared for us. This is also where we can begin to explore the true Self that lives within.

Emerson said that the greatest revelation is that God is in every person. God is in our teenagers, yearning to grow, learn, and express in the world. It can look like a messy process at times, but we are wise if we trust that it is unfolding exactly as it should. Love them enough to let them fail, and they just might choose to succeed. And they’ll feel like they did it themselves.



BARRY EBERT

REV. BARRY EBERT is an associate minister and the youth director at Mile Hi Church in Lakewood, Colorado.