

## Letting Your Light Shine (from *Finding Your Path* by Michael Tino)

### OPENING WORDS & CHALICE LIGHTING:

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp-stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works....”

-Matthew 5:14-16

**PURPOSE:** We come together to build connections and to talk about what deeply matters.

**CHECK IN:** What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for loved ones, issues you are facing. How is it with you today?

### READING OF GROUP COVENANT

**FOCUS:** Letting Your Light Shine (adapted from the session developed by Michael Tino)

**FOCUS READING:** *A Figment of Her Imagination* by Vanessa Rush Southern

My mother's family, immigrants from Holland, fell in love with Ella Fitzgerald. My mother and aunts knew the entire “Ella Sings Gershwin” collection by heart. At family gatherings, we little nieces and nephews were serenaded with “A Tisket, A Tasket” and before long we were able to join in too.

So perhaps it is no surprise that if I had a choice and could be anything in the world, I would not be a minister, but a jazz singer. I find some solace in the fact that there are some similarities between the two professions. Both ministers and jazz singers sing of life's ups and downs. Both reach out across the dark spaces to try to connect with others and say, “you are not alone,” and, “I have been there too.” Both wear a lot of black. Clearly there are differences between the professions. For one, the work hours are totally reversed. For another, there is that nagging issue of talent.

I was reminded of the talent issue just the other day. Still singing along with the stereo, I switched off the car and got out. Without Ella singing along and the big band sound in the background to drown me out, all that could be heard in the silence and echo of the parking garage was me—a waffling voice and all those missed notes. It was then that I thought, as I have a thousand times before, of how much I yearn to have a voice like Ella's.

At that moment, I had a crazy thought that might pass as a revelation. What if some crazy flip-flop were the case? I thought to myself. What if I were to find out that years ago a beautiful jazz singer had dreamed of being me? What if, more than anything else, this singer wanted to possess the gifts and talents I possess? Indeed, what if she had dreamed me up and her highest aspirations and life-long yearnings were supposed to come to fruition through me? How ungrateful I would be to stand here wasting my time dreaming of being her!

What would happen if each of us were to find out that we were the creation of someone else's dreams? I wonder: Would that change the way we live our lives? Would we spend less time thinking about what we don't have or aren't? Would we spend more time cherishing who we are? Would we approach life a bit like a treasure hunt, and spend our time looking for the gifts the dreamer had hidden in us? Perhaps we would stay awake at night, not worrying by wondering—wondering what great works or wonders this dreamer had made us capable of making real?

So, I don't feel so bad these days about one dream brutally brought to a close in an empty parking lot. Instead, I have decided to spend some time wondering what notes Ella had in mind when she dreamed me up. I have no doubt that they are wonderful. Now I just need to find them.

### Questions for Reflection:

What are you particularly good at?

What are you proud of having accomplished?

What talents do you have?

How do you let your light shine in the world?

**TIME CHECK:** Each person in the group speaks uninterrupted; if time remains, general response and conversation are welcome.

**CONFIDENTIALITY CHECK AND CHECK OUT:** Is there anything that you shared here today that you would like held confidential? Otherwise, this is a reminder that we treat each other's sharing with kindness and respect.

### CLOSING WORDS:

“I have spent my days stringing and unstringing my instrument while the song I came to sing remains unsung.”

-Rabindranath Tagore