

May 3, Easter 4A (Psalm 23; John 10:1-10)

## **The source of David's overflowing cup is a free, frolicking divinity.**

by [Kirk Byron Jones](#) in the [April 22, 2020](#) issue

Peter Gomes, gone too soon, was an extraordinary preacher who served as minister of Memorial Church at Harvard University for almost 40 years. I once heard him joyfully confess his frequent response to inquiries concerning his well-being: "I flourish!" Gomes didn't just answer with the usual "Fine, how are you?" His "I flourish!" I am sure caught many people unfamiliar with the ultralively Gomes off guard.

You will not find the words "I flourish" in Psalm 23 or in Gospel accounts such as John 10 that trumpet the reality of a lavish provider offering more than enough for those in his care. But you will feel the full blast of a flourishing, abundant spirit. We may be tempted to fend off such an idea due to its proximity to a prosperity gospel that bows to the idol god of "more." Or we may find such spiritually palatable lavishness off-putting in a time when too many have too little and too few have too much. Yet to ignore David's cup with its contents spilling out all over the place is to dismiss the free, frolicking divinity behind it. Psalm 23 bids that we come to terms with feeling awfully blessed without feeling awful about it.

Feeling fine with flourishing positively and powerfully impacts our overall attitude toward life. Multiple sclerosis forced musician Jacqueline du Pré to stop performing at the age of 28. But by then, she was already regarded as one of the most gifted cellists the world had ever known.

Du Pré entered her first cello competition when she was just six years old. On that day, she ran down the hall, carrying her cello above her head, with a big grin on her face. Someone standing by interpreted the child's demeanor as elation with the relief of a successfully completed performance. He said to her, "I see you've just had your chance to play!"

“No, no,” young du Pré responded, “I’m just about to.” Her outlandish attitude characterized her short but legendary performing life. How we feel going into anything largely determines how we will feel coming out of it. We make our beliefs, and then our beliefs make us.

Being fine with flourishing also unleashes a creative prowess and boldness that is otherwise unimagined and, therefore, unrealized. Jazz pianist Herbie Hancock offers an image of how this looks and feels in his book *Possibilities*:

I’m onstage at a concert hall in Stockholm, Sweden, in the mid-1960s playing piano with the Miles Davis Quintet. . . . The music is flowing, we’re connecting with the audience, and everything feels magical, like we’re weaving a spell.

. . . The five of us have become one entity, shifting and flowing with the music. We’re playing one of Miles’s classics, “So What,” and as we hurtle toward Miles’s solo, it’s the peak of the evening; the whole audience is on the edge of their seats.

Miles starts playing, building up to his solo, and just as he’s about to really let loose, he takes a breath. And right then I play a chord that is just so wrong. I don’t even know where it came from—it’s the wrong chord, in the wrong place, and now it’s hanging out there like a piece of rotten fruit. I think, *Oh, shit*. It’s as if we’ve all been building this gorgeous house of sound, and I just accidentally put a match to it.

Miles pauses for a fraction of a second, and then he plays some notes that somehow, miraculously, make my chord sound right. In that moment I believe my mouth actually fell open. What kind of alchemy was this? And then Miles just took off from there, unleashing a solo that took the song in a new direction.

In the final analysis, being fine with flourishing has to do less with how much you have and more with a heightened appreciation for the value of whatever you do have—for yourself and for others.

Frederick Streets tells the story of visiting a home in a village and being hosted warmly. As he spoke with the adults, he noticed a little girl, and he gave her a few

pieces of gum. Later, outside, he saw the little girl again—surrounded by other children. She was sharing the gum with her friends.

When we are living in God's overflow, there is an abiding sense of having what you need and always having enough to share. Appreciating what we have, rather than ruminating over what we don't have, allows us to abide freely and fully in ever-flourishing blessing.