

## You are fine the way you are

Beloved you, beloved person,

In the picture book "Frog is Frog" by Max Velthuijs, Frog is initially quite pleased with himself. He can jump and swim and loves his green colour. But when he sees what his friends can do, something changes within him. He can't fly like Duck, do carpentry like Rat, read like Hare, or bake cakes like Piglet. Frog tries too, but he cannot and crawls away, embarrassed. He cries to Hare. Hare doesn't tell Frog to try harder, but that every animal is different and that they love him precisely because he is Frog. He reminds Frog of what he can do: jump, swim, and be a friend. Then Frog understands that he does not have to become perfect to be loved. And with a big leap, he jumps outside like only a frog can.

Do you recognise this? Moments when you start comparing yourself to others and think you are falling short. Sometimes followed by a feeling of disappointment or shame. Perhaps you withdraw a little afterward. You say less, reveal less of yourself, keep your distance, even though that is not what you need or what you do well. We sometimes learn early on that you have to prove yourself: Who got the highest grade in the class? Is your child walking yet? Or – if you're a bit older – how quickly do you get your life back on track after a divorce or the loss of a loved one? At times like these, you can lose not only yourself, but each other as well. And then, like Frog, we withdraw.

Why is it that we present each other with a view of humanity and the world that seems to leave no room for imperfection, disappointment, and experiences of loss? We prefer to present each other with an image of control, success, and progress. If you just try your best, you can be or become anything you want, and if you do not succeed, it is your own fault. Yet everyone knows that life is not so controllable, and that something is lost when we try to avoid it: namely, the courage to stay connected to the vulnerable part of ourselves.

In the story, that is exactly what Hare tries to convey to Frog. He does not try to change his feelings and does not offer well-intentioned advice on how to change. He stays with him, reminds him of who he already is, and invites him to trust in that. This gives him the courage to step outside again. Perhaps this touches on what we call compassion. By enduring what is vulnerable, in others and within yourself, space is created for new feelings and thoughts.

*When space opens up in my mind,  
everything changes,  
it takes on new colour and shape.*

*I see unsuspected distances  
and what once seemed a barren plain  
turns out to be fertile soil.<sup>1</sup>*

When we experience it this way, compassion also takes on a religious meaning. For example, when words are no longer at a loss and a gentleness arises as a friend sits quietly beside you. Or through a look of understanding from someone who has also experienced what it is like to be alone. Or a sudden gentleness felt for yourself, in the midst of your failure, and you do not quite know where that tender feeling comes from. Compassion then seems not only something you can show, but also something that can emerge. Something that presents itself as grace; not earned, not made, but received.

Perhaps you recognise that tendency to compare yourself? Hopefully, you also know the people who want to be "like Hare" for you for a while? Who do not want to solve or improve anything, but sit beside you and remind you of who you are? A beloved person, with everything that belongs to you. Then the courage can be born within you to jump again as only you can. It is a gift to know that you can be carried with that trust.

With a warm-hearted greeting, gladly your brother,

Marten van der Wal



**We remind each other of our baptismal promises**

<sup>1</sup> Choir Song 49 *Creative Thinking*, freely translated