

Turning to One Another
Two Rivers Unitarian Universalist
October 16, 2011

First Reading – Turning to One Another by Margaret Wheatley

There is no greater power than a community discovering what it cares about.

Ask “What’s possible?” not “What’s wrong?” Keep asking.

Notice what you care about.

Assume that many others share your dreams.

Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.

Talk to people you know.

Talk to people you don’t know.

Talk to people you never talk to.

Be intrigued by the differences you hear.

Expect to be surprised.

Treasure curiosity more than certainty.

Invite in everybody who cares to work on what’s possible.

Acknowledge that everyone is an expert about something.

Know that creative solutions come from new connections.

Remember, you don’t fear people whose story you know.

Real listening always brings people closer together.

Trust that meaningful conversations can change your world.

Rely on human goodness. Stay together

Second Reading – The Low Road by Marge Piercy

Alone, you can fight, you can refuse,

you can take what revenge you can

but they roll over you.

But two people fighting back to back

can cut through a mob,

a snake-dancing file

can break a cordon,

an army can meet an army.

Two people can keep each other sane,

can give support, conviction,

love, massage, hope, sex.

Three people are a delegation,

a committee, a wedge.

With four you can play bridge

and start an organisation.

With six you can rent a whole house,

eat pie for dinner with no seconds,

and hold a fund raising party.

A dozen make a demonstration.

A hundred fill a hall.
A thousand have solidarity and your own newsletter;
ten thousand, power and your own paper;
a hundred thousand, your own media;
ten million, your own country.
It goes on one at a time,
it starts when you care to act,
it starts when you do it again after they said no,
it starts when you say We
and know who you mean, and each day you mean one more.

Homily – “Turning to...” by Rev. Deborah Holder

Homily – “...One Another” by Gretchen Haley

As late as my first quarter in seminary, I had some serious doubts about all this. I mean, church.

I know it’s crazy, but until I started as a student there, I didn’t fully get that the Iliff *School of Theology* was a *religious* institution. And that I had signed up to talk – a lot – about church – not to mention God, and scripture, and morality, liturgy and hymns – to wrestle with and learn about all these things.

See, I knew about Iliff from my social justice work in the Denver area – they were always hosting forums and leading actions around the most progressive of social issues – queer justice stuff, anti-racism, Palestinian-Israeli dialogues, economic justice– these sorts of things. And since in my mind *church* and progressive justice work were pretty incompatible, I don’t know, my brain just wouldn’t compute the church part of their – or my – identity.

So there I was, at the opening convocation, my first quarter. And they started playing this really super traditional Methodist hymn, and there was an organ, and everyone knew all the words, and Christ had come to redeem us all. I realized, with no small amount of dread, I was surrounded by “Church” people. They were everywhere

That was just over four years ago. Last week, someone literally called me a “church lady.” “You’re really churchy,” they said. And what’s more, I agreed.

What happened in those years, what changed in me? What made me imagine that somehow church was not just compatible with my deepest values, but actually the *best* place and form for stirring up these values and dreams, and for bringing them to bear in a vision of the world?

“It starts when you say we, and know who you mean.”

That first year of seminary, I felt like an outsider, an interloper. I did it to myself mostly, you remember that stance I told you about in the prison....I made it often and in many subtle ways. Keeping a safe distance from the whole *religious* world. Like it was an infectious disease.

And then, over Spring Break that year, it was Tuesday. I was laying on my couch with my then 2 year old daughter when the phone rang. "We believe 2 years ago you adopted a baby girl?" "Yes," I said. "Well her birth mother had another baby, two days ago. A boy." Would my family be interested in another foster-adoptive process? He could come home that weekend, they thought.

That next Monday, I returned to my classes with a zoo-animal print sling wrapped around me, carrying inside the tiniest little baby you ever did see. We didn't have a childcare plan for an infant – we didn't have an anything plan. But these moments when they come, you just leap, and trust that somehow, it will all be ok.

Two weeks into classes. Josef had been coming with me to New Testament every day. We were getting by. It was hard, in those early days with an infant, there's enough elation you don't notice how impossible it all is.

One day, the teacher said to me, Gretchen, I need to talk to you after class. I was sure she was going to say, it wasn't going to work. I had to find another place for my baby. The end of the class came, and everyone filed out as usual. I maneuvered my way up to my professor. She took me by the hand and she said, I know it's been a tough transition. I wanted to talk with you – maybe let's go out in the lobby and sit down for a minute? I said ok, and she led me out the door.

And there, filling the lobby – three or four tables – were piles of presents, and my whole class, with signs and balloons saying, welcome baby, and congratulations! They'd thrown me a baby shower.

I barely knew how to respond – looking around at these future Christian pastors, future church leaders, smiling at me, loving me, and my son, and with all the cards addressed to me, *and Carri* – you get it, this *gay* family? I didn't know what to say. And so, I burst into tears.

What else do you do when you realize someone has been paying attention to you in ways you hadn't noticed? That a whole community has imagined what you might need, before you can even articulate it yourself? I know many of you spent time reflecting on this month's theme of belonging last Sunday – well, this was one of those moments for me, where I felt in a way I could have never predicted, like I truly belonged.

And as they brought me over to a chair, and handed me present after present to unwrap, and rejoiced with me in this great moment – a vision came over me. It was a new hope for this thing called *church*, and its capacity to build bridges rather than foster division. A new understanding

of Christianity and the possibility that its leaders had not all gone mad, and that maybe, a good number of them, still followed the basic words of Jesus: Love One Another.

And it was a vision of community, of communion between Christianity and Unitarian Universalism, and in turn a sense of communion amongst all the world. Sitting there, I glimpsed the world I wished were true all the time. In that moment, I didn't just hope Beloved Community was possible, I *knew* it was, with everything in me.

And here's the important part. This vision, this experience of *faith*, came not through rational argument, or analysis or theory. It didn't even come through social justice or public witnessing together. There were no picket signs, no debates, no text books. There was just the turning of persons to one another, in care and concern, in an expression of courageous and abundant love.

"It starts when you say we, and know who you mean, and each day you mean one more."

A long time social activist, who was pretty new to this whole church business, told me once, she'd spent much of her life overwhelmed at the world's problems. There was just so much to do and it was always so hard to know where to begin – or how to stop. The world's hunger was so relentless, and the landscape so bleak, she felt paralyzed and on the edge of despair. But she told me, since starting to do her work through the church, these feelings had lessened.

I have these people, they are my partners, and together we are working on these issues. It's a scale I can handle, she said. I don't have to figure out the whole world, and I don't have to do it alone. I just get to begin here, practice here. With these people, in this place. And I know they have my back. Maybe this is the best we can hope for, she said, maybe this is the point. Just keeping going, doing what we can, with a small group of people, learning and growing together, helping each other, as best we can.

This is our village. This church. Here, we learn each other's song, and we sing it to each other. And as life moves along with its mix of joy and loss, these songs remind us of our deepest loyalties and values, remind us even on the darkest nights, we are worthy and sacred, we are seen and held, and we belong here in this circle, here in this life.

In these circles of community I've come to call the Unitarian Universalist church – we affirm all these things, and she was right, it's the point. Which is not to say, all this singing is always easy, or fun. Church – especially a Unitarian Universalist congregation – is not a club you join because you have a bunch of things in common with everyone else who's there. Usually it's the opposite – you look around and wonder – who are all these strangers and how did I end up here?! And in that way – it's the best microcosm we have available to us of the whole world. What other place can you go today, where all ages are present. Where all sexual orientations, gender expressions, and economic backgrounds are welcome. Where all kinds of beliefs about the universe and all kinds of approaches to life are present together. And where else can we go where at the point where all these differences intersect, in this gathered community, the point

is to move from the I to the we. The point is to turn to one another across our differences, with courageous love and concern, and to affirm, our oneness, our wholeness. The point is to reveal to each other that the I is becoming, has always been, the we.

And with this vision of church before us, I think we all might become, proudly, church ladies. All of us, even the guys.

“It goes on one at a time, it starts when you care to act, it starts when you do it again after they said no, it starts when you say We and know who you mean, and each day you mean one more.”

The I, becoming the we. How does it happen?

Think about all we have reflected on so far. These stories of turning – to one another.

And I want us to spend a few moments considering: “what tells you when the I is becoming we?” Think about your own history – in this congregation, or in other settings. What tells you when that single “I” starts becoming something called “we.” What does it feel like, what are the experiences like, what do you know about that?

I’m going to give you a few moments of silent reflection. And I want you to answer this question in a short phrase. Like, less than 10 words. Better if it’s 3 words if you can. A kind of mantra.

And then I want you to turn to each other, to one person near you, and share your answers. And then if you are willing, write down your answer on these cards, and pass them forward.

From you I receive. To you I give. Together we share. And from this, we live.

May it be so, and amen.