

Great expectations! A multigenerational service looking at our call to our better selves in service toward a better tomorrow.

Last week you had an opportunity to see a picture of UUism. Using the Spirit Play method of story we laid out a picture of who we are as a people of religion. If you missed it, you can find it in the newsletter and it is also displayed in our social hall. The story shows us on a rainbow path, in ever-widening community, drawn together to engage the mystery of creation some call God, gathered in caring community that makes promises to one another. There are seven of these promises, each with a color, which will become more important in the service in a bit. RED to respect one another, ORANGE to offer fair and kind treatment to all, YELLOW to yearn to learn more about each other, ourselves and the mystery, GREEN to grow together as individuals and as a community, BLUE to act on our values not just on Sundays but all days, INDIGO to use our power to insist that all people are free, and safe and able to live in peace and receive justice and VIOLET to value our planet. The story depicted the six sources we draw upon:

1. direct experience of awe and wonder,
2. words, deeds and I would add creations of people who have come before and live now and through their creations and actions invite us to learn, to grow and to act that we might become better people and create a better world,
3. world religions, each of which offer different ways and stories and histories that can inform our pathway toward that better self and better tomorrow,
4. our Judeo-Christian roots which for so many of us played formative roles,
5. science and reason which brings us knowledge and facts into relationship with faith – at times to challenge and other times lead us to new understandings, but always, always reminding us that our minds are capable, and in fact, called to discernment when it comes to belief
6. and earth-centered traditions inviting us to note with gratitude our place in the natural rhythm of life and existence.

If a picture of our tradition is to be had, friends, this is it! And as the year progresses our young people will be engaging with our story. They will be learning different stories that invite them into deeper understandings of our promises. What it means to really respect every person. What that looks like when the person is a bully. What that looks like when you really don't like that person – or as someone once taught me to say 'it's someone you aren't necessarily drawn toward.' What that looks like when that person is someone very, very different from you. What that looks like when that person is you and you're not feeling respected or included. How do you call others back to those promises we made? These are not easy questions and that's only with the first promise. The questions don't get easier. What about #2, about fairness? I think about that when I think about our sanctuary not being fully accessible. I think about that one when I put on this Black Lives Matter button too. And how about promise #5 to act upon our values not just on Sundays but every day! I know I struggle with that one. Maybe when the young people get to that one they'll let me join in the conversation so I can get some tips from them!

But, truly, shouldn't we be working on all of these too? Isn't that why we're here? To become our better selves? To build a better tomorrow? To fulfill those promises we just heard?

Now you might be thinking "I come for the coffee!" Or "I come for community." If it's community, that's part of it, isn't it? That's one of the ways we work on respecting each other and growing together and

learning about one another. There's a great phrase a colleague on the west coast used 'church isn't the place you come to be with the people you love, it's the place you come to love the people you're with.' Wow --- that gets right to the core, doesn't it? Just by being together we can become better selves --- IF, and it's not a little IF... IF, we are fully committed to those promises. That doesn't mean we won't mess up and say something unkind or react in a way we later regret. It doesn't mean we'll be embarrassed from time to time either, because we didn't understand something --- yet or made assumptions. It happens to me all the time. This week alone I learned that some people who have different hair than me, cannot get the shampoo they need in stores here in Marblehead. They have to leave town for shampoo. And earlier this year, I learned something profound about a relative that made me change how I saw her in a huge way and regret some conversations I had. So, being in community is a key, I would even argue vitally necessary pathway to becoming a better person.

You might say 'I come here for the music' and I'd agree that was a fabulous reason to come. Our gifted musicians and choir add such beauty to each service and singing can make our souls smile – I think that's important to our diet as spiritual seekers on the pathway to better selves and in terms of a better tomorrow, some of our best music comes from the soundtracks of social justice revolutions – I mean movements!

There are many draws to any Sunday morning. Music, community, for some the intellectual stimulation of the Sunday Seminar, for many the opportunity to impact change through the Social Action efforts..... I've even heard some come for the sermons --- to be comforted some Sundays and dis comforted others. Each of these important ways we engage on the journey. BUT, if you tell me you simply come for the coffee, that you don't really have much of a reason and you're not interested in becoming a better person and making the world a better place – **I challenge you to step up your game.**

There are some traditions in which a chair or several chairs are placed at the front of the service toward the end or space is made available at the altar and a call goes out to all those who are ready – ready to receive Jesus Christ into their hearts and lives, ready to convert, to proclaim their faith and be claimed. Ours is not that tradition but I do call us all, at every age, to commit to becoming better selves. To have faith that working on how we are with one another and how we engage with questions of the head and heart and how we do good works in the world – to have faith that it changes us in ways we cannot know, but for which we will be grateful – and better. To have faith that doing so enriches all of our relationships and opens us differently to a community and world which needs more of what we are learning to cook. To have faith that it makes a difference – and it is as Margaret Mead said, the only thing that ever has.

A couple of weeks ago I preached that this is not a place where spirituality is received, rather it is the place where it is achieved. Friends, the only thing in between us and our better, best selves is the same thing in between today and a better tomorrow – It's right here. If it's spirituality you seek, it's time to step up your game. Each day. It's a choice. It's daunting, for sure. But there is very good news. It's free. You needn't do any research. No Consumer's Report, tripadvisor, no need to ask friends, nor save money, wait for sales or look for groupons. The way forward begins right where you sit and you are the motor. There's more good news. You are not alone. Look to your right. Look to your left. If your neck turns well look behind you and look in front. We have so much company on the journey and we need it. And we have help from our tradition, one that calls us out to go from good to better to best and never rest ----- come on, you know the rest ... till our good is better and our better is best!

Dick Gilbert who is quoted on your OOS, nailed it when he said “We should never be graduated from the church’s school. Religious education is not something that can be once and for all delivered to us and then kept. We cannot be a really free church unless, as adults, we keep studying. It is insidiously easy to grow content with comfortable finalities that at one time were regarded as liberal.” And Jack Mendelsohn affirmed the need to go beyond that study into action “People talk about our intellectualism in religion. Actually our religious enterprise is based primarily on a monumental act of faith – faith that if we are willing to work together without the usual bonds of certainty and uniformity- even in the most emotional areas – we will become the kind of persons our pluralistic world needs if it is to survive.” He called us to a constant state of humility – what he called “the humility required by a never-ending search for meaning.”

It’s up to us. Each morning we’re given another day and we can choose to stay the course or dive in and head toward morning wearing the call of our faith to seek better, to reach for best, to build a tomorrow worth reaching so we might do it all again. Come, let’s head on further toward morning right now by making visible our commitment to our promises! Are the streamer launchers ready?

(the children and youth then helped us created a colorful web across all the pews connecting us with the colors of our promises, Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo and Violet. There may have been enormous balloons of the same colors bouncing throughout!)