

INTEGRITY: EMBRACING IT ALL
The Rev. Julie Stoneberg
Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
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OPENING WORDS

~ *Lawrence Kushner*

Some seem to be born with a nearly completed puzzle.

And so it goes.

Souls going this way and that

Trying to assemble the myriad parts.

But know this. No one has within themselves

All the pieces to their puzzle.

Like before the days when they used to seal

jigsaw puzzles in cellophane. Insuring that all the pieces were there.

Everyone carries with them at least one and probably

Many pieces to someone else's puzzle.

Sometimes they know it.

Sometimes they don't.

And when you present your piece

Which is worthless to you,

To another, whether you know it or not,

Whether they know it or not,

You are a messenger from the Most High.

You, and all that is you, are a gift to this community. Come, let us worship together.

STORY FOR ALL AGES

The Missing Piece

~ *Shel Silverstein*

A 'pie' is missing a piece, and searches for what is missing. Nothing seems to fit, and finally, it realizes that its life, its purpose, is to search.

READING

Day 23 ~ from 40-Day Journey

~ *Parker Palmer*

Day 23.

I now (after the experience of severe depression) know myself to be a person of weakness and strength, liability and giftedness, darkness and light. I now know that to be whole means to reject none of it, but to embrace all of it.

Some may say that this embrace is narcissistic, an obsession with self at the expense of others, but that is not how I experience it. When I ignored my own truth on behalf of a distorted ego and ethic, I led a false life that caused others pain – for which I can only ask forgiveness. When I started attending to my own truth, more of that truth became available in my work and my relationships. I know now that anything one can do on behalf of true self is done ultimately in the service of others.

Others may say that “embracing one's wholeness” is just fancy talk for permission to sin, but again my experience is to the contrary. To embrace weakness, liability, and

darkness as part of who I am gives that part less sway over me, because all it ever wanted was to be acknowledged as part of my whole self.

MESSAGE

Embracing it All

Imagine if our opening words today had expressed something like this:

“Come down off the ladder. Wash out that paintbrush. Shake the sand out of your shoes. Get up off your muddy knees, and give the garden a morning off.”¹

Leave outside these doors all of the ‘stuff’ of your everyday human life. Take off your shoes and enter here as a pure being. Show not, in this sacred space, your fears, your doubts, your mistakes or your flaws. Leave outside of these doors all that you are ashamed of, all of the times you have not done your best, all of your struggles. Bring only that which is right with your soul...that which is true and beautiful. Come. You are welcome here.

Imagine that those had been our opening words. What I just read began with the words of David Blanchard, but then they turned a corner and became something else...something concocted and contorted...something I hope you will never ever hear in this community, as our opening words, as our welcome. Never ever.

Today, as you know, we are considering what it means to be people of integrity, which is to say, people who live whole and undivided lives.

This morning’s story, *The Missing Piece*, was about a being, an IT, that exists in the shape of a circle with a wedge cut out of it. IT rolls about, feeling un-whole, searching for its missing piece. Eventually, IT meets a piece that seems to be a perfect match, oh happy day!, but IT finds that when it is a perfect circle, IT misses out on a lot of things it used to enjoy. Eventually, IT decides that IT would better off as it was before...imperfect, not complete, and bumps away...apparently satisfied, but still searching.

Do you ever feel like IT? As if you are constantly on the lookout for something that will complete you and make you feel whole? Or perhaps, you’re looking for something that will fix some ‘broken’ part that you feel ashamed of, or where you feel inadequate. Maybe you believe that there’s one circumstance of life, one which, if you could just achieve it, would replace your less desirable pieces with shiny new ones, and then, you would feel whole.

Or, maybe you experience it differently...having stuffed your space, your being, with all kinds of extra pieces that take up space and cloud or overpower bits that are integral to your authentic self. Instead of bumping along like a broken wheel, you feel overwhelmed, or over-stimulated. Your energy is bloated, and you are unable to ‘roll through life’ at all.

There’s also a danger, I suppose, of living at the other end of the spectrum...not embracing the seeds of potential we contain, and rather, out of fear or a lack of self-confidence or generally feeling like we have nothing to offer, we leave whole parts of ourselves vacant and un-actualized.

Will you absorb these words of Martin Buber? “Every single person is a new thing in the world and is called upon to fill his particularity in this world. Every person’s foremost task is

¹ <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/opening/5190.shtml>

the actualization of [their] unique, unprecedented and never recurring potentialities, and not the repetition of something that another, be it even the greatest, has already achieved.”

The point is, to be who we are...and to embrace all of who we are...even those parts that have been somehow, somewhere, labeled as insufficient or ugly or undesirable. The point is to embrace all of who we are, even when we feel incomplete or like we're missing something.

Why? Why embrace it all? Parker Palmer says that in embracing it all, he has been able to let go of living a false life, one that caused pain. As he's embraced it all, more of the unique gifts he has to offer have become available in his work and his relationships. To embrace it all, for him, means that the weakness, liability, and darkness that is part of him holds less power and space. He's found that all those things ever wanted was to be acknowledged as part of his whole self.² The god of wholeness, Palmer wrote, is not the god of ought to be, but the god of what is.³

Can you believe that? Can you begin to conceive of it? That each part of us, whether named as weakness or strength, liability or giftedness, yearns to be acknowledged as part of the whole?

Let's do a simple exercise together...a guided meditation, if you will. Close your eyes, or just relax your vision. Take a few deep breaths. Picture your feet firmly planted on the ground, and then take a golden cord and lay it in a circle around your feet...at the perimeter of whatever you feel is 'your space.' Now reach down and lift that cord, so that the circle slowly moves up your body. As the cord passes, see that it creates a sort of casing, or an outside edge, a golden circle around you. Lift it slowly higher until it is over your head, and then gently complete the circle, so that you are wrapped in golden light. Breathe.

This is the whole that is you. Bask in it. Breathe.

Now scan that interior space. First check for things that aren't yours. The shoulds and oughts. The holes someone else has told you that you need to fill. Things that belong to someone else. Kindly excuse them from your space. Set them outside. Clean your space so that all that is left is yours. Only your story. Your truth. Your past. Your experiences. Your knowings. Your values. Your struggles. Your dreams. Your gifts. Your shortcomings. Whether they be bits you love or bits you have trouble embracing, hold it all. This is you. This is the one unique and beautiful you. Say it to yourself...this is me. This is me. All of this is my Julie-ness (of course insert your own name.) All of this is my ____-ness. I embrace it. I embrace it all. Now, in your imagination, bring your hands to the top of your space, and lovingly run your hands down the outside of your space, all the way to your toes, opening yourself again to all that is. And breathe.

I have the feeling that in this moment, we are together in an uncluttered way, true to ourselves...a way that is often difficult to experience. Appreciate how this feels...inside of yourself and around you. Notice it. See the truth and wholeness of everyone in the room. Be here, just as you are.

² See earlier reading from 40-days

³ A Hidden Wholeness

Rev. Doug Taylor⁴, writing about his discomfort with expectations of transformation, said, “My theology calls me to meet you where you are...to promote you being who you are without the need to become something or someone else. Sure I want to be a better person; we all want to be better people. But transformed? ... There is a deep theology at the ground of this question. Either we accept you as you are or we are in the business of helping transform you into something else. We can’t play both sides with integrity.”

We all want to be better people. We all want some kind of transformation. But what we resist is an expectation of what that transformation will be or when it will happen. First, we want to be accepted as we are, for who we are, knowing that within each of us are seeds of change and growth, but that those seeds are ours to water and cultivate, as we choose. To paraphrase the words of a Zen Buddhist master, “I am perfect just the way that I am...and I could use some improvement.”

Embrace it all. Embrace it, accept it, love it, even as we desire to change. Hiding parts of ourselves doesn’t make us better people...it just limits the inner resources we have to draw upon, and what we have to offer the world.

And what does this mean for community? I think to have integrity as a community is to be willing and capable of taking an honest look at who we are. It’s about naming both our strengths and our limitations. It’s about facing our mistakes and aiming to do better. It’s about celebrating who we are even as we imagine who we can be.

So, if you were to use that golden cord exercise for the whole that is this congregation, or this faith even, where would you put it? Would it look similar to the walls of this building, embracing what is ‘us’ in terms of those who are within the walls? I hope not. Would it circle out into the wider community in openness and welcome? That’s a start perhaps. Look inside. What is it that we embrace as an integral part of who we are, and what are we spending ourselves on that does not line up with that vision? Might that cord create...not a space for particular people, defining who is in and who is out...but rather a container for those values and visions which we hold to be true and worthy of our attention? Might it help to create a space where we each come, as our whole selves, and find the courage to embrace the whole that is this community? And might we allow ourselves, in our wholeness, to truly celebrate and live together, dedicated to healing not harming, helping not hindering, blessing not cursing?

What if we truly grounded ourselves in love, beginning with acceptance, and then were to strive to be a place where we would help one another through whatever transformations come our way? What if, in embracing that whole of who we are, we actually had more to give, more space to grow and to connect... honestly... authentically... with integrity.

In his book, *Religious Integrity for Everyone*, Rev. Fred Campbell, says that a religious community has integrity ‘when it enables human beings to enact the drama of living, aging, and dying with understanding and acceptance, meaning and purpose, trust and love, faith and hope.’ In other words, we have integrity when we bring with us, into this community, all of

⁴ <http://uubinghamton.org/2012/04/transformation-versus-acceptance/>

we are, all of what we are struggling with, and open ourselves to support others in a life of wholeness.

I conclude with the REAL ending to the words of Rev. Blanchard, with which I began: "This church is ready for you to fill its rooms, to create its spirit, to generate its warmth, to kindle its light. This church is ready for you to make community, to create beauty, to bend it toward justice, to serve its ideals. This church is ready for you to be here, YOU, honoring our past, invigorating our present, and dreaming our future. This is your church. Here we are home. Here we are whole."

Yep, we are who we are. In fact, we can't help but be who we are. May we be the best us we can be, and may we be so with integrity, embracing all that we are, true to our wholeness. Amen.

CLOSING WORDS *Hasidic Tale* ~ Martin Buber\

A rabbi named Zusya died and went to stand before the judgment seat of God. As he waited for God to appear, he grew nervous thinking about his life and how little he had done. He began to imagine that God was going to ask him, "Why weren't you Moses or why weren't you Solomon or why weren't you David?" But when God appeared, the rabbi was surprised. God simply asked, "Why weren't you Zusya?"

Go, knowing that you, as you are, in all of your wholeness, are a messenger from the Most High...a gift to us all.

Amen.