

SEEKING JUSTICE IN A CHANGING LAND
The Rev. Julie Stoneberg
Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
May 24, 2015

OPENING WORDS *The World* ~ Rev. Charles Eddis

May the world that is one in its life, a rich blue top spinning in the endless night of space, a world that is one in its interdependence and fragility, be one in our hearts and minds and deeds also.

Le Monde

Que le monde qui est unique, qui évolue dans l'immensité profonde et bleue de l'univers, le monde qui se complète, interdépendant et fragile, soit entier dans nos coeurs, nos esprits et nos actes.

STORY FOR ALL AGES *Climb the Family Tree, Jesse Bear!* ~ Nancy White Carlstrom

A young bear goes to his first family reunion and experiences all the joys of being with his people.

READING *ACM Experiences*

Several UFPers shared their experiences of attending the CUC Annual Conference and Meeting in Ottawa.

MESSAGE

What can I say that has not already been said? I've been back in Peterborough but a scant thirty-six hours, and been asked the question already many times...how was the conference? How is the CUC? "Oh fine. Great, really. It was good." Enough said?

But what can I really tell you? How can I ever share the variety of experiences, and interactions...the things that inspired me, and challenged me, and wrangled me, and gave me pause?

The reason we do this...the reason there's a 'bring back' from the annual CUC conference and meeting...is that it is easy for us to become isolated and silo-ed...here in our comfortable P-patch. Things are going on out there in the Unitarian world, and we might not ever hear about them...we could completely lose touch...if we didn't have these ways to connect and interact with other Unitarians and other congregations. Joining with others, we see the 'size of the Unitarian cloth' here in Canada, and get some sense of our place in it.

In his confluence lecture on Sunday afternoon entitled "Spirit: The Necessary Foundation for Social Justice," Rev. Stephen Atkinson told of his vision...one in which we would change our level of consciousness so that spiritual qualities such as patience and acceptance would manifest in us in our disinterest in being right...and in our deep interest in being more connected. He was talking about building bridges across differences, building connections leading to greater justice. Indeed, connection is critical, even when that connection is with our own 'tribe.'

If I can only offer one thing...and I can only offer one thing...it is to share about some of the progress we are making in beginning to understand the issues around, and in trying to connect with, our First Nations people. This theme was prevalent throughout my weekend, as the

Saturday stream that I took was about the CUC's Truth, Healing, and Reconciliation work, and the multigenerational workshop I attended on Sunday was on Aboriginal music and storytelling, and I attended the Canadian UU Women's Association's tea, at which Claudette Commanda spoke. Perhaps it's just my lens, but we, as a national movement, are beginning to actively engage in this work. That's incredibly heartening and hopeful....and it's about time.

But let me tell you a bit about Sunday's pageant. Yes, it was artful and beautiful. Yes, it had loads of music, and props, and colour, and movement. Yes, I wish we could do something on that scale here.

But it wasn't perfect. It wasn't perfect...as if anything ever could be...because it told an incomplete story and told it from a limited perspective. It carried some assumptions and stereotypes and was far too 'tidy' in its inclusion of First Peoples. You see, it was a story of Ottawa...from the time of the earth's formation to the current day. It told of molten rock and flowing waters. It told of newcomers coming to that area and mingling with the people who already lived there. It told of a build-up of settler culture, pushing out the First Peoples, and of the destruction of nature. It told of a great fire, and it told of Ottawa ceding a hospital room to the Netherlands so that a princess could be born on her own land. It told of the pollution and misuse of the waters, and of the great sadness of the water spirits. And, it told of efforts to reverse those mistakes and to ask forgiveness. But as I say, it was a bit too tidy. First Peoples were represented by one caricature-ish puppet. It smacked of being too easy for those of us who are part of that settler culture...too easy to wrap it all up with a kiss and a shared tulip.

I had a conversation later with one of its creators. I learned that its first iteration was as a play...using a big 'spirit of the water' puppet to encourage cleaning up a terribly polluted lake. Its second iteration was as pageant presented at Ottawa First. And for this iteration, at the ACM, there was strong encouragement to change it to include more of the story of the First Peoples. Maybe wasn't such a good idea. Or maybe it was.

Let tell you is this. Before the pageant, Rev. John Marsh from Ottawa First offered a short homily in which he told some of the story of his own family. He recently learned that his forbearers were among those who settled land in the Bay of Fundy area as the British pushed out the French Acadians, an act referred to today as a Canadian Tragedy, the Great Expulsion. A shameful history. He then went on to tell about his grandfather, who during the Second World War, made a decision which destroyed his business but which served to help others. A proud history.

None among us can find all good, or all bad, in our histories. We all come from a long line of mistakes and right actions, bandits and heroes. We each contain the capacity for both. Rev. Marsh concluded with a story from Shakespeare...from *The Tempest*...when Miranda questions her father Prospero concerning all that had happened to them. She asks if the decisions they made had been a blessing or a curse. His answer, "Both, my child. Both."

This tension, the presence of both good and bad in our past, both good and bad within us, was lifted up so poignantly...in Rev. Marsh's words...and in the beautiful and painfully insufficient story told by the pageant.

Our work, in seeking justice, is not done. The story has not yet been fully told. We have stumbled, often. We have hurt one another, often. And so have we loved, and cried, and

healed. It is on our ability to look honestly at ourselves, to listen openly to others, and to step bravely forward together, that the unfolding future depends.

So be it.

RITUAL OF THE SAFETY PIN

~ as shared by Matt Meyer

CLOSING WORDS

Oh Canada, My Country ~ Gwen Pharis Ringwood (1940)

Oh Canada, My Country

Where you have failed, the fault is on my head.

Where you are ignorant or blind or cruel, I made you so.

In all your folly and strength I share,

And all your beauty is my heritage.

Go with this country in your heart. Go with each other in hand. Know that you are not alone.

Amen.