

A COMMUNITY OF WELCOME
The Rev. Julie Stoneberg
Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
September 3, 2017

OPENING WORDS

Invitation to Join the Journey ~ Lyn Cox

(These words were originally written to accompany a service based on the Wizard of Oz...)

Come you accidental pilgrims, you who find yourself on a journey of surprise and wonder.

Come you who emerge into this place as an act of liberation.

Come you who seek a life of mindfulness and a place to test your thoughts. Come you who bring hearts of all kinds: heavy hearts, rusty hearts, hearts broken open in revelation, hearts full of love to share.

Come you who seek courage, and you who have more courage than you realize.

Come you who stand behind the curtain, gathering up the resources to claim your truth.

Come you who have been in a bubble, you who are poised for transformation.

We begin our story again, gathering courage, love, mindfulness, and a sense of purpose.

We gather as people of all ages, of different abilities, different backgrounds, and different perspectives. We share a covenant, a direction for our shared journey, and a commitment to encourage and challenge one another to spiritual growth.

This path will ask much from us. Let us move forward with love. Let us move forward with appreciation for one another. Let us move forward knowing we are not alone.

Whoever you are, whatever your gifts, you are welcome to join this journey.

And the journey is made all the more meaningful because of your presence.

STORY FOR ALL AGES

Tea Rex

~ Molly Idle

(A small girl invites a very large guest to tea, and must intentionally practice hospitality!)

REFLECTION

A Welcoming Invitation; a Welcoming Heart

As I've delved into the theme of welcome for this month, I've become fascinated with the reciprocity that's hidden within...to truly welcome someone is apparently not just as that gracious, gregarious host who readily throws open their doors and refrigerators and wallets. Yes, to be welcoming is to be open and giving, but what is less often stated is that it is in the act of welcoming someone/something into our lives, that we ourselves become more whole, more full of life, more able to access all the possibilities of who we can be in the world.

I chose the opening words for their spirit of welcome, but it occurs to me that referencing the story of the Wizard of Oz makes sense for today. Our protagonist, Dorothy, is on her own hopeful journey...not knowing exactly how to get there, what she will encounter along the way, or what she will find when she arrives. And yet, she welcomes others to join her on the path...and is willing to alter her timetable in order to accommodate their needs, welcoming their companionship as a blessing. She helps them even as they help her. She is changed by their presence with her.

It may be true that the danger of seeing welcome as one-sided...a person who knows it all and has it all, offering it to someone who doesn't have it or know it...is that the welcome actually becomes more hollow, less open to/capable of being changed. To welcome, then, is perhaps done best when we see those entering as already blessed, already whole...recognizing that in joining with us, they will, in turn, provide a reciprocal welcome to us...that of sharing their lives and hearts.

As we begin this church year, as you reconnect with this journey and why it is you come here, and as you consider inviting friends to join you, I thought we might explore the connection between welcome and invitation. So often, folks are afraid to 'invite' others...worrying that it is evangelizing, or proselytizing, or just pushy. And I completely understand that. I feel a similar resistance in myself. And yet, I know that having companions on our paths, an experience that many of us share here, is something that so many are missing.

I've often thought it would be wonderful if we had a personalized welcome video on our website, but we don't. So I'm going to show you one from another congregation. As we watch it, think about what is being shared and expressed. Is it welcoming? Is it open? Does it suggest that there's a space for others? Does it offer the understanding that those who walk together actively participate in the transformation of one another?

You might also think about what YOU would say if you were in a video like this. We're going to talk about that after see this video.

(Following the video, those present had a conversation about what they would like to see in a video about UFP...)

READING *A Religion For Greatness* ~ Clarence Skinner

A Religion for Greatness was written by Charles Skinner in 1945, though what he writes seems to speak directly to our world today. The language has been adapted to for gender inclusivity:

The religion of the unities and universals is (a) radical cure. It gets down to the roots out of which prejudice grows. It digs into the soil of ... selfishness, superstitions, and distortions. It destroys the vicious partialisms which would lock [people] into divisive cells of race, denying them the common rights of humanity. This enemy must be routed on every front – economic, social, biological, and cultural. The only way to rout it is to supplant the fears and errors of partialism by a vigorous, realistic religion of universalism. For every denial we must make an assertion. [All] must enlarge the borders of [their] consciousness to include the human race. We must think, feel, and act in universe terms, and thus see how petty and sinful are the partialisms of our lesser selves. We must welcome differences because life in a varied world is richer than life in uniformity. We must recognize the rightful place of color, shape, and history in a syncretic culture. If we "see life steadily and see it whole," we can appreciate all the parts. The part becomes misunderstood only when we see it without relationships, as an end in itself. One race is no more necessary than one kind of tree or one kind of horse. Each has its own genius and each may contribute to a life that is "rounded, divine, complete."

It is a time for greatness. There must be a religion for greatness to meet the need of the time.

CLOSING WORDS *Invitation to Join the Journey (redux)* ~ Lyn Cox

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Blessed be. Amen.