

THERE'S A THREAD YOU FOLLOW
The Rev. Julie Stoneberg
Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
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OPENING WORDS *The Peace of Autumn* Rabindranath Tagore (adapted)

Today the peace of autumn pervades the world. In the radiant [morning], silent and motionless, the wide stillness rests like a tired bird, spreading over the deserted fields to all horizons its wings of golden green.

Today the thick thread of the Otanabee river flows without much song, leaving no mark on its gravely banks.

Neighbouring townships bask in the sun with eyes closed in idle and languid slumber.

In the stillness we can hear...in every blade of grass, in every speck of dust, in every part of my own body, in the visible and invisible worlds, in the planets, the sun, and the stars...

the joyous dance of the atoms through endless time.

In every season, in every moment, we are connected by many strands, to all that is.

Come, let us be together in the stillness and light of this sacred space.

STORY FOR ALL AGES *Agatha's Feather Bed* ~ Carmen Agra Deedy

(Weaver Agatha has a new feather bed. But when she is visited by some naked geese demanding their feathers back, she has to figure out what to do. Her mantra is "Everything comes from something...")

READING *Shoulders* ~ Naomi Shihab Nye

A man crosses the street in rain,
stepping gently, looking two times north and south,
because his son is asleep on his shoulder.

No car must splash him.
No car drive too near to his shadow.

This man carries the world's most sensitive cargo
but he's not marked.

Nowhere does his jacket say FRAGILE,
HANDLE WITH CARE.

His ear fills up with breathing.
He hears the hum of a boy's dream
deep inside him.

We're not going to be able
to live in this world
if we're not willing to do what he's doing
with one another.

MESSAGE *There's a Thread that You Follow* ~ Rev. Stoneberg

William Stafford once wrote this poem, which he calls "The Way It Is."

There's a thread you follow. It goes among
things that change. But it doesn't change.
People wonder about what you are pursuing.
You have to explain about the thread.
But it is hard for others to see.
While you hold it you can't get lost.
Tragedies happen; people get hurt
or die; and you suffer and get old.
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.
You don't ever let go of the thread.

As you can tell, it is from this poem that I took my title for today...there's a thread that you follow. There's a thread that we follow. I think that Stafford is probably talking about moment to moment time in this poem...the unfolding of life. Looking at his words through the legacy lens, we might choose to change the words slightly...there's a thread that is passed to us and which we change and which we pass along.

Take the thread. Weigh it. Use it. Discard what you do not want. Change the things which you can improve upon. Add the things which are yours to add. And pass it on.

November is our month to talk about legacy. It's a theme chosen by our Creative Worship Team, knowing that this month contains All Souls Day, our annual pledge campaign and Remembrance Day. It's simply a good month to be thinking about legacy...about what has come to us from those who have gone before, what we are working to preserve, and what we are hoping to pass on to future generations.

At least once every year, I feel compelled to tell you about process theology, which is the system or philosophical platform that makes most sense to me...it's a way to understand the world and my relationship with all that is. Based in the thinking of mathematician Alfred North Whitehead, simply put, process theology holds that everything...every being, every entity...is always in process. We are constantly becoming, and we can never fully become, because before any one moment closes, we enter a new one.

It also suggests that the possibilities for what each moment or entity might become (or in the language of process theology, how something concreces)...those possibilities exist in the combination of three things...the previous moment or concrecence...what is happening around us in the current moment...and what lure, what beauty or good, is pulling us forward. The ongoing evolution of each entity, every being, is determined by the choices we make...to consider the past and to stay the same or to change...to be affected by something we've encountered or learned, to reject those things that don't resonate with us or further the existence of life...and by how carefully we pay attention to whatever it is that pulls us forward...that force that some might call God.

So, in thinking about legacy, it is obvious that we ought to think about our own becoming and evolution, and maybe less obvious that we also might consider our own ability, or availability, to affect the becoming of all that we encounter. We are one of the entities 'out there' in the field surrounding everything else; and as such, we are a possible contributing factor to how 'all else' becomes. How we affect others, and the planet, will be our legacy, for good or ill. Got it?

To leave a legacy, at least to try to leave a legacy, requires some intentionality. Once we decide what it is we hope to leave behind, we have to wonder how bright or big our light can shine in order to have as much effect as possible on the whole. How strong are the messages we send, and with what energy do we send those messages? Like, we all know that messages and impacts sent with judgment are not well received and are likely to be rejected, or even worse, internalized as judgment or shame in another's becoming. Messages sent with compassion and with loving intent are more likely to be accepted, and to be internalized as belonging and acceptance in another's becoming.

But perhaps the best way to be impactful is to live lives, and to fill our days, with those things and behaviours that are most true to who we are and that reflect our values and what matters most to us. Of course, we can hope that we might then be inspiring to others...that who we are and what we do might be noticed and taken in by someone else as an example of a way that they too want to live.

I wrote on my blog, and in the theme packet, that I have been pondering the legacy I wish to leave here, at UFP. While I find it an easy question to answer, it's a difficult one to live, because, frankly, the impact any behaviour has is not a given. Intent and impact are not the same thing, as we are all learning in our undoing white privilege work.

How you receive what I offer, how this community responds to who and am and how I contribute, is not something I can control. When I work long hours, for example, some of you might see this as inspirational commitment to something that matters to me, but others of you might see it as over-functioning or micro-managing or poor self-care. Which, I guess is indicative of the fact that what I do or say, is just one thing in your field of possibility...only one factor in how you might become into the next moment. You will also be heavily influenced by who you are (your past experience), everything else around you, and your own vision for where you are going (the lure of beauty or good.) And you get to decide what you'll do with all of that.

Sometimes, as is definitely true for me, the reality that we're not in control of how, or if, we make an impact can make it all feel pointless...we rarely get a chance to see the effect we have. But if we truly believe that all things are connected...if we trust that indeed there is an interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part...then our task is to 'stay in our own lane' as it were. Perhaps we should not worry so much about whether or not we are making a difference, but rather, simply believe that who we are does matter to the whole. Perhaps we should just pay as much attention as possible to our own becoming...taking into account what has been, looking around us for inspirational and motivational influences, and in particular, paying attention to who and what we most want to be in the world. And then. And then trust that we matter. For indeed we do. You do. Each one of you matters.

There's a brand-new book out about Old Turtle, called *Questions of the Heart*. At the end of the book, Old Turtle talks about a question that is asked by each dawn, and whispered by the first morning breeze, and by the bird that carries the first daybreak song. The question is, "Who are you, and how will you live this day?"

And, says the book, "we give our answer each and every day, in all that we do, and all the choices we make. Our answer is in the ways that we treat one another, in the courage we must

find to face a challenge. It is in our eyes when we choose to look for beauty, and in our hands when we reach out to help someone. It is in our minds when we try to understand, and in our hearts when we choose to love."

It is a question that is in all the other questions we ask, and in our journey to find the answers. Who are we, and how will we live our days?

Take the thread. Weigh it. Use it. Discard what you do not want. Change the things which you can improve upon. Add the things which are yours to add. And pass it on.

Because the choices we make will be our legacy.

BUILDING A LEGACY WEB

There's a thread that you follow...

I hope that you have been pondering this morning what legacy it is that you would like to leave...that special things for which you would like to be remembered... how your way of seeing the world and acting in the world are passed on to others. What is one thing you want to be sure to pass on? Give that a moment's thought. If there's just one thing you will be remembered for, what will it be?

(Balls of yarn were passed out, with instructions to pass the ball of yarn, while also expressing the legacy that each desires to leave.)

Let's take just a moment to notice all that we receive and pass along...made visible with this yarn. Consider what you have received today, and remember what you want to pass along. May the living of our days reflect the legacy we wish to leave.

READING *Web* ~ Denise Levertov

Intricate and untraceable
weaving and interweaving,
dark strand with light:
Designed, beyond
All spiderly contrivance,
To link, not to entrap:
Elation, grief, joy, contrition, entwined;
shaking, changing, forever forming, transforming:
All praise, all praise to the great web.

CLOSING WORDS *We Build on Foundations We Did Not Lay* ~ Peter Raible

We build on foundations we did not lay
We warm ourselves by fires we did not light
We sit in the shade of trees we did not plant
We drink from wells we did not dig
We profit from persons we did not know
This is as it should be.
Together we are more than any one person could be.
Together we can build across the generations.
Together we can renew our hope and faith in the life that is yet to unfold.

Together we can heed the call to a ministry of care and justice.
We are ever bound in community.
May it always be so.

Amen.