

“Hello From the Other Side”

A Valentine’s Day service, within the monthly theme of Reconciliation

Guest speaker: Ben Robins, UU seminarian

Feb 14, 2016

Opening Hymn

#354 “We Laugh, We Cry”

Opening Reading

Author unknown

There’s a saying going around on Facebook, about Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh. One version goes like this: “Even though Eeyore is basically clinically depressed, he still gets invited to participate in adventures and shenanigans with all of his friends. And they never expect him to pretend to feel happy, they just love him anyway, and they never leave him behind or ask him to change.”

Meditation

This is a time in our service to ground, to feel our feet connect with the floor, to feel our awareness connect with our breath, to know that in our stillness, we are all here together. This is a time to go deeper, to a place where we are all connected, to a place where we are all whole. Let us join together in meditation.

Responsive Reading

Our responsive reading is adapted from "Litany of Atonement" by Robert Eller-Issacs:

For remaining silent when a single voice would have made a difference:

I forgive myself, I forgive you; We begin again in love.

For each time that our fears have made us rigid and inaccessible:

I forgive myself, I forgive you: We begin again in love.

For each time that we have been angry without just cause:

I forgive myself, I forgive you; We begin again in love.

For each time that our greed has blinded us to the needs of others:

I forgive myself, I forgive you; We begin again in love.

For the self-admiration which can set us apart and alone:

I forgive myself, I forgive you; We begin again in love.

For getting stuck hoping that things will go back to the way they once were.

I forgive myself, I forgive you; We begin again in love.

For losing site of our unity:

I forgive myself, I forgive you; We begin again in love.

Hymn

#346 Come Sing a Song With Me

Message

Good morning. Hello. We don't know each, so let's talk about love. I don't know your story, and you don't know my story, and here we are.

Actually, some of you did share your stories during "Joys & Sorrows". Thank you for that. Here's some of my story:

I went through a heavy time, a complicated time, when I was 20 years old. Part of it was that I couldn't reconcile the love I had to give with the lack of love I thought I was receiving. I'm talking about my feelings of romantic love, and also feelings of love for the world. I had a jumble of feelings that I couldn't keep straight. I didn't have the vocabulary to put those feelings into words. There was so much distrust in my life that I barely tried expressing anything.

If I -had- tried, I wonder if it would have sounded like the pop singer Adele, in the music video for the song "Someone Like You".

The video is set in Paris. We'll see the Eiffel Tower in the distance. How romantic. But it's a grey and windy day, and Adele is walking along a long concrete road. There's a stone wall alongside her, a stone wall that has stood there, unchanged, for generations. She's alongside the River Seine, a river that somehow holds your memory, but can't promise to take your memories out to the sea.

Adele is wearing a stylin' black outfit, with a bold silver zipper diagonally across it, a stylin' black outfit that distinguishes her from the world, an outfit that doesn't provide any indication of how she's feeling. But today her downcast face can't mask the truth, and as her eyes come up she comes to song. "I heard, that you're, settled down, that you,

found a girl, and you're, married now. I heard that you're dreams came true. I guess she gave you things, I didn't give to you."

Heartbreaking. How many days, how many years, has she walked this concrete road, trying to reclaim the past, trying to forget the past. She's learned how to put on a stylin' outfit. She's learned how to do her hair so that it's held back while still falling gracefully. She's learned how to do marvelous things to extend her eyelashes. But as those eyelashes come up once again, and she turns those empty eyes to the camera, she reveals that the core of her life is out of her control. The video ends in a cafe bar, a place many go to find community, but she doesn't see anyone around her. Her eyes are off in the distance, watching someone walk away.

What would you say to her? What would you say if you were her pastor, or her lay chaplain, or her neighbour, or her friend? Would you tell her to run after him, to try one more time? Would you tell her to move on, to look away, to tune into the world around her?

For me, back home in Toronto, I wonder what we would tell the people involved in the Jian Gimeshi trial. What do these women need? What would we say to them? Do they just want to be left alone now? Does it matter to them that I trust them, even if the legal system doesn't? What would we do for them if they walked through that door this morning, and just sat there, at the back, not saying anything. What would we say to someone who made breakfast for her abuser? Human beings are so complicated, our feelings and our behaviours are so complicated.

What would we say to the people who set the fire in the local mosque? Would we say, hey, we can work it out, let's all love each other. Come, sing a song with me.

A Unitarian Universalist congregation in Arlington, Massachusetts had a banner in front of the church, a Black Lives Matter banner, that was vandalized. They replaced it. Vandalized again. The police caught the person who did it. What would you say to that person, sitting across the table from you, so close and yet so far away.

What would you say if you looked in the mirror. What would you say to yourself about love and reconciliation. For you, it might not be about romantic love, or the vast love of healing the world. It might be reconciliation with parents, or siblings, or an old friend, or an old job.

So much to say. So many complicated, contradictory feelings. Where to begin. And to call across such a distance. Calling out across that chasm risks being ignored, or misunderstood, or accused of stirring the pot. Maybe you're calling out for a past that nobody else wants. Maybe you're calling out for a future that nobody else can see.

Maybe you're feeling alone. Alone like that first time in the history of evolution, when that 1st protoplasmic amoeba split in half (Did I get that right?). In that first ever case of asexual reproduction, something ruptured in the world, and ever since, we have been

needing reconciliation. When there is 'other', there is need for reconciliation. One amoeba calls out to another, "Hello from the Other Side."

Eons pass, evolution continues, and sexual reproduction appears. We now need to encounter another being in order to reproduce. Humans come along, social creatures, but still divided into small bands based on narrow kinship ties. Time passes, and bands of people reconcile with neighbouring bands, forming tribes. After much fighting, tribes reconcile with neighbouring tribes, forming nations.

In the Great Lakes region of Africa, this process is still happening. In Burundi, Unitarian minister Fulgence Ndagijimana has been working to help Hutus and Tutsis reconcile, to help create a country reconciled to love and justice. It hasn't been easy, and in fact he's fled the country.

Here in the western world, many people, cogs in a vast, dehumanizing economic system, forgot about reconciling themselves to life. As Pink Floyd put it, they became comfortably numb.

Too often, Valentine's Day can feel like a day to judge that numbness, to be uncomfortably numb. Valentine's Day can put another demand on you, a demand to let your heart burst open with love. But today is not the day to place an additional demand on you. We're not going to insist that Valentine's Day be a day of joy. Nobody is going to make us lie down with our heads on each other's bellies and do laughter yoga. I love laughter yoga, but not this morning. Today's sermon is called "Hello from the other side". It's not called "Hello, my head is on your belly." If only we lived in a world where everyone had a head on their belly, bringing us all into a communion of laughter. If only we lived in that world. I hear that the people of Peterborough Dialogues are working to create that world.

And so is the pop singer Adele. Let me explain. Last week, Julie spoke of the both/and attitude that is at the heart of reconciliation. If there are contradictory feelings in the room, there needs to be room for both. In the song "Someone Like You", Adele expresses hurt. But she also expresses hope: "Never mind, I'll find someone like you. I wish nothing but the best for you." There is the loneliness at the end of the music video, with Adele standing in an empty cafe bar, watching someone walk away, and then there is the community that Adele creates by singing that song. What a community she creates when she goes on tour. A stadium full of people witnessing her as she sings, singing with tears streaming down her face. 646 million and more people have watched her video online. By singing her need for reconciliation, Adele creates a global community of people who can relate. Everybody needs reconciling in some way. Adele calls out to this need in all of us, and she says, I need it too.

We all need that reconnection. We're not as different as we think. At the height of the Cold War between global empires, the musician Sting called out his hope for reconciliation. He sang, "What might save us, me and you, is that the Russians love their children too." Reconciliation with all humanity, through our shared humanity.

Not through our shared health, or our presumed wholeness. Reconciliation by sharing our authentic humanity, showing up, just as we are, today.

That UU congregation in Arlington, Massachusetts, that had their Black Lives Matter banner vandalized. The local police chief recommended that they engage in a restorative justice practice with the vandalizer. Meeting the vandalizer in their shared humanity.

In Burundi, Unitarian minister Fulgence Ndagijimana helped Hutus call out to Tutsis, and Tutsis call out to Hutus, come, sing a song with me. Come sing a song with me. Just as you are, today. Just as you feel, right now.

Valentine's Day is named after 1 or 2 Italian religious leaders. Their love was a love for all humanity. It was only in the middle ages that Valentine's Day became about couples and romantic love. We can authentically celebrate Valentine's Day as a day for boundless love, a love that holds even those of us who are not in the mood for love.

The Canadian Unitarian Council is proposing a new saying. In addition to our 7 principles and our 6 sources of wisdom, the Canadian Unitarian Council is proposing 5 aspirations, which can be summed up in 3 words: love, justice and interdependence. Now I say the Canadian Unitarian Council, but it was actually 5 people who wrote the report, after much consultation. Their names are Fiona, Glenda, Vyda, Carly and Keith.

As a UU movement, we are recognizing that we don't just love each other, and we don't just want justice for each other. We are interdependent. This isn't a new idea, it's in our principles, but they're proposing that we highlight it. We are interdependent. We are stronger if you show up, in whatever state you are in. We want you to be with us.

Our stories connect us. Even if we don't know each other's stories, they still connect us.

The spirit of life is always with us. Even if it feels like we're alone, the spirit of life is always there. Spirit of life, come unto me. Hey, spirit of life, I'm not in the mood for a hug, but if you hang around, and don't make too much of a fuss, that would be cool. Spirit of life, you can curl up on the couch. I'll stay over here.

That saying, "spirit of life", I don't know exactly what it means. I love the song Spirit of Life, even if I don't take the lyrics too seriously as doctrine. But there are times when it seems meaningful to say that I was not letting the spirit of life in. I don't know about you, but I've gone through periods of life where I walked through the world with a wall up around me. Things had happened and trust was gone, and it felt safer to be alone than to attempt reconciliation. For me, I felt that wall come down a little bit when I found myself in a place where I knew that I had inherent worth and dignity. My shoulders dropped a little bit when I found myself in a place that valued love, justice and interdependence. I felt a yearning to open up, when I found myself in a place that valued both listening and being heard.

This is a place where you can be yourself, whatever your gender identity, colour, age, or religion; you can be yourself, and be loved. This is a place where you can love whoever you love. This is a place where you can love and lose, and lose love again and again, and still be held in a larger circle of love. This is a place where you can show up feeling like you'll never love again, and that's okay. This is a place where however you feel about love, you have inherent worth and dignity, and you are loved.

In a song called One Voice, the Wailin' Jennys sing, "This is the sound of one voice. One people, one voice. A song for every one of us. This is the sound of one voice." A song for every one of us, sung in one voice. Whatever your song is today, we can sing it together. Thank you for coming together for Valentine's Day.

Hymn

#318 We Would Be One

Closing Words

We would be one. We would be one. All hurts healed, all relationships reconciled. Maybe one day. But in the meantime, let us trust that we can come together, however we feel, whatever we need, and feel like we are held within a larger circle of love. I love you. Amen.