

WHAT I'M LEARNING ABOUT MY WHITE PRIVILEGE

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Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
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OPENING WORDS *Come, Come Whoever You Are* ~ Ian W. Riddell

Come, come, whoever you are.

Do you hear that voice calling you, calling us?

That voice which calls us together here today in this room made holy by our presence and by the sacred breath we share in our singing and speaking and silence.

That voice which calls us to remember that we are not alone and that we are inextricably linked to all other life – woven into a vast tapestry of existence of which we are a powerful, integral, and holy part.

And just as we have been called together here today, we act as the voice – the heart – the hands of another call:

The call to:

Walk with the wanderers

Sing and dance with the worshipers

Proclaim the memory of those who have taken their leave

Wrap the despairing and the broken in the arms of love and community

And hold the hands of all of us who have broken our vows and call us back – again and again – to the covenant and work of justice, humility, and steadfast faithfulness.

For this we are here together today.

So, my friends, come, yet again;

come let us worship together.

STORY FOR ALL AGES *The Lunch Box Note* ~ Sabrina Cortes

(A young girl realizes that all of her classmates have notes in their lunch boxes, but they are said in different languages.)

REFLECTION and READING

Let me speak for a moment of privilege. It's a hard word to swallow...it gets caught in our throats...and if you're anything like me, the first impulse is to deny it, or to engage in trying to prove all of the ways in which we are NOT privileged.

But no matter the oppressions you have experienced in your life...as a woman, as queer, as poor, as uneducated...if you are white, or pass as white, you have the privilege to be part of the dominant group...a group which tends to be respected, assumed the best of, and given the benefit of the doubt. As a white person, (take a good look...I AM white) I have the privilege of my colour being invisible...non-operative...not a factor in who I am or what I want to do in the world. That just isn't the case for people of other races, no matter how wealthy, smart or hard-working they might be.

It is not your fault that you were born white and have this privilege. But you, we, do benefit from it, and it is our 'fault' if we are not accountable to this reality.¹ Here's something Rev. Karen Armina wrote:

¹ Explaining White Privilege to a Broke White Person, Gina Crosley-Corcoran

"The Quaker activist and songwriter, Carrie Newcomer, sings these words of encouragement: 'Come on and look inside you--it's the best place to start. The greatest revolution is a simple change of heart.'

We think we have to change all those things that are happening out there, and that change can happen as a direct result of our actions. And sometimes this is true.

Especially in the arena of social change, where we need to very intentionally build momentum to create more just conditions.

But more often, I'm learning, true change happens only when we take the time and the risk of sitting with something hard. True change in the world is intimately related to our internal transformation, which is intimately related to our presence to ourselves.

Culture is simply everything that's around us. At some point in our lives, we learn that there are other ways of being. Our human tendency is to think that ours is better than theirs. When we are white, thinking that ours is better is supported by the fact that our social and political systems have been built through the same frame through which we're looking.

We learn that our way is the right way and the best way. Simply put, this is white supremacy culture."

We...those who are white...have many privileges because of living in this culture. And the ultimate white privilege is the ability to acknowledge our privilege and then do nothing about it. I pray that I am learning to do something about it.

What I'm Learning.... ~ Anne Orfald

I grew up in Minneapolis, in an all-white neighbourhood. In elementary school and also secondary school, I met not one person whose complexion was unlike mine. (The greatest diversity I can remember in our elementary school is that we had one German American boy and two Jewish girls, and I probably remember that because it was during and after the second world war.)

In relation to the concept of "white privilege," I would never say we were privileged to be so segregated from people of colour, and would even say we were deprived in that respect; deprived of the richness that diversity brings to life. I have some discomfort with the term privilege in the racial context, as it is frankly uncomfortable to admit being privileged in a way that clearly is harmful to others.

The on-line course on racism which we took, called "Hard Conversations" was so rich in content, and we learned so much; I highly recommend it to anyone who wants to learn more about the layers of racism in our culture and in our lives. But I am not going to try to summarize what we learned. I just want to share some personal reflections I have had, on my white privilege: I can step outside the door, walk the streets of my neighbourhood, go down town, in fact go anywhere in any city that I've lived in and never have to be concerned that I will be shunned or hassled or feared, or the object of racial slurs because of my race. I can drive my car anywhere, and never be stopped because of my skin colour. I can travel across borders, and never be delayed, questioned, and under suspicion because of my ethnicity. I am an immigrant, yet I have never been seen as a threat to those who came before me. I have never been asked "what are you?" or "where do you come from?" because of my appearance.

I never had to prepare my children for the discrimination and abuse they could expect in their interactions with people of other colours. I never had to comfort them and teach them to have a tough skin, because of the colour of it.

Although Scott and I started married life with very little money, we were able to get a mortgage easily. We were able to get good jobs. We were able to live wherever we chose. We were able to help our

children get a post-secondary education. Did we ever know or wonder about who was being turned down for a mortgage because of race? Did others not get the jobs that we got because of their colour? Are we now in a comfortable position financially, able to pass on some inheritance to our children and grandchildren, because of the privileges we have had as white people? I honestly don't know how much of a factor race is in what we have experienced and what we have accomplished, but I do know it is a factor, and I face that fact with discomfort.

I had a great-aunt who traced the family history back to the Mayflower, and she took some pride in being a "Daughter of the American Revolution." I don't share that pride. I recognize that my ancestors were European settlers, and had a share in creating the racist society I grew up in. I am not proud of that.

On the other hand, I don't feel an obligation to apologize for my white privilege, or feel personally guilty because of it. I didn't choose to be a majority person rather than a minority person. Honestly, here's where the choice comes in. Being white means being able to choose whether or not to be aware of racism, whereas people of colour do not have that choice. They are aware of racism every day.

I can choose whether to just accept my white privilege and live comfortably in it, ignoring what it means for others, or I can choose to be aware of racism, to learn as much as I can about it, and to act in whatever ways I am able against the discrimination and stereotyping and hatefulness that is the racism that we all swim in. I hope I choose well. That's my intention.

What I'm Learning... ~ Ben Wolfe (forthcoming)

RESPONSIVE READING *All Of Us Need All Of Us To Make It*

~Megan Foley, Theresa Soto, adapted

Unitarian Universalist minister Rev. Theresa Soto writes, "All of us need all of us to make it." These are words that speak to the heart of what our faith proclaims, so they are words that we should make our prayer. All of us need all of us to make it.

This is why Unitarian Universalists support [the Truth and Reconciliation process, and the Black Lives Matter movement and Bridges Out of Poverty.]

Please take a moment to center [the struggle for undoing white privilege, white supremacy,] in your thoughts. {pause}

Say this response with me, loud or soft: "All of us need all of us to make it."

In a world where some of us are targeted for struggle and brutality, where others of us benefit and flourish, we pray:

"All of us need all of us to make it."

In a world where powerful people of ill will and indifference make us fearful for our safety and our futures, we pray:

"All of us need all of us to make it."

In the excruciating space that lives between seeing and naming, and hearing and changing, we pray:

"All of us need all of us to make it."

Make a picture in your mind of someone you aren't very happy with right now. {pause}

Look at their face in your mind, and pray:

"All of us need all of us to make it."

Unitarian Universalists believe that all of us need all of us to make it; [this is why we are working to be better allies for the lives of BI-POC today and every day.]

Amen.

What I'm Learning...

~Sue Sauvé

Firstly, I am so grateful to Deb Reynolds for recommending this course to us. She announced it at a service and did a splendid job of promoting it. The course, besides the content being great, was extremely well set up and presented with engaging videos, articles and discussions. I was interested because I wanted to understand more about the black lives matter movement and about racism, especially how to dismantle it. I wondered, what is the role that I can play?

In terms of my life, about 13 years ago when my sister's son Nicholas was 6, her family visited us from their Sikh dominated neighbourhood outside of Vancouver. Nicholas took his mom (my sister) aside and was concerned that Ian and I were racist. My sister was taken aback and asked him why he thought that. He said that all of our friends are white. Wow, what an eye opener! My sister's family had been the more conservative one in many ways. I knew that Nicholas had only met a handful of our friends, and only our Peterborough friends, but it did cause me to pause and think.

Fast forward several years, and I found myself noticing people's skin colour more than I remembered noting it before and hearing about racism almost daily in one way or another. I found myself thinking, I feel like I am becoming more racist because race is on my mind so much more than it ever was before. Even at a recent walking and biking conference I attended, there were sessions on what it means for walkability in black neighbourhoods, the bias of colour in traffic collisions involving pedestrians and cyclists, etc.

Now having completed most of the course, I feel more empowered to live my values and be true to my, our, principles. I learned that noticing skin colour is very important. If we don't acknowledge the most obvious thing about someone's appearance, we are not seeing them for who they are. I am not racist because I notice skin colour. The point is to not judge or prejudice according to skin colour. I had sort of gathered that, but these are hard conversations and I hadn't really explored them out loud before. The course had great examples about how to engage in difficult conversations about racism in ways that can bring people on board with treating all people as valuable and equal.

With respect to the idea of white privilege, I had heard the term, but didn't have a deep sense of what it really meant. I picked up that, as a white person, I can make connections more easily than others, with fewer barriers. In my day to day life, I am trying to be aware of when this comes into play, wanting to level the playing field in any way that I can.

This is how we came to have Kajal, a young East Indian Fleming student come live with us 2 weeks ago. It was a rainy cold day. I was walking home from work. As I started to cross Aylmer Street, I noticed two brown people walking just ahead of me. They met up on the other side of the street with 3 other brown people whom I presumed to be of East Indian descent. The people knew each other and started talking right away. I smiled as I passed by and the father figure in the family said, "Excuse me, can you help us?" I asked, "In what way?" and he replied that they were looking for housing for their niece who was starting school at Fleming College in 3 days and they had been unable to find housing so far. They were actually knocking on some doors and asking people if they had a room to rent. I didn't know of a place off-hand, but offered my business card and said that, if they were stuck, to let me know because we have an extra room in our house that was available for a week or so.

Without meeting the other people that I live with, Ian and Anne, or seeing the house, they contacted me and arranged for their niece to come stay with us that week. I was amazed at their trust. Kajal set up in our guest room and soon we were eating homemade chapatis and potato curry, meeting her new-found friends, rescuing her from being lost, showing her the way to the bus, exploring room rentals, and greeting her at midnight when she came home from a party with 5 other students in tow. We had a full-on week of learning to be cross-cultural parents before Kajal went off to a house that she found on her own. I can foresee Kajal negotiating huge treaties with the UN in her future! Overall, we were able to provide a bridge of housing for a young woman who did not have any connections in our community and may have faced discrimination. I am not sure that I would have reached out in the way that I did if I hadn't taken the course.

As an activist, the message that came across loudly and clearly to me in the course was that the black lives matters and anti-racism movement needs white people to step up, big time. We hold the reins, and we need to share them. It is up to us to look at our systems of education, employment, justice, etc. and change the way that they are set up so that they represent all of us well. It is not enough to not be overtly prejudiced. I found this course to be excellent and feel that more people talking and taking it will contribute to dismantling racism. I feel I have a lot more to learn, but am more confident to reach out and just do the best I know how to. It would be worse to be quiet and not make any mistakes. And worse to not meet inspiring people such as Kajal and her family.

READING

~ *Laila Ibrahim*

...We are not in church to be with people who want to sing the same music, or rally for the same cause, or attend the same retreats. We are in church to learn to love better.... We disagree, we annoy, we flake out on one another. And we worship, we support, we hold, and we affirm one another.... There is really only one choice: between imperfect community and no community. Again and again, we are all called to choose to commit ourselves to building a more just, more diverse, and yet ever messy and imperfect, beloved community.

CLOSING WORDS

~ *Marta I Valentin*

Spirit of the circle that is Love,
as we twirl in this dance that is life
we give thanks for reminding us each day of our task of ministering to each "other"
with a searching glance, a safe touch, a generous smile, a thoughtful word...
Thank you for reminding us
that we are always building our beloved comunidad.
Thank you for reminding us that through our covenant with you
we covenant with each "other" and are made whole.

So be with you. So be it with each 'other'. Go in peace.