

THE POWER OF KNOWING WHAT WE CARE ABOUT
THE UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP OF PETERBOROUGH
REV. JULIE STONEBERG
OCTOBER 14, 2018

OPENING WORDS *Look to This Day* ~ *Attributed to Kalidasa*

Look to this day!
For it is life, the very life of life.
In its brief course lie all the verities
and realities of your existence:
The bliss of growth,
The glory of action,
The splendor of beauty;
For yesterday is but a dream,
And tomorrow is only a vision;
But today, well lived, makes every yesterday
A dream of happiness
And every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Look well, therefore, to this day.

STORY FOR ALL *The Three Questions* ~ *Jon J. Muth*

(In this story, a young boy searches for answers to three questions: What is the right time? Who is the right person? What is the right thing to do?)

READING *Turning to One Another* ~ *Margaret Wheatley*

There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about.
Ask: "What's possible?" not "What's wrong?" Keep asking.
Notice what you care about.
Assume that many others share your dreams.
Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.
Talk to people you know.
Talk to people you don't know.
Talk to people you never talk to.
Be intrigued by the differences you hear. Expect to be surprised.
Treasure curiosity more than certainty.
Invite in everybody who cares to work on what's possible.
Acknowledge that everyone is an expert about something.
Know that creative solutions come from new connections.
Remember, you don't fear people whose story you know.
Real listening always brings people closer together.
Trust that meaningful conversations can change your world.
Rely on human goodness.
Stay together.

(Following this, those gathered were asked to write down their responses to the question: What is it that this community most cares about? Or should care about?)

MESSAGE *The Power of Knowing What We Care About* ~ Rev. Julie Stoneberg

Do you ever have one of those moments when you hear something that feels...I mean, deeply feels...like it is exactly what you need to hear and to internalize into your being...but it is such a paradigm shift that you can't quite grock it? That's where I am this morning. My brain feels like it is trying to bend itself around a corner, in order to see my heart, in order to save myself...and my brain just doesn't yet know how to bend in that way. The inspiration is there, but I need some practice in exercising my brain's flexibility before it can actually turn the corner...a corner around which I think I see a very different kind of vision.

So, if some of what I am sharing this morning is met within you with confusion or even resistance, I understand. What I most want, here and now, is to be able to speak heart to heart. With that desire, I'm taking some risks with our typical format; I invite you into that process with me.

My 'muse' of the day is Margaret Wheatley. As Paul told us, today's title was inspired by a line from a poem of hers. Having taken it as inspiration, I was then compelled to follow its thread. What is it about a community discovering what it cares about that is so powerful? What did she mean by that?

For those of you who don't know of Wheatley, she is an organizational and leadership consultant, a co-founder of the Berkana Institute, and a prolific author, speaker and teacher.¹ Her work often interlaces with, and is used alongside of, that of Peter Block, Otto Scharmer, Parker Palmer and others who have inspired this community.

Yesterday, I finished one of her books, *So Far From Home*²...and in order to help you see the paradigm shift that is tugging at me, I offer you a few – almost alarming – quotes and ideas from that book (and know that I'll continue to quote her throughout my message.) She says:

- I no longer believe that we can save the world³...the dream of a new nation of possibility, equality, and justice has fallen victim to the self-serving behaviours of those in power. The powerful will continue to exert that power for their own, not the collective, advantage.⁴
- We are exhausted because we are struggling to accomplish what can never be accomplished.⁵
- If we fully accept the world as it is – in all its harsh realities – then we can develop the qualities we need to be in that world and not succumb to its harshness.⁶
- My great teachers these days are people who no longer need hope in order to do their work...as greed, fear, and oppression drown out their voices, they become more

¹ https://margaretwheatley.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Margaret-Wheatley-2017-Leader_to_Leader.pdf

² Wheatley, Margaret, *So Far from Home: Lost and Found in Our Brave New World* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers. 2012) I read this book using Kobo, which is not paginated. I have instead noted the name of the chapter from which they were taken.

³ Wheatley, *So Far from Home*, "Seeing What Is"

⁴ Wheatley, *So Far from Home*, "Seeing What Is"

⁵ Wheatley, *So Far from Home*, "Everything Comes from Somewhere"

⁶ Wheatley, *So Far from Home*, "Do You Want to Save the World?"

committed...not because they will succeed, but just because it is right for them to be doing it.⁷

- It doesn't matter which way history moves. What matters is now; how we live, work and create together, cultivating our best human qualities, and creating meaning by how we are together in the present moment.⁸

Remember what we learned about emergence last month? Of how emergence refers to how change happens out of the chaos and the complexity of many causes and parts interacting?⁹ What emerges is always unpredictable and always different from the sum of its parts.

But here's another thing Wheatley says I find difficult to accept: once something has emerged, it is here to stay and cannot be changed.¹⁰ The only way to create something different is to begin again, staying true to our values and best practices.

How we live, what we engage in, what we think about, matters. So, we need to focus on transforming ourselves, to further work on embodying the values that we treasure...to do right work, and to be caring, gentle and brave people.¹¹ We can make and re-make ourselves, consciously choosing and re-choosing values and beliefs that support meaningful lives. And, life itself is always right here, engaging with us, ever willing to partner with us.¹²

But, while each of us is free to decide how to change, the reality is that individual adaptations only work within the context of community.¹³ Wheatley reminds us that individual actions are significant only because they are interconnected.¹⁴

In the evolution of this spiritual tradition, we've come to use the concept of interdependence extensively. The relatively new embrace of this concept is indicative, I trust, of our commitment to open minds and ongoing discovery; quantum physics uses a similar concept...that of entanglement...to refer to the reality that once connected or correlated, seemingly discrete, separate particles act as one, even when distant from one another. If I understand this, it means that once something has been touched, it is changed forever. Once connected, once joined in community, once aware of one another, we affect one another. (Einstein, though unable to accept the theories of quantum physics, noticed this, and referred to it as 'spooky action at a distance.')

This understanding has led physicists to conclude (as if conclusions are possible in an evolving universe) that in reality, relationships are all that there is. Relationships are the fundamental pre-requisite for anything to manifest; at the quantum level, a particle isn't visible until it collides with another.¹⁶ And, since our potential only manifests in relationships, the primary

⁷ Wheatley, So Far from Home, "Seeing What Is"

⁸ Wheatley, So Far from Home, "Do You Want to Save the World?"

⁹ Wheatley, So Far from Home, "Emergence: Surprised by Newness"

¹⁰ Wheatley, So Far from Home, "Emergence: Surprised by Newness"

¹¹ Wheatley, So Far from Home, "Emergence: Surprised by Newness"

¹² Wheatley, So Far from Home, "Identity: The Logic of Change"

¹³ Wheatley, So Far from Home, "Identity: The Logic of Change"

¹⁴ Wheatley, So Far from Home, "Surprised by Newness"

¹⁵ Wheatley, So Far from Home, "Relationships: Endlessly Entangled"

¹⁶ Wheatley, So Far from Home, "Relationships: Endlessly Entangled"

way we can affect change and new possibility is to become more skilled at, and more interested in, building relationships. In community.

The implications of this? For us? Well, let's return to the quote that started it all. "There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about." As I said, I'm really just beginning to see the possibilities in this statement, but what I'm seeing right now is that in the face of a world that is harsh, where positions are moving to the extremes, where there is little distinction between fact and opinion, where everyone is shouting and no one is listening, where values of consumption, greed and self-interest have taken over, a world whose planet will not tolerate us much longer¹⁷...in such a world, our lives might just be saved by being part of communities that pay attention to what they cares about.

Because change happens at the speed of relationship, and because the quality of those relationships and how we affect each other is dependent on our values and our practices, it behooves us to discover, again and again, what it is that matters to us. And then to work to create lives and relationships based in those values. In so doing, we will create meaningful lives, no matter the realities of the world.

As a Unitarian congregation, we already, thankfully, have some guiding values...our seven principles...the CUC's five aspirations...and our own purpose statement. The principles are printed in the grey hymnal just before the 1st hymn. Words from our purpose statement are captured on the banner. And as Canadian Unitarian Universalists, we envision a world in which our interdependence calls us to love and justice, a vision that calls us to these aspirations: to be deeply connected, to be radically inclusive, to be actively engaged, to be theologically alive, and to be spiritually grounded.¹⁸

So held in the container of all of that, what can we discover and name about what we care about? What matters to us? What do YOU know about what matters? Ben has put your responses into some categories, and we have a bit of time now to just talk about them.

The responses to these questions, in very generalized groups, included:

Community (21), Sharing Values (4), Respect/acceptance for all people (14), Faith/Spiritual Nourishment (16), Social Justice (23), Our Planet and Nature (12), Outreach/Welcoming (9), Learning (7), Building shared future with BIS (4), Celebration of Life (5), Financial Sustainability (2), our Children (2).

The numbers in brackets refer to the number of times these things were mentioned.

We then chatted about: In what ways do these things matter? How would/could these things manifest in who this community is? What practices/skills might we cultivate to grow this value?

Let me return to Margaret Wheatley. She tells us that the world-as-it-is has emerged as a result of many different values, decisions and influences interacting, intensifying, strengthening, and changing as they feed off one another.¹⁹ While in an ecosystem, different species self-organize according to natural laws, we humans self-organize around shared values, clear agreements,

¹⁷ Wheatley, *So Far from Home*, "Are We Lost?"

¹⁸ <https://cuc.ca/unitarian-universalism/vision-mission/>

¹⁹ Wheatley, *So Far from Home*, "Are We Lost?"

and norms.²⁰

When we choose life-affirming values and practices, we are engaging in counter-cultural acts which affirm that while we can't expect the world to change, we surely can. We can aspire to cultivate skillful means of being in relationship, so that we both recognize our pain for the world AND experience of our inherent interconnectedness. We can focus on where we are and who we're with...supporting others in discovering these qualities within themselves.²¹ It is our positive belief in others that will motivate us to act courageously, and to be warriors for the human spirit.

(Story about Erica and Medical Drive??)

Even though we're not going to save the world, says Wheatley, our work is still essential; we just need to hold it differently.²² We human beings are worth struggling for.²³ We can SERVE the world, and each other, by working for things simply because they are good and right, not because they stand a chance to succeed.²⁴

In the end, it is the existence of personal relationships that saves everything, which is why there is nothing as powerful as a community knowing what matters to it. We can get through anything as long as we're together.²⁵

So says Margaret Wheatley. May her words unsettle and inspire us. So be it.

READING *Letter to the People of the Future* ~ John Cummins

My Distant Children:

You will look back on us with astonishment at the truths that stared us in the face, and which we did not see. You will look with wonder at the bright toys we created, and used only for the rape of the planet, and one another.

It will seem strange beyond believing that we reached for the stars, and did not know the simplest principles of living well together.

But know this also, you of the future, you with your libraries and fountains, you in your star cities. Know that even in our slumbers, we dreamed. In our fumbling, shadowed search for mistaken glories, even in our clumsy cruelties, it was for you that we dreamed!

Beneath the piled-up centuries, below the lost and ruined rubble of all our striving, it was you who lay safe, enfolded in the womb of our dreaming. You, the first cause of all our daring! Even now, it brings comfort to know that it shall one day be as the wise among us have foretold.

In that far age, in the chrysalis of time, it will be your source of pride that your ancestors, born into a universe without justice or mercy, bethought themselves of justice and mercy and put them there!

²⁰ Wheatley, *So Far from Home*, "Controlling Complexity"

²¹ Wheatley, *So Far from Home*, "Do you Want to Save the World?"

²² Wheatley, *So Far from Home*, "Seeing What Is"

²³ Wheatley, *So Far from Home*, "Choosing for the Human Spirit"

²⁴ Wheatley, *So Far from Home*, "No Hope No Fear"

²⁵ Wheatley, *So Far from Home*, "No Hope No Fear"

Remember us for this.

CLOSING WORDS

~ *John Murray*

Just as we dream and vision, many have gone before who have dreamed for us. These are the words of John Murray, who was responsible for spreading Universalism across the eastern seaboard in the late 18th century.

Go out into the highways and by-ways.
Give the people something of your new vision.
You may possess a small light,
but uncover it, let it shine,
use it in order to bring more light and understanding
to the hearts and minds of [all people.]
Give them not hell, but hope and courage;
preach the kindness and
everlasting love of God.

Go, uncover your light, and let it shine for all that matters to you. Let this community be one in which we serve the world, knowing that we can get through anything as long as we're together.

So be it. Amen.

EXTINGUISHING THE FLAME