

‘Welcome Home’: A Reflection for Homecoming Sunday 2015

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Welcome Home.

It is good to see all of you here. Whether you’ve been away for a short time or for a long time, we’re glad you’ve chosen on this beautiful September day, as some of us say, “to come on back home.”

Every fall, many Unitarian Universalist congregations celebrate a day of homecoming on this first Sunday after Labor Day as they share in the water communion, a way of marking the beginning of a new season, a new year of walking together on this journey of life.

I offer today only a short reflection, in the interest of time, rather than a full sermon, on this day of Water Communion and of Homecoming. I have learned in ministry that one thing the minister, on Sunday mornings, had darned well better do is to keep the trains running on time. I won’t always manage it, but I do try.

My words today are only the beginning of a much longer conversation we will share, you and I, a conversation about what it means to be human in this life and how we can be our best selves – here, with one another, in our work in the world, whether paid or volunteer, and at home, with our neighbors, friends and family.

Part of what it means to be human is, as Frederick Buechner wisely says, to spend our whole lives searching for home. The truth is: none of us is ever truly at home anywhere on this earth, during life’s journey. We are, instead, travellers, crossing rivers of tears and rivers of joy. We are explorers, climbing mountains of discovery and then resting, for a time, in the meadows of contentment. We are pilgrims, who leave home, and then, as Buechner says, spend the rest of our lives searching, even if we’re not always aware that we are searching -- searching for that place in our hearts, that place inside ourselves, where we are fully and completely at home.

As I’ve looked back over the words I’ve written in recent years, the word “home” appears more times than I can count. The theme of “home” and the idea of home as a place inside ourselves are each woven throughout my sermons and meditations, and my journals and poetry.

One of my very first sermons was called “Leaving Home” – a sermon in which I grappled with the spiritual truth that whether or not we move an inch from where we were born and raised, we, at some point in our journeys, first have to “leave home,” in the spiritual sense, before we can hope to find, in our hearts, any true sense of being at home with ourselves. I did leave home, and since I left home all those years ago, it’s as if home, both as an idea and also as a real place with real people, has been calling to me, day and night, calling me to come home. Maybe there’s a place or a people, or both, who, on this day of homecoming, are calling to you, calling you to come home.

Now that I finally answered the call and have returned the land of the oaks and the pines, to the waters and the hills where I was raised, and to its people who are good and real -- I know I am where I need to be. And yet, I know, too, that now that I am here, my journey home, my journey to that place inside myself, is deepening, and will only continue.

Together, over the next couple of Sundays, we will explore these ideas of “home” and “homecoming,” that journey that continues and is never finished. Next week, as we honor the Jewish tradition of making amends and beginning again, we will ask how we can learn, through forgiveness, to be more at home with ourselves. And in late September, we will ask how we might, here in this place and on this planet, learn to be more fully at home with one another, at peace with the whole human family and all living beings.

The way I see it, one of our callings here in this congregation is to do what we can to make this world more loving and more just, more homelike for all beings everywhere. None of us can be at home with ourselves, or with one another, until all people, everywhere, have enough to eat, a safe place to sleep, and what they need to survive and thrive -- and that means care for their bodies. Some of us were at the Capitol on Friday to stand up for the right of all people, regardless of their means, all Arkansans in this place we call home, to have access to health care, including reproductive health care. And we will stand again, You and I, whenever and wherever we can, for the right of all people on this planet to travel, in body and in spirit, a safe journey home.

I do believe “the wide universe is the ocean (we) travel” and that all our lives, we are sailing. We are sailing all our lives, all of us, whoever we are wherever we come from, and whatever our path, we are “making our way by the lights of the heavens” on this earth, “our blue boat home.” I am honored to be here with all of you, and I give you my heart as, together, we find our way home.