



Ploughshare

A Piece of Mike's Mind by Rev. Mike Morran

What follows is the beginning of the sermon on July 30th:

Since the election last November, one of the conversations I've been having with a number of my colleagues in the liberal ministry is how they've approached the current administration in their preaching. Do they preach about it? Do they preach about it regularly? Do they feel like they have to be careful about political diversity in their congregations? What approach have they wanted to take? And have they had to temper that with concern about offending people. Utterly unscientific, but it seems most of my colleagues have felt like I felt beginning last election day. Like it's been almost impossible to preach about anything else! Not only because of what we were feeling personally, but because so many of our people have also been reeling.

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Imagine a Camp by Erin Kenworthy, DRE

This year's Imagine Camp experience was a bit unusual. We held camp offsite at St. Elizabeth's School, which allowed us to play a mysterious game called "GAGA" on the school's newly installed GAGA court. We ate lunch every day under the trees in City Park. We walked to and from the Denver Museum of Nature and Science to explore science as one of our sources. This year's camp theme lifted up our six Unitarian Universalist sources, each day's activities centered around one or two sources to explore. Matt Davis, again, did an outstanding job of planning, coordinating, and orchestrating this annual experience offered to our elementary school UU's.

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And not only people already a part of communities, but the many wonderful people who were coming into community precisely because they were feeling shock, and grief, and bewilderment. People almost desperate to find ways of coping with it all, like they needed to get involved in something positive, feeling like they needed someplace in their world that would remain grounded in sanity, even as the world appeared to lose it.

Many of my colleagues, and this was true for me, felt like we simply had to try and offer people some comfort, or reassurance, or sanity, some kind of faith in a world that felt like it had just gone mad. In my observation, this was so present in the minds of this community, so weighing on the hearts of this community; I felt it would be irresponsible to preach about anything else.

In many ways I still feel that way; though the urgency has abated somewhat as we've all become more or less accustomed to the behavioral bar for politics being driven ever lower, ever more outrageous, and ever less competent.

(Obviously, I personally have not felt as if I need to tiptoe around or otherwise dilute my own feelings about the Trump presidency.)

And all this is really just to say how I've come to the subject of sustenance this morning. What sustains us as we move through life? As we deal with setbacks? As we cope with daily news?

I am sharing this again here because First Unitarian Denver is very shortly headed into period where we will have to take the idea of sustenance very seriously. Beginning in October or November, we will be a church without access to our own building for at least several months and probably through February or March. In addition, I will be going on sabbatical November 1st through April 1st, coinciding with most of the construction phase.

Already, the Women's Homelessness Initiative and Family Promise have moved to other locations, and soon Sunday worship will also be happening off-site. We don't yet know where committees, meetings, and other church groups will be gathering while 1400 Lafayette is being renovated, but we know the whole process, coupled with my absence is going to be stressful for the congregation.

All of which is to say that every single member and friend of the church is going to have to make an extra effort to stay connected, stay engaged, be a part of one of our many ministries, CORE Circles, Social Justice efforts, or other community activity. It is togetherness that will sustain us.

Remember that you ARE the church, so wherever you go, we are with you.

See you there!

Mike

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With the help of youth counselors and counselors-in-training, new friendships were built and new interests discovered. Though exhausting to facilitate, the tie dying of 50 camp shirts was a labor of love, rewarded by a beautiful rainbow of creativity.

With Matt now on a well-deserved vacation, and my own recovery continuing, I've had time to reflect on the lessons of the week. I'm reminded of the mystery boxes on Monday. Participants were asked to reach out into a box to feel around and guess the contents. At the beginning, there was the slightest pang of fear as you considered the endless possibilities that awaited you in that unknown box. By the end, there was trust. Though the contents were strange and unexpected, those who prepared the activity did not seek to harm or injure anyone.

Monday's programming also included a scavenger hunt, setting small groups out to work together solving riddles, completing puzzles, and finding a universal truth together after revisiting their covenant.

Tuesday activities brought awareness of World Religions as a source of wisdom in our own faith tradition. We tie dyed shirts to represent the mixing and mingling of meaning and message found in the various and colorful religious traditions of the world.

Wednesday we experienced yoga outdoors, to connect ourselves with nature and seek balance with our natural world.

Thursday we explored the words and deeds of prophetic people, and imagined how our own unique voices might add to the collective wisdom gathered from past and present voices.

Friday we experienced science and logic first-hand at the museum. Our final event brought us to the Planetarium for a glimpse into the universe, the fabric of space and time, the stars, and the spaces in between.

It was a very full week, full of laughter, of learning, of creating, of connection. It was a very hot week, often uncomfortable, and demanded some creative problem solving. Soaked and Frozen sponges from the dollar store can be your own personal air conditioning unit. Through all of it, the camp covenant resonated in resolution of game disputes, in one on one discussions, and in imagining how the sources can inspire each of us to be the change we wish to see in the world. If you want details, seek out a youth who attended Imagine Camp this year. I guarantee it will be a joyful conversation. I also invite you to imagine how this coming year presents opportunities to reach out with trust into the unknown. Imagine your own spiritual truths and the beauty of covenant in this community. Seek balance within and outside of yourself. Imagine your own voice in the chorus of those who work for justice with compassion. Remember that there is a unity that makes us one, and binds us together, forever, throughout all time, through life and death, and the space between the stars.

In Peace, Erin.

President's Corner by *Stu Ferguson, President, Board of Trustees*

The Capital Campaign remodeling looks like it will start sometime in October. With all the construction in Denver, the permitting office is quite backed up which makes exact prediction difficult. The new board had its retreat July 15 and worked on the question: How can we maintain our loving community through the transitions this year? These include the remodeled building and Mike's sabbatical as well as national changes. We discussed ways to keep the momentum going in our lively congregation.

We will explore ways to keep open communication. Our web site, Ploughshare, and other avenues of communication will be important for all of us to know where to go for services and events. Having telephone contact with visitors and members is an idea that has been successful in pulling together other congregations. But implementation of these plans will need creative help from many of the members both new and old.

During Mike's sabbatical, we would like to continue adult classes for spiritual growth. Fortunately, FUSD has good people who can step in and provide support. There are multiple places for members to contribute both in social justice projects and in small group discussions with each other. Hopefully we can nourish the good projects we have going and welcome new people into our community.

The RE program will have some disruptions because of the remodeling. We discussed the importance of inter-generational events and ask for suggestions to help our families feel at home even when we are out of the building. Cindy Pincus gave an excellent service July 23. She discussed distraction in our modern lives that keep us isolated and the importance of community to combat that isolation. Unitarian/Universalism teaches us of the interdependent web of existence. By building a strong community in Denver we put into practice the principles we talk about. This community has helped me through the last 35 years of my life and I am welcoming my friends to join with me for the next adventure.

On a different note, the Board is working towards hiring an assistant minister. The first step is strengthening our stewardship program. To that end we have organized a Development Council to diversify and grow our income streams. We hired Karen Derrick-Davis to fill a newly-created half-time staff position to support the Council. Karen has been working with the congregation for the last year coordinating our successful capital campaign and she knows our values and goals. The first activity of the Council is to conduct an assessment to get congregants' feedback and input. We need to assess our current efforts and gather volunteers' suggestions for the future. We hope you will take a few minutes to complete the congregant survey (online at fusden.org or on paper in the community room after the service).

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Money tends to be a taboo topic in our church but handled in the right way it can augment our already amazing program. At a recent meeting, we emphasized that all donors should be treated respectfully and equally with gracious giving and gracious receiving. In a voluntary organization where volunteer hours surpass our staff hours, everyone is valued for who they are. The Development Council will carry First Unitarian to the next level of making an impact in our society as well as in our own lives.

A Message from the Abundance Ministry

by Kim Urish

I'm a gardener. Almost every day from spring through the summer, I'm outside checking on everything. Sometimes I just putter around and sometimes I work on major renovations or changes. It nourishes me. It feeds my soul and restores a sense of balance to my world. By August the pace of gardening slows a bit for me as I enjoy the fullness of summer and the fall blooms. Yet even during this slower time, the basics still need to be done. The same is true with our beloved First Unitarian community. This summer our Development Council is progressing nicely: hiring Karen Derrick-Davis part-time to assist with fundraising and putting together our Development Assessment in order to evaluate fundraising activities and perceptions in our community. This information will help us put together a Retreat and a Development Plan in September which will be shared with the congregation in October. Throughout this process and as we shift our strategies and activities, we need to attend to the basics: supporting each other, reaching out to new people and maintaining our financial commitment to the church. Please keep these basics in mind as you tend your gardens this summer



Whole Souul Living

Surrender is the Whole Souul Living Theme for August. By way of introduction, Surrender is the title of the following poem by William Larsen. It has a word in it, dharma, which is Buddhist term that translates roughly as "teaching"

*At our house there live
a girl, a dog, and a yard full of newly planted flowers
The dog came free, the girl is priceless
and the flowers cost three hundred dollars,
a cozy scene, but complicated
in that I love the girl, the girl loves the dog
and the dog loves to dig my flowers
and I do not love the dog
creating a dilemma in which I who crave
even the illusion of control am stymied between my needs
for the orderly completion of my desires and the beam of joyous fire
in the eyes of the girl,
all of which says more about the complexities of love
than the training of neurotic dogs
and I've just discovered in writing these lines that
the dharma of this dilemma
has less to do with my training the dog to not dig my flowers
than the dog training me to love the girl*

Questions for reflection:

- What is Life calling you to surrender right now?
- What is getting in the way of that surrendering?
- Wisdom literature is clear that spiritual growth comes more often through letting go of limitations than by acquiring some new skill or attribute. Does this ring true in your life experience? Tell, journal, or otherwise find a way to express the story behind your thinking on this.
- Surrendering is sometimes required, not just by individuals but by whole communities and even cultures. What does your community need to let go of in order to grow in wisdom, spirit, or connectedness?



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