

Claire Feingold Thoryn
September 7, 2014
Theme: Unitarian Universalism
Homily: Generations Dance

The “Generations Dance” Time for All Ages and this homily were inspired by, and quote from, writing by Rev. Robin Bartlett.

I’m not sure if you remember, but we started out this service by dancing. Oh—you do remember? Well I am sure that for some of you, it was mortifying; for others it was super fun; for some it was awkward and for others it was a wonderful way to get the wiggles out. At the very least, I’m guessing that it was for many of us—including me—out of our comfort zone for church.

The poet Gregory Orr wrote:

To be alive: not just the carcass
But the spark.
That’s crudely put, but ...

If we’re not supposed to dance,
Why all this music?

I said our dancing would be a living breathing illustration of what is special about church. And so I hope you saw a few of the things I saw.

I saw five generations celebrating *the spark*.

I saw the generations that had lots of representation,
and the generations with less.

I saw people taking risks,
being vulnerable enough to get into the music and move your body.
For New Englanders,
a big head nod or wide smile in church
is getting pretty physical.
So dancing—*dancing* in church takes guts.

I saw some new dance moves I hadn’t seen before—
did you learn any new moves this morning?

This is the gift of a group of people who span the generations—
the learning that comes from taking risks,
being brave, learning new things from each other,
and seeing our commonalities.

We are all alive and we all have, not just bodies, but *the spark*, and music was made for dancing—whether your dance is the jitterbug or the running man, whether you swing or whether you mosh.

Being able to see the generations is special because having five generations of non-biologically related people in one room—
choosing to be together—
is actually very counter-cultural these days.

Kids and youth know this the best. Grade by grade, you hang out with people all within a year of your age. Out there, if things are like they were when I was in school, it probably would be weird for, say a 7th grader to hang out with a 5th grader—let alone striking up a friendship with someone else's grandfather.

And for adults, this happens too. School ends and we tend to keep hanging out with people who share our age and stage of life. I know that outside of these walls I spend a lot of time with a lot of people in their 30s or 40s and have kids the same ages as mine. It's easy to find common ground when we both speak the language of sippy cups and going potty.

Beyond the limits of generations and the limits of language, it is also easier to slip into only surrounding ourselves with others who share our backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities. It's easier to befriend people who are like you. You don't have to think so much. It's comfortable.

It's harder to get out of your comfort zone, to learn a new dance.

Many of us don't have a lot of practice in creating friendships with people across generational divides,
or any other type of divide.

It takes effort
and translation
and awkward silences
and empathy
and commitment.

It takes putting down assumptions
and picking up curiosity.

Perhaps your potential new friend wasn't alive when John Kennedy was shot,
or has no concept of what it felt like to be a child when the Twin Towers fell.
Perhaps your friend has dealt with dentures for years
and you haven't even lost all your baby teeth yet.

Perhaps you aren't sure how to interact with a non-verbal toddler
when you are used to interacting primarily with your professor friends.

Perhaps your potential new friend loves Justin Bieber
and you are more of a Justin Timberlake fan,
or perhaps you don't know who either of those people are.

Perhaps you don't trust anyone over 30,
or perhaps you don't trust anyone under 30.

In a culture that seeks to divide us, instead we choose to come together in this building,
choosing people not in our biological family.
to make a new sprawling multi-generational family.

We didn't have to choose each other.
We don't have to choose to come to church.
There are so many easier ways to spend your time.

The New York Times never asks you to dance in front of a bunch of people.
The other patrons in the movie theater never ask you to volunteer for social justice work.
Your co-workers probably don't ask you to practice sacred listening in the staff meeting.

Church life asks us to think deeply,
feel passionately,
and to open ourselves to each other's humanity
and to the Divine in which we live and more and have our being.

It's work: soul work.
The work of growing our souls.

And so here, across the generations,
across the oceans of language and years and beliefs and experiences
that divide us, we come together.

And we practice this soul work
And we practice creating beloved community.

We practice when we smile at the restless toddler in the pew next to us,
or we sing our hearts out during our least favorite hymn because we know it is beloved
someone else.

We practice when we use coffee hour as an opportunity to talk to all the new faces.
We practice when we mentor a youth in the Coming of Age program,
And when we offer to babysit for a young family so the parents can go out at night.
We practice by reaching out to Unitarians in another country, to learn about each other's
faith and culture and language.

We practice when we strive to make sure our church is accessible for people with different abilities.

We practice when we donate to each other's causes
And when we bring each other casseroles.

We practice when, instead of making assumptions,
We ask questions and listen, really listen, to the answers.

In our first hymn we sang
*Here we have gathered, gathered side by side.
May all who seek here find a kindly word;
May all who speak here feel they have been heard.*

*We of all ages, women, children, men,
Infants and sages, sharing what we can.*

May we seek the spark of life together,
Because if we're not supposed to dance,
Why all this music?

Amen.