

September 28, 2014
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Theme: Unitarian Universalism
Sermon: Moments of Meeting

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I've been asking friends and mentors, new and old, religiously inclined and otherwise, what I should say to you this morning from this pulpit.

"Tell your spiritual autobiography!"

"Introduce yourself to them, they have no idea who you are!"

"We heard Claire's, and we heard Josef's from Transylvania – what about yours? What's your credo?"

"Make FUUY do something!"

"If it's not too much to ask, it would be great if you could shoehorn something about Emerson in there."

"Sing a song! Play your ukulele! Play your drums!"

"Can you talk about Jesus? Would it help if I just asked you what would Jesus do?"

"Get Jimmy to install pyrotechnics and a smoke machine!"

"Just don't make us dance again."

"Just don't pick hymns from the teal book."

"Check your facts."

"You're Buddhist right? Easy! Lead a silent meditation."

"Is it just you, or will Claire be there too? If Claire's there you're fine."

"Do they have coffee hour, with like legit food and stuff?"

"Tell a story about my dog!"

I've been pretty nervous about this service, so thanks everyone for your help and guidance. Really! Not only have you given me inspiration for this sermon, I think I've

got enough stuff to work with for at least the next year and a half. Remind me though to talk to Jimmy about the smoke and pyrotechnic display. I'm thinking that will be great for the Sunday when I just play the drums – or even better lead the silent meditation.

While all of these suggestions are entirely valid ideas, for this, my first sermon as your ministerial intern for the next two years, I decided to follow the model of those who have preached before me this month, and offer my credo as well.

My credo is twofold, and it's fairly simple. And I might not have it quite right yet – I am just the intern after all.

I believe in loving ourselves unconditionally, and I believe in loving the world unconditionally.

The best practice I've discovered that enables and engages this love is pausing.

So essentially, I believe in love and I believe in pausing to love.

I was talking to a wise friend last week about my other job, as a farmhand at a small but bountiful vegetable farm called Two Field Farm down the road in Wayland. I was visiting with her directly after working a farmers market and was recounting the stand-out events of the afternoon with energetic joy: there was the child who would only let her mother buy purple vegetables, the man who meticulously picked out 9 pounds of heirloom tomatoes only to then spill and smash them all on the ground, the disgruntled woman who wanted to know why we weren't selling lemons yet, and the French woman who always confuses the word organic with orgasmic.

My friend laughed at my afternoon, and followed up my tales with an observation. She knows well my experience working at my *other* other job in the produce department of a high-end grocery chain, and the disgruntled and exhausted state a shift in store generally leaves me. “What is it about the farmers market that gives you energy rather than depletes you.” She asked, “These people sound just as quirky and finicky as those at your other job.”

I paused.

“Well, its outside, and I care about the farm and our vegetables, and most of the people are fine and happy....-sigh-...you know what it is actually, when I work the market I get to touch a lot of people with open hands. At our stand, people pick out these piles of vegetables, of all different shapes and colors, and they hold these piles in their hands, and then we have to weigh them, so very carefully, they hand these piles over to us, with open hands, into our open hands. And then we weigh them, and then cause most people bring their own bags – its like the farmers market thing to do, you know – we hand these piles back to them – with open hands, for them to bag themselves. Usually in these vegetable pile exchanges one person places their hands under the other persons – so for a moment your open hands are holding theirs, and then, a moment later, their open hands are

holding yours - for just a second, with person after person, most of them complete strangers. And often we're smiling and chatting at the same time. That sort of exchange doesn't happen a lot, and though I don't think I really thought about it now, I think those moments make me really happy."

"Humh," my friend replied, "those moments, they're like a special kind of meeting. They're moments of meeting, where you two are connecting on some kind of subconscious and conscious level. Of touching hands and holding vegetables, but for a moment you're also holding one another."

"Yeahhh," I smiled, "Moments of meeting, I like that. Exactly, yes, moments of meeting."

Since having this conversation with my friend, I've been trying to shift my awareness to recognizing these moments. What I've found is that moments of meeting are occurring everywhere all the time. They are silent, spoken, felt, seen, heard, sensed. They are shared alone or together, with animals, nature, or other human beings. Fleeting, spontaneous, and long lasting. Simple, complex. They're all over the place! They're happening right now!

Moments of meeting are happening when you come home and your dog rushes down the stairs to greet you, and you kneel down to greet your dog.

There's a moment of meeting when you go for coffee with a friend and together you sit with your hands wrapped around your mugs, both feeling the warmth in your palms.

There's a moment of meeting when you are cursing a driver beside you to some explicit doom and you look over to see that they are mouthing obscenities right back at you.

There's a moment of meeting when you find yourself in the breakfast line at the Follen Youth Retreat waiting for your turn for the ice cream, chocolate sauce, Lucky Charms, whipped cream and marshmallow stuffed butter rolls, while those in front of you gleefully, one after another, concoct their decadent breakfasts.

There's a moment of meeting when you lose someone and finally just let yourself cry and collapse alone to the floor in sadness.

There's a moment of meeting when you pause to look up at the sky and the trees, or tall buildings and telephone wires and notice the intricate patterns and colors shaping our environment.

There's a moment of meeting when your team scores a goal or a touchdown and everyone around you all at once throws their hands up in celebration.

There's a moment of meeting when you're engaged in a passionate dialogue, when your oohing and mmming as you eat a dessert, when you are so tired and finally can just lie down on the couch and watch game of thrones.

Essentially a moment of meeting, is a connection – to yourself, to others. It is a time when you are together in life, with life. It is a shared experience with the world at large,

when, for a time, perhaps a very fleeting second, or maybe many hours, something mutual is felt – your love for another is reciprocated, the warmth of a hot beverage is shared, the sadness in your heart is expressed, the leaves on the trees above you are acknowledged, the exhaustion in your bones is comforted, your hands hold another person's hands.

It is a time when things come together, in short, they meet.

I believe these moments of meeting are what we live for – they are a time to love our body and give it what it needs, and love the world and acknowledge what it gives. Moments of meeting ourselves where we are at, and moments of meeting the world where it's at.

You might be thinking, "Come on, intern, I don't feel much love for the world when that driver is mouthing obscenities at me."

No, you don't but you feel your anger and express it, which might not be a good thing, but here's where the second half of my credo comes in: to engage the love present in a moment of meeting, you must pause and be in that moment.

So when that driver cuts you off, waving a vulgar hand gesture in the rear view mirror, and you feel compelled to throw a brick through their window, can you pause in that moment and feel that point of mutual anger where you both are meeting. Do you think you could feel how alive you are, connected to another, sharing a human experience of wanting to be first. This is life alive – can you feel how much energy is in us? Is between us?

Ideally moments of meeting will not be in anger, and frankly, rarely will two people have an angry moment of meeting because anger is so often a result of an imbalance of power, which is the opposite of a moment of meeting. One could instead call it, a moment of missing. Massachusetts traffic, however, provides an endless source of moments of angry, angry meeting, where everyone is equally in the wrong – together.

Being in the moment. And pausing to see what greets us there.

This is the practice I believe, that helps us love ourselves and helps us love the world. We feel the amazing energies and senses within us in these moments, and we become aware of the many possibilities of the world.

Now, forgive me for just shoehorning some Emerson into here, but he does do well to explain these moments of meeting in his essay on Friendship, "Delicious," he writes, "is a just and firm encounter of two in a thought, in a feeling. How beautiful on their approach to this beating heart! And nature, she gives me this joy several times, and thus we weave social threads of our own, a new web of relations. And, as many thoughts in succession substantiate themselves, we shall, by and by, stand in a new world of our own creation, no longer strangers and pilgrims in a traditionary globe."

On Wednesday night, Joanna Macy, environmentalist, general systems theorist, Buddhist teacher, and spiritual leader, spoke here at Follen. Her words to the audience were based primarily on the tenets of her “work that reconnects,” a process she has developed and written about extensively in her books. Macy’s “work that reconnects” is in accordance with the idea that we are all one in the web of life, or in Buddhist terms that all things are interconnected. And thus her work to “re-connect” centers on teachings and exercises to help raise awareness of our impacts on the world, and world’s impacts on us. On Wednesday, she urged us “to pull the sacred down from that heavenly place where we tend to set it up above” and keep it here with us, so that we may see the earth with awe and wonder, and see our lives as precious.

While Macy has many exercises to engage the work that reconnects, our reading today offered scientific notions – perhaps we could call them facts – though I didn’t check my facts - from which we can develop our own practice of reconnecting, or simply, meeting. She explains that the number of atoms the world holds is enough so that every breath we take contains more than a million atoms breathed by other living beings on earth.

Every time we breathe, every breath, then, is a moment of meeting. “We don’t have to invent or construct our connections.” Macy writes, “They already exist. We already and indissolubly belong to each other, for that is the nature of life. We can rest in that knowing and stop and breathe and let that breath connect us.”

We all are breathing this atmosphere, together, and we all must keep breathing to survive. No matter what, we meet always at our breath. And with those inhales and exhales we can love our body for breathing and love the world for this air.

Would you mind, pausing with me now, to love your breath.

Our breath.

It’s nice to meet you.