

2/20/11 Sermon

“Let Your Life Speak”

Rev. Paul D. Daniel, Minister

Have you ever wondered where your life is going, what purpose you serve? Are any of us really the same person we present to the world, or are we someone different; hidden and broken, wondering what happened to the real me? Has your life turned out like you envisioned it to be?

Your inner voice will tell you whether you are living your values in honoring your best self. A purpose driven life is a true calling, like ministry or church leadership ... to live your highest truth and values when you engage the world. If we share a common goal of changing people's lives for the better, we are challenged to make our inner and outer persona consistent.

If your reaction to these questions has stirred up some personal dissatisfaction about who you really are, what are you willing to do to become the person you think you were meant to be? What's holding you back? If you and I are to answer that question, we must decide what a life of integrity offers us and what that means for the relationships we have established and the faith we are trying to live.

The process to grow and change your life can be painful and come slowly as you begin to accept that you could be happier. A lack of self esteem, how you feel about yourself in the world, can cause you to teeter on the brink of failure, for fear of being exposed as a fraud by not being the person you told others you were. This feeling can lead to depression or worse. That was my experience when I was “in the closet.” People knew me as a heterosexual; a father, husband, valued leader of my church community ... but I was not that person. I know that fear no longer.

Living a disconnected lifestyle ultimately devalues and destroys relationships. Living inauthentically almost cost me my relationship with my children. What has it cost you? If we know we are risking all that we value, why would any of us resist changing how we live? We must appreciate that there is so much less stress the more we act with integrity. Most of us have at times been more comfortable with the status quo than with facing the uncertainty of change and the fear of losing everything we had been or built – the sandcastles of our individual lives.

This also can have the effect of putting life on hold; which can have devastating emotional, relational and financial consequences. Make no mistake, there is always a price to pay for the lack of integrity.

At the personal level, the battle to live authentically is challenging and requires fortitude and courage. This disharmony that puts your heart into conflict with itself is a battle that you might feel you can never win. You often know the right thing to do, but you find yourself not doing it. When you find yourselves in that place, perceptions of your situation become distorted. It is an act of violence against yourself.

Such dissonance frequently causes both emotional and physical trauma. For me, it created deep depression and an inability to perform my career with efficiency, or be in a relationship with joy. It overwhelmed my body with illness in the form of cardiac disease. No doubt, in your own life, you know that pain.

The good news is that this journey to authenticity can be transformative, but it takes, time, effort and patience. May Sarton put it well:

*"Now I become myself,
It takes time, many years and places.
I have been dissolved and shaken;
Warn other people's faces."*

Beginning your transformative journey allows you to build a new life based on the hope that living with integrity can bring. You can achieve a new level of trust and happiness in relationships growing out of the lessons learned from past mistakes. The joy and satisfaction of living a life of integrity renews our purpose to become the best person we have within us to be. It enables us to better care for ourselves and for others; it allows us to become fully present to our spouses and especially our children. Through this process of becoming congruent in thought, word and action we model how to live successfully and faithfully in the world.

When we are genuine with ourselves and others, no one can ever question the legitimacy of the depth of feeling we have for another or the honesty of our instincts and feeling. We become unassailable and trustworthy again. I serve as your minister to help you move to and enjoy that place.

While we may not safely be able to share all of ourselves in a public forum, what we do can be depended upon while we maintain our integrity discreetly and in an appropriate manner. No one has a given right to all of who we are. We are in control of what we share and in whom we place our trust. Building trust is an incremental process, one step at a time. To get trust, you must give it. Allowing another to define who we are is not living the life that is yearning to be born in us.

Shakespeare encourages us, "To thy own self be true." But remember, we also must be willing to listen to the inner voice we don't want to hear.

The life you will create speaks through your future actions. When you live with right purpose, you satisfy not only a higher moral calling to change the world, but you bring to life the faith you profess. Parker Palmer, author, educator and activist, said it this way, "You must let your highest truth and values guide you. You must live up to those demanding standards in everything you do."

We have an obligation to ourselves and others to honor the precepts of Unitarian Universalism that call us to respect the inherent worth and dignity of every person – including ourselves – as part of the larger web of existence. Our search for personal integrity is part of our faith's call to truth and dignity. It is through this authentic religious journey to create, uphold and sustain life that we become all that we were meant to be.

There is no higher calling than that. There is a Hasidic tale that reveals with amazing brevity, both the universal tendency to want to be someone else and the ultimate importance to become one's self. Rabbi Zusya, when he was an old man said, "In the coming world, they will not ask me, 'Why were you not Moses?' They will ask me, 'Why were you not Zusya?' "

The Quakers tell us, "Let your life speak!" Only you can decide if you are unhappy and need to change. No other voice matters. When you hear your own authentic siren song, it will inspire you to seek personal fulfillment and remind you that your life has purpose – to live out the call of your God, your faith and your own life. The mistakes we all have made in our lives are, in the end, a gift; for they teach us what we need to know to live successfully. This is the path to right relationships, to serve humanity in the fullness of your being.

I leave you to ponder this final question in Parker Palmer's words; "It is not, 'What ought I to do with my life?' It is more elemental and demanding. 'Who am I? What is my [authentic] nature?' "

Blessed be!