

First Unitarian Church of Worcestre
Sermon: A Life Long Journey
Rev. Tracey Robinson-Harris
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Once in a while, I'll pick up a book I've read before wondering what I might find in those pages this time around as I bring to this new encounter more of my own living. Recently I returned again to the small volume entitled *Let Your Life Speak* by Quaker teacher and activist Parker Palmer. Its first words are this poem by William Stafford:

Sometime when the river is ice ask me
mistakes I have made. Ask me whether
what I have done is my life. Others
have come in their own slow way into
my thought, and some have tried to help
or to hurt: ask me what difference
their strongest love or hate has made.

I will listen to what you say.
You and I can turn and look
At the silent river and wait. We know
the current is there, hidden; and there
are comings and goings from miles away
that hold the stillness exact before us.
What the river says, that is what I say.

Palmer then writes:

"Ask me whether what I have done is my life." For some, those words will be nonsense. . . a poet's loose way with language and logic. . . But for others, and I am one, the poet's words will be precise, piercing and disquieting. They remind me of the moments when it is clear. . . . that the life I am living is not the same as the life that wants to live in me." Our lives, writes Palmer borrowing the title of Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography, our lives are "experiments in truth" (Let Your Life Speak p 1-2, 7)

When the poet writes “Ask me whether what I have done is my life,” his words are an echo of questions held in the minds and hearts of folks like you and me and asked generation after generation: “What is the meaning and purpose of my life?” “How is it revealed through my living?”

When the teacher speaks of “moments when it is clear that the life I am living is not the same as the life that wants to live in me” he confronts the incongruity, the dissonance between the life I live and the person I am, between the what and the who of me.

When Mahatma Gandhi tells stories of his experiments in truth, he reminds us that we have many opportunities to try another way, to do something differently, to learn from failure as well as success and by that leaning redefine both.

Stafford’s poem, Palmer’s observation, Gandhi’s stories - each, in its own way, reveals something of the challenges we face as adults on our respective journeys in faith development. And each hints at the precious gifts we can offer one another – gifts of presence and of listening, of insight, clarity, encouragement, understanding, and perspective, gifts of support and of forgiveness.

As we promise to support the faith development of all in this community this is good and plenty And, *and*, there is one more thing to be said, one more thing in several parts. It is commentary on the theme of Jessica’s reflection – the only constant is change – and on one of those things some say about why we are committed to change and spiritual growth – we believe revelation is not sealed.

If Jessica’s assertion about change turned out to be wrong and if Unitarian Universalism reversed course on the nature of truth declaring it complete, what we learned long ago - whether of death or truth or love - would stand us in good stead now as then. If human experience in its essentials repeated exactly, or with only the slightest variation, things already learned would be sufficient for today and for anything the future might bring. If we lived our lives in linear fashion, with the past both sure foundation and clear direction-without-deviation for this present moment and for whatever time we have left to us, we could rest assured we have learned all we need to live honestly and fully for the rest of our days.

If new experiences did not lead to new truth, if the course of life did not push us toward greater understanding, reluctantly at times and willingly at others, then we could avoid the promise we just made. We could ignore the affirmation spoken together moments ago. We could put aside any thought of our need to gather for time like this, to be with one another on weeknights and early mornings and all hours on weekends, in small groups and large circles, to be face to face and side by side, companions on the journey.

In a sermon entitled “On Going to Church” preached in the mid-20th century to the congregation of All Souls Church, Unitarian in Washington DC, the Rev. A. Powell Davies said, “In a congregation we share each other’s spiritual needs and reinforce each other. . . We meet each other as friends and neighbors anywhere and everywhere but we seldom do so in the

consciousness of our soul's deepest yearnings. . . in church we do. *In church we meet each other in the consciousness of our soul's deepest yearnings.*

I am on the side of the Poet and the Quaker and Gandhi-ji and Jessica and A. Powell Davies. I am on the side of there being more truth, and believe that more truth is coming my way. I am on the side of our promise to support the faith development of all of us in this community. I am on the side of our affirmation that spiritual growth and learning is one of the most precious gifts we offer ourselves in community.

Now, writes, May Sarton:

Now I become myself. It's taken
Time, many years and places;
I have been dissolved and shaken,
Worn other people's faces,. . . .
All fuses now, falls into place
From wish to action, word to silence,
My work, my love, my time, my face
Gathered into one intense
Gesture of growing like a plant.

Now I become myself.

And I could not be myself without you.