

Belonging in a World of Difference
Thanksgiving Homily

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First Parish in Brookline

As humans we are contagious. What we do and how we act has impact. Our agency, or power, is the greatest strength that any of us have.

What we say or don't say, do or don't do, can have a lasting and deep impact upon another person or people for a day or a life time. For good and for bad.

Professor Dumbledore explains this well when he says to Harry Potter: "It is our choices, Harry, that show who we truly are, far more than our abilities."¹

I've thought of this quote often over the last week and a half. Twelve days ago, we had our national Presidential Election. My immediate reactions that night were swift and clear. Bring the community together. Stay connected. Remind us all that we are here for each other. We did that the night after the election. It was wonderful, and felt right.

After that, though things changed. I became less clear about how to respond. Not just here at First Parish, but in all parts of my life.

I had some clarity. My instinct is to draw closer to those on both sides of this election. I have family and know people who voted differently than I did. I know these people, love some of them. It is time to start listening and talking together with an eye for genuine understanding.

Regarding other things however, I was not so clear. My clarity was muddled by things like comparing myself with other people. Reading too much Facebook and shaming myself for not doing everything that was being suggested, not organizing every rally, attending every gathering, reading every article.

Perhaps scariest of all is that I began to criticize myself for doing the things that are essential for my wellbeing. I felt selfish for meeting my needs when there was so much to be done in the world.

This sense of being off-center lasted for about a week. Throughout those days, I never stopped doing the things that I know I need—meditation, prayer, journaling, exercising, taking an inventory each night of how I lived that day, and keeping a gratitude list each morning.

My off-centeredness changed when I connected with two members of this congregation, Rich Day and Nate Freitas. We were meeting about 'work stuff' and during that time I told them honestly where I was.

¹ Rowling, J.K., Scholastic, Inc. New York, NY, 1998, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 333

That for example reading too much Facebook was overwhelming me. Nate and Rich agreed, and in fact, had/have gone "off" Facebook! We ended up having the greatest conversation. We talked about alternative, or additions, I guess we would say, to Facebook. Other social media platforms that might be good for us to consider using at First Parish.

The idea of creating a First Parish group on WhatsApp. A safe, entirely encrypted place where we could share our thoughts and feelings. Or that I might use Medium, a blog site where people could sign up to be on that, and not have to read all of Facebook. (Please wait to look these things up on your phone until I'm finished speaking.)

Remaining steady in my self-care and talking honestly with others brought me back to center. From there, I was able to put down my thoughts about how I am choosing to respond to these times. I would like to share them with you this morning.

I offer them to you for consideration. Take them all as your own, take one or two, take none. Most importantly, do your best to know your own criteria. Articulate them as clear as possible and use them to hold your ground.

Here are my three:

#1 Promote peace.

In big and small ways. "Return to no person evil for evil." This doesn't mean that we condone. We respond. In love. When the car driving behind you doesn't like how you drive, and the driver lays on their horn—even longer than they might have 12 days ago—send them loving thoughts. Mine are: "Peace be with you." And I mean it. That person is hurting.

Practice being a non-anxious presence. Fear feeds on fear. When people are afraid, as many are, if we respond in kind—with more negative talk or complaining or demonizing, it will not help soothe their fear. Nor ours.

#2 Create connections.

With yourself and others. All others. Remaining connected to yourself is intensely personal and is an essential act of social justice. We are not partners when we are dry or depleted. There is a river inside of all of us; that is our source. Live as connected to that as possible.

Connect with others. If we don't want walls on our borders, how can we build walls in our lives or in our hearts? I have an image of bringing UUs who voted on both sides of this election together. We share so much; let's talk. Understand why each of us voted as we did. And yes, there are UUs who voted for Donald Trump.

And #3 Take Positive Action.

When we want to rant and complain. Take an action instead. An action that promotes peace and makes connections.

Take the chalk home with you today and draw peace art. Take pictures of that and spread the joy.

The owner of Chobani Yogurt is being boycotted because he hires Syrian and other Middle East refugees to work at his company. Buy Chobani Yogurt.

Sign the petition ensuring that immigrant children at Karnes Family Detention Center can continue using coloring crayons.

These things are most meaningful when they come from a place of truth about who we are.

I have heard several people (outside of these walls) talk about their wanting to go back to using drugs and alcohol, for example, as a way to deal with their emotions right now. As a minister in recovery I realized that I could offer my support. So I let my UU colleagues know that I am here to talk with any of their congregants who experiencing such feelings.

When I read of a recent act of Anti-Semitism on my son's college campus, I sent an email offering to help their chaplains. I could have posted about it on Facebook; I could have complained and been aghast. I took that same ten minutes and sent the email instead.

Rilke wrote in our reading today: "We must accept our reality in all its immensity. The courage to meet the strangest, most awesome and most inexplicable of phenomena."

As Professor Dumbledore said to Harry Potter: "It is our choices, Harry, that show who we truly are, far more than our abilities."²

May our choices reflect our true selves, not fear. May we remain connected to that source that is within us all, and may we "Go out into the world in peace. Have courage. Return to no person evil for evil. Strengthen the fainthearted. Support the weak. Help the suffering. Honor all Beings."

Amen and Blessed Be.

² Rowling, J.K., Scholastic, Inc. New York, NY, 1998, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, p. 333