



New Horizons – July 2020

Theme Based Ministry Newsletter of the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto

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Connection

“Are you as connected as you want to be?”

For many years now, that’s been the question posed by our volunteers at the Engage & Connect Table on Sundays during Coffee Hour. It’s hard to imagine any of us would say we are as connected as we’d like to be, especially during this time when, because of the pandemic, we are required to keep physical distance from one another and we depend on Zoom and FaceTime to keep in touch with others in our lives. And yet we are social animals; creatures who often crave affection and companionship; beings who need the comfort of human touch—so much so that the term “skin hunger” has been coined to speak to the sense of deprivation we may feel when we’ve gone for too long without physical connection.

Of course, not all connection requires being together in person. Even during these strange times, many people have done an extraordinary job of keeping in touch with their nearest and dearest with the help of technology. The pandemic has, for many, provided both an impetus and an opportunity to reach out, to make the extra effort required to feel connected right now. Having more time at home has allowed some to be more caught up with friends and family than they have been in years.

This time has also provided us with an occasion to reflect on what connection really means to us, and to understand the degree to which we personally feel a need for it. This month, we invite you to delve more deeply into what connection means for you—to ask yourself if you’re as connected as you’d like to be and, if the answer is no, I encourage you to do what you can to change things.

Wishing you many meaningful connections over these summer months!

In faith and love, Shawn

Questions to Live With



1. How are you feeling particularly connected during this time?
2. How are you feeling particularly disconnected during this time?
3. What does connection feel like to you? How would you describe it?
4. What does disconnection feel like to you? How would you describe it? Is it a matter of presence? Or distance? Or time?
5. What are the signs of the start of a feeling of disconnection? How does it come on for you?
6. If you're not as connected as you'd like to be in some part of your right now, is there a way to change that, even under the current circumstances?

For Inspiration

“Everything Is Waiting for You”
- David Whyte

(After Derek Mahon)

Your great mistake is to act the drama
as if you were alone. As if life
were a progressive and cunning crime
with no witness to the tiny hidden
transgressions. To feel abandoned is to deny
the intimacy of your surroundings. Surely,
even you, at times, have felt the grand array;
the swelling presence, and the chorus,
crowding
out your solo voice. You must note
the way the soap dish enables you,
or the window latch grants you freedom.
Alertness is the hidden discipline of familiarity.
The stairs are your mentor of things
to come, the doors have always been there

to frighten you and invite you,
and the tiny speaker in the phone
is your dream-ladder to divinity.

Put down the weight of your aloneness and
ease into
the conversation. The kettle is singing
even as it pours you a drink, the cooking pots
have left their arrogant aloofness and
seen the good in you at last. All the birds
and creatures of the world are unutterably
themselves. Everything is waiting for you.

In this stillness,
I am the trees alive with singing.
I am the sky everywhere at once.
I am the snow and the wind bearing stories
across geographies and generations.
I am the light everywhere descending.
I am my heart evoking drum song.
I am my spirit rising.
In the smell of these sacred medicines burning,
I am my prayers and my meditation,
and I am time captured fully in this now.
I am a traveller on a sacred journey
through this one shining day.
- Richard Wagamese

Although I am a typical loner in daily life, my consciousness of belonging to the invisible community of those who strive for truth, beauty, and justice has preserved me from feeling isolated. The most beautiful and deepest experience a person can have is the sense of the mysterious. It is the underlying principle of religion as well as all serious endeavours in art and science. Anyone who never had this experience seems to me, if not dead, then at least blind. To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is a something that our mind cannot grasp and whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly and as a feeble reflection, this is religiousness. In this sense I am religious. To me it suffices to wonder at these secrets and to attempt humbly to grasp with my mind a mere image of the lofty structure of all that there is.
- Albert Einstein

My successes are not my own. The way to them was prepared by others. The fruit of my labours is not my own: for I am preparing the way for the achievements of another. Nor are my failures my own. They may spring from the failure of another, but they are also compensated for by another's achievement.

Therefore the meaning of my life is not to be looked for merely in the sum total of my achievements. It is seen only in the complete integration of my achievements and failures with the achievements and failures of my own generation, and society, and time.
- Thomas Merton



One of the old ones stood up
into the morning light
and spoke to those who had come
back to the river.

Now we have come again to this place.
My life apart from you
is not as strong. Yes,
I have danced and I have told stories
at my own fire and
I have sung well, to all eight directions.
But when I am with you,
my friends,
I know better
who it is in me
that sings.
- Barbara Pescan

Since Copernicus we have known better than to see the earth as the centre of the universe. Since Einstein, we have learned that there is no centre; or alternatively, that any point is as good as any other for observing the world. I take this to be roughly what medieval theologians meant when they defined God as a circle whose circumference is nowhere and whose centre is everywhere... There are no privileged locations. If you stay put, your place may become a holy centre, not because it gives you special access to the divine, but because in your stillness you hear what might be heard anywhere. All there is to see can be seen from anywhere in the universe, if you know how to look; and the influence of the entire universe converges on every spot.

- *Scott Russell Sanders*

In the old days, the primary job of the native Lakota mother was to teach the new child that he or she was connected with everything in the circle of life. She would take the child walking and say, "See the squirrel? That's your brother. See the tree? We are related. This is your family; these are all your family." Because they were all brought up that way, they knew deeply that they were all interconnected, they were all family, they were all conscious. Lakota children had an opportunity to begin early in life to attend to the whole or the holiness, the spiritual side of things, and then to expand this ability powerfully as they grew.

- Brooke Medicine Eagle



So here's what I wanted to tell you today: get a life. A real life, not a manic pursuit of the next promotion, the bigger paycheque, the larger house. Do you think you'd care so very much about those things if you blew an aneurysm one afternoon, or found a lump in your breast? Get a life in which you notice the smell of salt water pushing itself on a breeze over Seaside Heights, a life in which you stop and watch how a red tailed hawk circles over the water gap or the way a baby scowls with concentration when she tries to pick up a Cheerio with her thumb and first finger. Get a life in which you are not alone. Find people you love, and who love you. And remember that love is not leisure, it is work... Remember that you are...still learning how to best treasure your connection to others. Pick up the phone. Send an e-mail. Write a letter.

Anna Quindlen, 1952

Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The human race is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
'Cause nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

- Maya Angelou

"The life I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place my touch will be felt."

- Frederick Buechner

If you're going to care about the fall of the sparrow then you can't pick and choose who's going to be the sparrow. It's everybody.

-Madeleine L'Engle

“So much depends upon” – Tom Chandler

the blonde woman who drops a potato
in the supermarket parking lot where it rolls
beneath the 89 Dodge Ram with rust patches
near the left rear fender from contact with
too much road salt during the winter of 91
which was actually one of the mildest on
record

though the driver tends to remember it
as the season he was fired from his job
at the aluminum window factory where
he had worked for nearly sixteen years
without promotion as he shifts into reverse
and backs over the potato which squishes
as softly as a dream's last breath and leaves
slick asphalt for the lot boy to slip on
as he pushes a train of shopping carts
and sprains his lumbar vertebrae just
days before he is scheduled to leave
for basic training to become the cool
killing machine he's always craved
but will now have to settle for someday
making assistant produce manager
and marrying a girl he almost loves just
as the blonde woman finds herself
one potato short with dinner guests
ringing the doorbell.

Oh how beautiful this finely woven earth.
We are bound in threads of joy, of grief, of
soul.

My tears fall from your eyes,
your joy rings in my laughter,
we are bound together.

Give me your sorrow.
I will stretch across to you
over green pine and sparkling lake.
You will feel how my heart beats with yours.

Oh how beautiful our finely woven earth.

- Gaia Willis-Owen

Upcoming Services

Every Sunday morning at 10:30 a.m. our
worship services will be held online, via both
Zoom and YouTube.

An evening Vespers service is also held
Wednesdays at 7:45pm and an online drop-in
on Thursday evenings at 7:45pm.

Visit the First Unitarian Toronto website
(www.firstunitariantoronto.org) for links to
join any of these online gatherings, and to find
out more about our ongoing Journey Group
programs of small groups that discuss our
monthly themes.

New Horizons Editing Team: Wendy Peebles, Jeanne Van Bronkhorst, Margaret Kohr, Rev. Shawn Newton, Rev. Lynn Harrison

First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto



Seek • Connect • Serve

175 St. Clair Avenue West
Toronto, Ontario M4V 1P7
416-924-9654

