And the Day Finally Came

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First Unitarian Congregation, Toronto
Sunday, October 18, 2026

Can I see a show of hands: is there anyone here today that has had some change in their personal lives in the past year or so? Correct me if I am wrong, but my understanding is that this congregation has been going through some very significant changes as well. This congregation, by the looks of things is no stranger to change. Rev. Dr. Susan Beaumont talks about change happening in three stages, the separation, the time when things are no longer the same, the liminal period, that time of oh dear, things aren't what they were, and they're not what they're going to be. It's that time when everything is muddled, and like the caterpillar into a butterfly, the time when everything is an unrecognizable mess. Beaumont tells us, and may others have confirmed, that it is in this liminal space where amazing and wonderful stuff happens. Innovation, creation, re-defining, imagination, passion and on and on.

And then the reorientation phase. That time when things start to feel better, we are where we need to be, just maybe have to unpack a few more boxes. But we can tell it's now going to be okay.

The Meaning Making theme for this month is: Change and Stability. When I was reading through the packet a while ago, on the last page is a quote by Nin: The day finally came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was greater than the risk it took to blossom. I first heard that quote in 1992. I was in a time of deep transition in my life. I had just ended my marriage to the father of my children and my youngest was under two years old. I had taken some great risks, was beginning to upgrade my education, and had just had my call to ministry. Which way was I going to turn?

Change is a funny thing: nobody loves it, but it's where the magic is. We're out of our comfort zone. Has anyone seen that graphic? There's a great big circle called our comfort zone, and then way off to the side is a tiny box that says: where the magic happens. Change is uncomfortable, but we all go through it, and we are, at least most of the time, better for it.

If a person were to dive into change theory, or theories, we would see that there are many, many models. And…they are all worth studying. And…they are pretty boring.

However, what I would like to focus on today is what happens to us as we go through change. More importantly, how do we mange or maintain our stability, while we go through those changes.

The first thing that happens to us is that we experience loss. Loss happens because we are giving up something, a routine, a job, a building, a minister, a house, or a lifestyle that has served us well up until the decision was made to let it go. We now have to grieve that loss. Sometimes we end up missing and grieving the weirdest things. I remember leaving my home of 30 years in Kamloops and sure, I missed my friends, my past relationship, my house, but what I ended up missing more than anything, and this surprised me, was a bearded dragon

named Scooter. He was named that for obvious reasons. This was a surprise! I had carefully re-homed him because I couldn't take him where I was going, and then thought nothing of it. Believe me, I never thought I was the kind of person that could love a lizard that much, but apparently, I am. It is in these times of liminality, the messy middle stage of change where we find out things about ourselves that we didn't even know. The metaphor of the butterfly having to be unrecognizable goo before its beauty can emerge is not lost on us here.

It was in this liminal phase that, as the story goes, those same people who were slaves in Egypt and crying out to be delivered, were the same people who, during the messy middle stage, were crying out to return to Egypt for at least there they were fed. This is the stage in the change process where we become disheartened, this is the stage where we quit, this is the time when we can suffer from stress and depression. Nothing feels right, it's hard to know where to put our feet, and we feel lost. Even though this liminal time can be a time of innovation and creativity, we have to deal with this disturbing time of disorientation. So, how do we do that?

I can think of a few things, anyone else? [ask for answers and repeat them into the mic]

Have someone along to talk to

See out counselling, meditate, have a plan, get fresh air and exercise, eat well, hydrate, basically during change we need to take good care of our bodies.

And just like Susan Beaumont says, this is also the time when we are at our most creative, we find new opportunities in this stage. What are some of the magical things that have happened to you when you are in the middle of change? [ask for answers, repeat them back into the mic]

Here's some of my things, I moved many times and met so many wonderful people, I got an education, I met my partner, I discovered I could write half decent poetry. What discoveries have you made about yourself during a time of transition? What discoveries have you made about your congregation here during this time of transition? In what ways has your congregation grown? In what ways has your congregation become stronger? Richer? More caring? Where have you struggled? Was there a time when you were disheartened? How did you get through that? There's a saying, I've gotten through 100% of all tough days so far! We get stronger, more resilient, more caring, more thoughtful, more loving when we go through difficult changes. I'm excited to see how this congregation moves forward in your new home with new energy and skills, passion and energy.

I think I would be remiss if I didn't speak a little bit about my new role with the CUC. We're talking today about change and liminal times, and I would say that the CUC is also going through some deep, creative, and innovative, times. As often happens when a leader of many years retires, it begins a bit of a domino effect. People hanging on in loyalty decide the time is right, and for many other reasons, staff turnover can be high during these liminal times. The CUC is re-imagining itself right now. I am finding working for the CUC at this time exciting and rewarding because the status quo is no longer part of the picture. We are asking congregations and individuals across the country what it is you would like to see from your CUC and the answers have been surprising, and consistent across the board. I live in Edmonton, but am in

Toronto this week for the annual board and staff retreat. This week we will be looking at the data we have gathered from the survey and ensuing congregational conversations to determine next steps for our organization. We want to be responsive to your needs, and let me tell you, you, as a whole have spoken. My hope and prayer, and my work as your Life Lead, is that we on staff, working with the board will be working to help and support congregations and we will do our best to provide what we are hearing you as a whole are needing.

We are in liminal time, we have suffered losses, we grieve those relationships, and we are excited about what the future holds for our denomination.

May the blessings carry us forward into the future with renewed vision, love, and purpose.

May it be so

Let us take a few deep breaths in silent reflection