

We are all immigrants. I look at this in a both analogous and literal sense. As a progressive religion we use new knowledge as it becomes available and we use it to better understand our existence, and what it means to be human. We not only use new knowledge but we search for new knowledge and understanding. This is part of the core of our mission statement here, embracing searches for meaning. It is also one of the principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association. The free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We search not only in the far off places of the world, but also in the far off places within ourselves to find truth and meaning.

But from a literal sense, unless there is someone here who is 100% Native American, we are all immigrants or descendants of immigrants. I would like you to reflect on that when we think about the question of immigration and labor. A few weeks back I told you of my story of my Great Grandfathers' journey to this country. For many immigrants coming to this country it was often a push pull. Most were voluntary immigrants, being pushed out, escaping an existence of persecution, persecution from oppression, often due to religion and class. They were escaping the persecutions of poverty and hunger and war, and they were pulled here with hopes and dreams of a better life, hopes and dreams to own land, the hopes and dreams for a better future for their descendants. These immigrants worked hard, did have opportunities, and often did create better futures for their descendants, of whom many of us today are the beneficiaries. We tend to hold up the success stories, which is good, but we should not forget that there were also many immigrants who came to this country and were abused by employers, or conscripted into our army and never had that opportunity. Let us also not forget that there were also many involuntary immigrants, African Americans, brought to America to work in slavery for the benefit of other more powerful immigrants. And let us not forget that discrimination in hiring which still continues today, did not provide the same opportunities for people of color throughout most of our country's history.

When I mention to people that we are all immigrants, when I am speaking of allowing more immigrants into the country, people often say, that, well we came legally. So I wonder what the Native Americans feel about that. They didn't have any written laws preventing Europeans from coming here. There are of course many stories of the indigenous peoples of this country trading with and welcoming Europeans. There was plenty of land to share. But as more and more Europeans came, well we know the well documented history of deception and deportation and violence toward of Native Americans. In reading the autobiography of BlackHawk, the war leader of the Sauk tribe in this area, in the early 19th century, he is portrayed as often bewildered by the clash of cultures, merely trying to preserve his people's way of life.

I often like to wonder what our world would be like today if we as a country worked cooperatively with Native Americans instead of destroying their way of life. And so I wonder if some of our own fear about immigrants in this country is our projecting of our own history onto the future of people we don't know, cultures we do not know. Fearful, trying to protect our way of life. We assume maybe because we did not act cooperatively that others who come to our shores will not act cooperatively with us. Ralph Waldo Emerson said and I think quite poignantly, "People do not seem to realize that their opinion of the world is also a confession of their character." So over time we created laws to keep people out. But not all people.

The first law to exclude immigrants was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1870, then in the early 20th Century an informal treaty to exclude Japanese. It wasn't until after World War I that we started putting a quota limiting the number of people who could come into this country. It was not until the 1960s that we eliminated the country of origin as a determining factor as to who could enter the country. Clearly prior to the 1960s we admitted many more Europeans, than non Europeans. And if the same immigration patterns continue as they are today our country will soon (as it already is in parts of this country including where I lived in Florida) will be over 50% non white. And I think that fact as well whether consciously or subconsciously is creating a backlash against immigration in our country.

But I tell you just as diversity of theology is a strength of our religion so too can diversity in our population be a strength for our country. Evolution advances when we collaborate. Going back to when we were single cell amoebas who collaborated to become multi cell amoebas. We should not fear it, we should embrace it. There is a better way, not a way of destruction, but of bridge building. There is a better way, not of exclusion, but of inclusion. There is a better way, not of indifference but of compassionate action

Sept 11th changed a lot. It made us more cautious. I am not saying we should just let anyone into this country. I look at our first principle – we believe in the inherent worth and dignity of all people. But inherent

worth is not lived worth. It is just that inherent. That within each human being is the potential for worth and dignity. We should look for that and hold that up in each person we meet. But you can never be completely safe, you can never control all circumstances. But we should move forward with an open hand and not a clenched fist

I have always liked the analogy of controlling water. If you put it into your hand in a clenched fist, it will come out your fingers. It finds the path of least resistance and finds a way. But if you pour water into your open palm, it will stay there calmly and never move. So I believe it can be with people. If you try to control them, they will with an iron fist, they will resist you, so we need to develop a culture that will welcome people with an open hand and open heart, and developing appreciation for the differences amongst us with the understanding that it may change us as well, and by doing so hopefully all can develop that lived worth and dignity to the fullest that is inherent within each of us.

Just as we as a religion and as a congregation have certain shared values, so do we as a country have evolving shared values. One of the values that has derived from our Puritan heritage and circumstances is our work ethic. I was thinking of this recently when I read about foreign students here on a J-1 visa working at the Hershey Chocolate company in Pa. who went on strike because they felt they were being overworked and underpaid. The J-1 visas is an "Exchange Visitor Program which fosters global understanding through educational and cultural exchanges". I thought they really did get the full spectrum experience of what our culture is. Both our business culture of being overworked and our willingness to stand up against injustice.

But we do have a history of belief that hard work leads to success and often it does. Not everybody who works hard is successful, but success rarely happens without hard work and sacrifice. So remember that when someone asks you to volunteer for the congregation.....I think of my grandmother and her five sisters all living in the same apartment building in the Bronx and during the depression some in the same apartment. All of them working, sometimes 2 or 3 jobs, saving money so that my father the lone child amongst those five sisters, could go to college. I have heard stories from many of you of your parents or grandparents who worked endlessly on the farm that gave you the opportunity to go to school.

And I tell you it is no different today for immigrants. They just want a better life for themselves and their descendants. Some will be successful, some will not. The large majority of immigrants come here to work, to work hard, at low paying jobs, jobs that often no one else will take. Now I can tell you I know this to be true as I have some first hand knowledge of this. Prior to becoming a minister for 17 years I worked in what was called euphemistically the Human Capital Management Industry. I liked that title because often we think of capital only as money invested. I think it is important that business' should value their workers as an investment in order to achieve success. Valuing workers and helping them maximize their potential and improve their abilities helps the individual, the business and society. Up until a few years ago, I can tell you without a doubt, there were so many job openings, that we could not find even find undocumented workers who would accept a minimum wage jobs. That is why there was such an influx of immigrants into our country. We invite them, whether formally or informally to work at low paying jobs. Minimum Wage working 40 hours a week still leaves people under the poverty line. We should be thinking about enacting a living wage. When Elaine Kresse and I visited the Sheriff of Scott County regarding the upcoming Immigration class he told us that border crossings in Mexico are at an all time low over the past 10 years. This is due to the lack of jobs due to our recession. The truth is the challenge we face about immigration is about jobs and wages.

The global economics of the world today are forcing us to face some very crucial decisions about how we live our lives. Decisions about consumption, economic justice, and the distribution of scarcer and scarcer resources. Perhaps now is the time we need to consider consuming less, now is the time to really act vigorously to deal with climate change, maybe now is the time to consider our impact on the planet earth so that not just we in our time, not just for our descendants, but the descendants of all people will have the hope and dream not only of existence, but of reaching their potential. And by potential, I do not mean their material potential, but spiritual potential, to reach the fulfillment of who we are as human beings.

I think our fulfillment of our humanity will be hinged on how we are in relation with others on this planet. To be in right relations with others means there has to be equal opportunity and justice for all and working cooperatively with others. Our religious principles call us affirm justice equity and compassion in human relations. Unitarian Universalism calls us to not sit idly by but to act to transform ourselves and our world. What does that mean to have justice for all? Is the starving child in East Africa any more or less important than the starving child here in Davenport. Without question the answer to that question is no. That is why we all rise to the occasion when

we see tragedies occur such as the drought that has plagued African Nations. And this is nothing new. I remember it must have been thirty years ago, comedian Sam Kinison the comedian who always screamed his jokes... in commenting about the hunger problem in Africa in the 1980s, suggested to solve the problem, that we stop sending them food and instead send them UHauls so that they could move to where the food was, you live in a desert, no food grows there. He said it in such a way that it always got a big laugh...but I actually think it was very poignant. First it brings up the issue as to the decreasing arable land in the world due to increasing industrialization, climate change, deforestation, among many other reasons. The second point is that as well know is that it is not so easy to just move to where the food is. The doors are closed. We have heard stories from our refugee friends of being in a refugee camp for 10 years before they are allowed to move. So as you can see immigration, economics, environment, life, death, are all interdependent on each other.

But there is hope, as I think of what Israel has done building desalination plants to increase the irrigation and the arable land in what was previously desert. What a gift that could be that the world could give to others. To provide them with a way to feed themselves, instead of bombing them. And yes I am descended from nomadic people, who thought nothing of wandering 40 years in the desert looking for their home. If you look at the map of the trail they took, there was a much more direct way to get to where they were going. And I was lucky that my family made it here before this country closed its doors and millions upon millions were killed in Europe during the first two world wars of the 20th century.

And within this country we think nothing of picking up our stakes, and moving to where there might be a better opportunity. But most people in poverty don't have the ability to just pick up and move and most countries have closed their door. So I would propose that we allow more people to move here so they will have the opportunities our ancestors had, to use their energy, their hunger for opportunity to transform and improve the world. We heard last week the story of Joseph from the Jewish Scriptures who upon emigrating to Egypt helped save Egypt. Think about this country, how many of our inventions, scientific discoveries, medical advances, have been created by immigrants and descendants of immigrants.

Let us continue our policy of opening up our doors and walls, not only of our country's borders, but of our own hearts, to take in people who can and will change and enrich us. Let us go work and make our life a model of how to live in right relation with others and the environment. Let us go out and do the work that we can do, here in our local community to bring justice to this community so this community can be a model to others. It takes work. But if we are doing what we believe in our hearts to be true, such work is effortless, so that is what I ask you to do, to step back and think about on labor day. Not just our work to earn a living, but our work to build a life, a life where everyone can live into our hopes and dreams, our work to love our neighbor, whether 1 block, 1 country, 1 continent away. Our work to open our doors and hearts to those different from us.

As I started the sermon We are all immigrants, immigrants not only with our bodies, but may we be immigrants with our hearts, searching to find meaning in and of the universe. May we emigrate to that not so distant shore where we may find peace of mind, may we emigrate to that place where we find the truth that heals you, may we emigrate to that place in our heart where we can realize love for all people. May it be so.