

Often on facebook, when I wish someone a happy birthday, I will say enjoy this day and every day. And when my wife wants to celebrate our wedding anniversary, I like to tell her every day is our anniversary she doesn't buy that, so we do go out to a nice dinner anyway. But my point is we should make every day that we live a special day, every day a chance for a new beginning. This past year I had many new beginnings. To the outside world, this last year of my life seemed like a whirlwind. I was in a country wide search for a settled ministry, I was a full time intern minister, I was a part time business consultant, I moved to Iowa to start as your settled minister.

Yet to me, it didn't seem like a whirlwind, I just took it day by day, and each day was just part of the ongoing journey of my life. Each day presents me new opportunities to start anew. My journey to here has been a long one. It started early, when I was in grade school, I was certainly a day dreamer, always being reminded by teachers to get my head out of the clouds. My whole life I have been a seeker, a searcher, a dreamer always trying to better understand myself, and the world around me, always trying to improve myself. Always wondering is this all there is, always wondering the purpose of all things. I would take up hobby after hobby wondering if the next one would unlock the secret of my life.

And I was blessed through a random recommendation approximately twenty five years ago I found Unitarian Universalism which encouraged seeking and searching and growth. The idea of searching is our fourth principle, the free and responsible search for truth and meaning. Now the responsible part of searching requires us to not just have one's heads in the clouds, but also to have one's feet on the ground. It requires discipline and energy to have a responsible search not just day dreaming.

Now people are often are shocked and ask me how I decided to become a minister after being an accountant for so long. Like most stories, it is complex. There was not much intention involved when I chose my first career. It was quite simple really I set a goal that I wanted to be able to support myself, have a roof over my head and food in my stomach. I had no idea how that would happen when I started that journey. But I do believe it is important to set a goal, so we know what direction to head. I started by getting a job in a mailroom of a large corporation, and going to school nights, to see what I could learn. I took two classes my first semester in night school, English and Accounting and I received an A in my accounting class and a B+ in the English Class. I assumed due to this good grade, I must be good at accounting and thus decided to make it my career. I often wonder what would have happened if I received an A in my English class instead.

I obtained my college degree going to school nights while I worked in that mailroom during the day. I always love a good metaphor and that mailroom to the boardroom metaphor always inspired me. I didn't know how I would do it, But I was determined to figure out a way. Now again I point to the significance of not knowing how we are going to do something before we start down a path. That is a truth that has been proven time and again. And going forward with uncertain outcomes requires faith, faith that we will find a way, faith that we will find an answer, faith that circumstances will allow the necessary conditions to come forward so as to allow the positive outcome we need

But the mailroom to boardroom metaphor had a deeper meaning as well. I learned a lot by observing and by doing the basic tasks, growing in knowledge and wisdom over time. This process in many ways helped set the foundation of my personal and organizational philosophy. Going to school nights and working my way up from the ground floor taught me resiliency, and it taught me to take the longer view. We often don't realize what we are capable of while we are in the middle of a journey, but only after looking back, after time can we realize just what we accomplished, and how we were changed. But by doing so, by looking back we realize that change is possible and that is why we look back over the past year at New Year's Time

We do this so that on the next part of the journey, we remember we have the capacity to sustain ourselves, we know it may not be quick, it may not be easy, but if we keep our eye on the end goal, we know that eventually we can find our way. Working in the mailroom also gave me a unique perspective that helped me throughout my life. It showed me that success in an organization comes from a process oriented collaborative approach with all members of the organization working together in harmony, with shared values, towards the same goals.

So I became an accountant. As it turned out, I *was* good at accounting and business and for almost 30 years that is how I earned my living. I always remembered a book *Mother Night*, written by Kurt Vonnegut and he wrote **"We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be."** Most of the early part of my life I would say that I lived unconsciously without much forethought. I had long ago reached my goal of being self supportive, and I knew there was more, I knew somewhere in the deep of my soul, that there was more meaning in life. In a scene from the movie *city slickers*, the old wizened cowboy tells the neurotic city slicker Billy Crystal that the meaning of life is this (stick up one finger), Billy Crystal says, "your finger is the meaning of life?" No, the cowboy says "one thing, you stick to that and the rest don't mean anything...and when Billy Crystal asks what is that one thing. The cowboy says, that's what you have to figure out.

And it was my experiences as a Unitarian Universalist over the past 25 years has helped me figure it out. What I found within myself was a willingness to open myself up, and to look at myself and the world in a new way. I became more aware. More aware of how meaningful worship was, more aware of how important the relationships, congregational life and religion were in my life, and more aware of how I want to be and act in my engagement with the world. I learned to de-compartmentalize my life and to live out my values in the world. It wasn't always perfect, it wasn't always a linear journey, but it awakened within me my ability to find my true self and that one thing.

The idea of entering ministry as a profession came to me over lunch, when a friend (who I met at the congregation in a connection circle) asked me a simple question. If money wasn't an issue, what would you want to do for a living. And so I said it...I would be a minister. Then when the idea of entering ministry finally entered my brain, it was as if I had found that one thing I had been searching for all my life. I knew then and there, I felt for the first time in my life what I was meant to do in the world. Now I had no idea of how I could make it a reality, but I knew I could not turn away from that one thing that gave me meaning.

So I ask you to think about, what is it in your life that gives you meaning, what is the one thing above all else that drives you, that gives you energy, that invades your every waking thoughts. Now each of us are in different circumstances, and different stages in our lives, with different capabilities and of most importance is to know oneself. Pursuing that one thing sometimes does take a leap of faith, and courage as it may require you to sometimes to go against societal and cultural norms. It sometimes goes against that voice in our head that says, I am too young, or I am too old, or I could never do that. But don't limit yourself. Don't let age or stage of life hold you back. You will know what that one thing is when you find it.

And when you do find that one thing, Accept it, and accept the fact it may change you. Just this week I read about a man who at the age of 91 learned to read and at the age of 98 he published a book that is in its second printing and has sold copies worldwide. He began by reading books designed for first-graders and spent countless hours practicing how to write, and then he was helped by a group of Literary volunteers. So don't every doubt what you can still do and learn, and don't ever doubt what you can do to help others. Without those volunteers, he would never have achieved that 1 thing that he needed. And this man was inspired to learn to read after learning about the story of another man, who wanted to earn his high school diploma at the age of 98.

Our lives through our actions and choices can be models for others. Its never to early or too late to start again. As Mary Ann Evans (more widely known as George Eliot) wrote "It seems to me we can never give up longing and wishing while we are thoroughly alive. There are certain things we feel to be beautiful and good, and we must hunger after them." So let us be resolved to stay hungry. To stay engaged. To work towards becoming our better selves, to find what that one thing is for us both individually and as a congregation. This is where resolutions can come in handy.

Now whenever I think of resolutions I am reminded of the Calvin and Hobbes cartoon, when Calvin says "Resolutions me, what are you implying, that I need to change, well buddy, as far as I am concerned, I am perfect just the way I am!!" But we know we are not perfect. In fact, perfection should never be the goal. As Voltaire said, "The perfect is the enemy of the Good". Our goal should be excellence, our greatest potential, not perfection. So when we are not perfect, let us be compassionate with each other. And let us remember that everyone around us may have dreams, joys, sorrows, capabilities that we know nothing about or may be different from ours. So let us not judge one another, but let me recommend that we make a resolve for the upcoming year to get to better know others we don't know well.

When I think of the word resolution, it is very confusing, I think of something that is completed. But on New Years Day we use it more to set our resolve for the upcoming year. This is not a bad thing. Maybe we should call it our New Years Strategic Plan...but that just doesn't have that same ring to it. Now it can happen any day of the year, but often personally it happens on New Years well because many of us have eaten and drank too much over the past month. My nieces who are ardent gym goers, over Christmas were complaining that for the next few months the gyms will be extremely crowded with people who set New Years Resolutions, and it normally takes until March or April until their resolve wears away. So first of course, I say, even if it helps that one person who does makes it, who really changes, it is worth having to wait in line for the workout machines. But why is it that so many people fall short in their resolve. Because it is not just enough just to have a goal. We have to have a reason why we want to do something, a reason that is compelling, a reason that is so compelling that it makes this resolution a must, a reason that is so compelling that this resolution adds meaning to our life. A reason that is so compelling that it makes the resolution a part of what that one thing is. Find that reason, hold on to that reason, and remind yourself about that reason every day. For some it may be to have a certain quality of life for oneself, for others it may be to have an impact on a family member for years to

come, for others it may be to give others an opportunity that they never had, or perhaps did have. Whatever the reason, it must be strong enough to keep you on the path, when the going gets rough.

So let us stay resolved, resolved to stay in right relationship, resolved to build our religious lives, resolved to live a just and compassionate life. But we must ask ourselves the question why? What is the reason that this is so important to you. Each of us have to answer that question for ourselves. Why is religion important to us. Why is Unitarian Universalism important to us. Why is this Congregation important to us. As I have told you, this religion has been transformational for me, it changed my view of how I viewed my life and the world. It shows me a vision of how beloved community can be, how relationships can be, how life can be better for all people, and how it is easier to accomplish that within religious community rather than alone.

And despite challenges, disagreements, false starts, this religion always holds up learning, justice, and love as its most sacred values, values which I try to integrate into my life every day. Starting next week, we will for at least a couple of months, as part of opening words in the service, hear from members, why this congregation is so important to them, what powerful moments they have experienced here. Because another value of this religion is that we can learn from each other, and each others experiences.

So through this whirlwind or journey that is my life I have learned many things. I have learned the need to adapt to and change as each bit of new understanding unfolds. I have learned that my desire to learn never ends. I have learned that nothing worthwhile comes easily, I have learned that patience is a critical virtue, I have learned that there is much pain, and that pain is usually born out of passion. I have learned I cannot fix everything. But I will never stop trying and I will always keep an open door, an open mind, an open ear and an open heart for anyone and everyone. But as always I have learned that my faith is always reinforced by the building of relationships over time. And the primary lesson I have learned in my first five months is that this congregation is filled with good and generous people.

It is filled with people who are not only generous with their time, their talents, and their treasures but also with their spirit and passion in their concern for this congregation and larger community. I am thrilled to be sharing this journey with all of you and I look forward to building deeper relationships over the years. So let us set our goals for the year, let us point ourselves to that north star, to our best truest selves, and let us work towards building beloved community. And if it doesn't work today, then we can try again tomorrow. Because every day is a new day, with new possibilities. Every day can be the start of a new beginning. Thank you, from the deepest part of my soul for giving me the opportunity to serve you. Amen.