

*That truth has been inscribed into my heart,
And into the heart of every human being
There to be read and revered;*

*That there are ways of seeing,
And sensitivities of knowing
Hidden deep in the palace of the Soul,
Waiting to be discovered, ready to be set free;*

*Open my senses to wisdom's inner promptings.
That I may give voice to what I hear in my soul,
And be changed for the healing of the world.
That I may listen for truth in every living soul,
And be changed for the well being of the world.*

- J. Philip Newell

COMING OUT, COMING IN . . .

To begin, I want to thank you for the privilege of being here with you this morning. I am loving my affiliation with Shoreline Church and so grateful to be with this loving and vibrant community. You are so lovely.

If the room feels a bit empty today,
it may be that the weather is so nice that people just cannot be kept inside.
But, I know that some of our members are absent this morning for a particular reason.
I am happy to announce that some of Shoreline's members are marching with other
Puget Sound Unitarian Universalists in the Pride Parade downtown Seattle,
which began at 11 am.

They are making sure that folks know our congregations
and the Unitarian Universalist Association
are places where lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender folks are not only welcome
but celebrated.

And, since I am not marching in the parade because I had agreed to preach this morning,
I just could not let this day go by without talking about
how UUs offer people a religious home that is *real community* –
a home for the beauty and diversity of all people.

And then, I also realized that since this is the first time I have actually preached in this
pulpit, this topic is also a good way for you to get to know about one central thread in my
life story.

So if you came wanting to hear about communal JOY as advertised in the bulletin!
Please know that I will present that next month on July 20th when I preach again!!

When I was nineteen years old,
I had some sense that I was called to the ministry.
The church was central to my life.
In fact, all of the main aspects of my life were due to my involvement with the church.
I was working as an Associate Music Director
and moving toward a vocation in Music Ministry.
I was active in the youth group and was wildly spiritual.
I actually felt as if I had a personal relationship with God –
God, as I knew “Him” then.
And best of all, the church was where my community of college friends hung out.
In fact, it was during a Youth Services Retreat were where I met my first love.
It seemed that the heart of my life was in the church.

There was just one problem. I was raised Catholic,
where women are not allowed to be priests.
And, then there was another problem . . .
My first love was another woman.
And, lesbians were not only disallowed from the ministry,
They were not welcome in the community of believers unless they tried to cure their
sexual orientation.
Being Gay was a sin . . . some horrible disconnection from God.

May be you remember your first kiss?!?!
I don't remember thinking ahead of time that I would kiss her. It was a warm sunny day
and Cindy and I were taking time to relax on the lawn under a big shade tree after a full
day of classes.
We were talking, and laughing, and just simply in the enjoyment of each other's company
. . .when all of a sudden we were kissing.
It just happened.
This kiss was wonderful!!!
I felt that complete rush of ecstasy for the first time in my life.
And, I wondered then if this feeling was what others must mean when they talked about
'falling in love'.

Unfortunately, what also happened was the simultaneous eruption of a stinging voice
inside of me that shattered this sacred moment with its silent screaming,
"What are you doing???? You're kissing a girl!!!"

It was in that instant that my feelings of love were teamed up with shame.

I didn't even really know what was wrong or why it was wrong.
I just knew that others thought it was wrong and that they thought *I* was wrong.

Sparing you the painful details,
I will tell you that as a young woman I was unable to sustain this love
after a four-year period of struggle
due to the rejection of my family and my church.
So, I finished with university and I ended my relationship,
embarking on the half-conscious trip of trying to live a "normal life".
I got married to a man, left ministry and went into teaching.

Without fully realizing it,
I began living a life that **I** could live with
because my **family and my church** could live with it.
Soon, I decided that church was just not for me any more either –
and by the way,
God, as I knew “Him” then, got left behind, too.

I became like the little girl in Frog’s story this morning,
who stopped eating ‘lima beans’ even though she liked them very much,
because she was worried about what others thought of her.
Like a chameleon, she kept changing to into what others said she was.
And just like the little girl in the story, doing so made me sick.

It is only in looking back that I was able to recognize the magnitude of this wound
And its long-term consequences for my life.
As a result of this single condemnation,
I had simultaneously lost all the important pillars in one’s life –
my vocation, my community, my family, my intimate partnership, and my relationship
with Spiritual Source.
All lost, all at once.
Ultimately, this was too much for my soul to bear.

Now, before I go on, I want you to hear that I don’t think being closeted
is only worrying about what others think.
I don’t want to minimize the reality of homophobia in our culture.
There are often grave psychological, financial, and physical consequences to coming out
. . . even in today’s increasingly “tolerant” culture.
As the poet says, “we have only just begun. . . “
The current fight for gay marriage is progress, but we still have so far to go.
Lives are still lost to hate crimes and suicide everyday.
This is why we still march on Pride Day.
This is why it is still important for UUs to spread the word about our generous faith that
proclaims loud and clear the historic Universalist gospel of God’s love for *all* people.
We have only just begun to imagine the fullness of this message.

But, this is not completely the focus of this sermon today.

What I want to tell you is this. . .

The grave losses that I experienced in coming out,
became openings to a greater learning . . .

*I learned that the Soul can go underground for a time,
But it cannot stay there.*

When I couldn't swallow someone else's idea of what was right for me,
I became depressed, and I went into a spiritual crisis.
I felt that deep loss of hope in the heart . . . and I lost trust that there might be a place in
this world where wholeness and happiness was available to me - and to others like me.
But, just like Camille's illness pointed her back toward what she really needed,
in the same way, some magical things also began to happen for me.

Seven years into my straight marriage, my sexual orientation issues began to re-surface.
And, my inner life became acutely rich.
I encountered a painful aliveness like I had never experienced before.
Most surprising . . . I began to spontaneously compose music.
I had almost forgotten how much I loved to write music.
This was another gift that had gone quietly underground sometime during the first year of
my marriage.
But, it was then that I made the connection:
"If my creative vitality re-surfaced as I was experiencing this re-connection to my
sexuality, what else was hooked-up in this way?"
*I realized then that my sexuality, my creativity and my spiritual nature
were all Sourced from the same sacred place.*

In her contemporary spirituality, Marianne Williamson describes the spiritual journey as
not adding a belief system or any additional dogma to our lives -
But, ideally the spiritual journey is the process of peeling away the layers of the
conditioned self to get to our core essence.

I realized then that an identity as a lesbian person required that I learn to honor my truth
even when most everything in my immediate world fell short of mirroring this truth.
My 'coming out' had created a '**coming in**'.
And **coming in** became the gift of my queer life.

Breaking out of the box of society's cherished rules
and choosing my own cherished dreams
was the beginning of spiritual recovery for me.
When I learned to give voice to what I heard in my Soul,
I began to heal.
I began to realize that Divine will and my will were not at odds . . .
but that my desires in life come from the Source of All Life,
which has given those desires to me in the first place.

My love for music . . . was a Divine Desire –
not some frivolous, moneyless profession that my father had characterized it to be,
but an expression of my soul that offers beauty and comfort to others.
My love for women . . . a Divine Desire –
not some devilish hotbed of sinful sodomy sure to send me to hell
as my Mother had prophesied,
but a source of love stronger than any I have known.
My quest for a spiritual life . . . a Divine Desire –
began to have a synchronicity to it, a coming together, a coming alive.

But this healing was not an end in itself.

When I recognized the truth that had been inscribed in my own heart,
I began to increase my capacity to listen for the truth in *every* living heart.
This was the beginning of the road back toward ministry for me.
This journey led my commitment to living with integrity,
to being whole,
and to helping others to do the same.
This journey led to expressing my passion for life,
To re-engaging my hope for a future where no one is excluded by prejudice,
but where all sit together . . . welcome at life's table.
And, this is what connected me to the old *Unitarian* gospel,
The saving message where the rational truth exceeds a blind faith.
You and I can now be the ones to step into the shoes of our forefathers and foremothers
Who refused to recite rote prayers that had been passed down through the centuries,
Who refused to institute religious practice that no longer made any theological or moral
sense.
We can be the ones who match the courage and the commitment of our ancestors who
often gave their lives in this refusal.

And, it is Unitarian Universalism that gave me a pathway back to my calling.
When I discovered Unitarian Universalism,
I found a church home that was dedicated to vigorous justice in the world,
and I soon realized that I could bring all of myself to this religious community,
not just part of myself.
I realized how much I had longed for religious community,
and that this was no longer something that I had to live without.
My commitment to UU ministry is grounded in this hope -
that others may find such a church home.

Over time the relationships with my original family have shifted,
They are not perfect, but they are loving and respectful.
Eventually, I produced a CD of solo piano pieces that were written as expressions of this
particular leg of my spiritual journey,
The resulting music has nourished my soul and gratefully has nourished many others
along the way.

Also, after much study and devotion,
I have again found the deep connection with spiritual source that I once had . . .
although I envision the River that flows underneath and sustains all of life
so differently now.

Lastly, I want you to hear that I share part of my story with you,
NOT out of a need for self-indulgence,
But, to wonder with you how many of us might recognize a piece of *ourselves* in this
story?

We may not be passionate about lima beans, and we may not be gay or lesbian,
But odds are that each of us have something that we could ‘come out’ about.
Odds are that we all have ways that our lives have been truncated by society’s dictates.
Maybe we all carry some shame in our hearts,
And, maybe we all have given a part of our lives away
for fear that others would not love us anymore.
We may each have truths in our lives that need to be embraced with the love of
acceptance.

Now a good question may be:

“How does our gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans experience inform the church??”

What exactly is our form of loving in the world all about?

It may be that by our very presence,

LGBT people are modeling an unprecedented ability to respond to our inner lives . . .
for many of us risk the loss of everything when we choose to own the truth in our hearts.

It may be, that our presence in this world might just insist that the choice to search for
truth and meaning become a truly free and responsible one for ALL people.

And our presence may be, to send a message of courage to each person –
that YOUR own reasons to live are to be found in YOUR OWN coming in.

I invite you to enter a moment of silence and reflection with me:

Let us not tire of hope.

The Soul can go underground for a time,

But it cannot stay there.

Perhaps as we learn to search for the Sacred in our own depths,
We gain the desire to discover these same truths in *every* living Soul.
And, we become changed for the well being of the world.

Amen. Ameen. Shalom. Salaam. May it be so.

BENEDICTION

You [surround] me, Oh, God.

You are within.

*You are in **all** things,*

Yet contained by no thing.

Teach me to seek You in all that has life,

That I may see You as the light of life.

Teach me to search for You in my own depths,

That I may find you in every living Soul.

- J. Philip Newell

Children's Story: *The Case of Stripes*

Opening Reading: *Beginners – Denise Levertov*