

SERMON – “FIRE OF COMMITMENT” – REV. LAURA SHENNUM

At the heart of any individual's story lives the tale of their commitments. As children, we are committed to our families or adults who provide for us and keep us safe. As teenagers, we are committed to friends and finding a way to freedom and independence. Each time in our lives we are asked to make a choice, to decide where our life will go, we are exposing our commitments.

We “give our word” in a way and it carries with it our integrity, faithfulness, truth, and authenticity. It calls us to examine our relationships with ourselves and with others by asking us to determine what we value most and what are we willing to risk to make it part of our lives.

Commitments give us the ability to live our lives with intentionality and meaning.

According to Rev. Victoria Safford, “a commitment does not predict the future or set it in stone. It makes a certain kind of future possible.”

This is what we are embarking on right now in our congregation. We are taking the beginning steps into a future that is unknown, but we have an idea of what kind of future is possible by taking those steps.

Commitment is a strong theme in Unitarian Universalism. Our principles and congregations are formed solely based on commitments. We do not have a creed that we all adhere to and expect each other to agree on. Instead, we have covenants or promises.

We do not make our primary question, “what do you believe?”

We ask as our primary question, “No matter what we believe, how can we be in community together?”

Or as Safford suggests, "to what larger love, to what people, principles, values, and dreams shall we be committed? To whom, to what, are we accountable?"

We cannot exist as a Unitarian Universalist congregation without commitment as our foundation.

According to Earl K. Holt III:

"What is unique and precious to Unitarian Universalism is that we affirm no external authority in our religious lives, not of church or creed or Bible, but hold as authoritative only the internal voice of conscience that speaks in each and every human soul. And as we grown in knowledge and experience, we come to new and different religious understandings. Our religious lives are works in progress. This is obviously true individually, but it is also true of our religious tradition as a whole. So we are organized both as a church and as an association, as a democracy, because a democracy too is a work in progress.

It changes according to the changes desired and expressed by its constituency."

Since our church is a work in progress and is affected by each person's expressed desires, this means we each have a responsibility to intentionally examining what our commitments are to this community. What is it about this congregation, the people you are surrounded by, the values, the principles, the hopes and dreams, what is it that pulls you to be here and how do these things call you into commitment with this community?

The first question to ask yourself is am I involved or am I committed? I would suggest the following quote to help answer that question: "the difference between involvement and commitment is like an egg and ham breakfast, the chicken was involved, the pig was committed."

Okay, maybe we don't need to go that far. However, being involved, you can keep yourself at a distance and on the periphery of the community. By being involved, you have committed your life to way of being, committed to journeying together with others on a path which gets you closer to a place where your hunger and your passion will meet, and in essence create a deeper sense of meaning and fulfillment in your life.

What does it mean to make a commitment to Cascade UU Fellowship and the people who are in the congregation? We are willing to show up for each other whether it be in worship, small groups, dinners, providing support, visiting at the hospital, or raking leaves. We all take a part in creating this community, not because we have a sense of guilt if we don't, but because that when each of us takes a part, then each of our parts become easier to manage and maintain. We also do it because of the relationship we have cultivated with each other.

Or as Richard Gilbert states, "We need to invest in one another's humanity. The church calls us to make deep connections...we can risk sticking our necks out with each other. And in the process begin to become who we authentically are."

It also means we make a commitment to actively seeking our own and our communities faith development and spiritual growth. We seek out new knowledge and understanding. We invite questions and differences of opinion. We continue to be curious of each others stories and ideas of truth in our world. By being in relationship with each other, we are pushed to grow beyond ourselves, we are pushed to grow our community.

Commitment to this congregation also comes in the form of financial support. We are able to be a community which defines itself and how we will be together only because we support ourselves financially.

Historically, churches have been supported by governments and it was those governments which dictated what creed was to be believed. By financially supporting Cascade UU Fellowship, you are intentionally choosing to make a commitment to this community and the values it expresses. This fellowship does not exist without those financial commitments. There are dreams and visions starting to take shape for this community.

And as Peter Drucker states, "Unless commitment is made, there are only promises and hopes, but no plans." When you decide this month, whether to pledge and how much to pledge, the central question to ask is am I committed to this fellowship, the people, the values, and the hopes and dreams? If so, then how can you help make that happen?

As Peter Frederichs invites us to consider:

Our faith, and membership in this church, comes with strings. To belong to this church and to be a Unitarian Universalist is to say "yes" to those strings. We say "yes" to life. We say "yes" to hope. We say "yes" to a belief that all people are worthy, all people carry a spark of the divine. And more than that, we say "yes" not just to these principles, but we say "yes" to doing the work of our faith, the work of this church, when we're asked. We can be that "place of quiet and reflection" ...only when, we all commit ourselves to creating that place, sustaining that place, loving that place, and working that place into existence.

When we do this, we build a church community that is in turn committed to us. We are committed to helping you become a whole hearted, authentic being. We help you find what brings you alive. We connect you to hope, love, and joy. And when life throws a curve ball and you are in a place of suffering, we journey alongside and give you the assurance you are not alone.

We encourage you to reach out beyond your comfort zone and hold that safety net in case you fall. We inspire you to lead with love and not fear. And we do not turn our backs and say, "it's not our problem." We respond when there is suffering, when there is pain, when there is a need for comfort.

We provide the humor, laughs, and smiles when all seems bleak. Most importantly, we provide a purpose and a meaning to help shape your lives each and every day.

This church also commits to you a place where you are accepted and affirmed in your own worth and dignity. This is a place you have voice and a vote in how to shape the community and its future. You are encouraged to search for new truth and meaning as well as guided on that search. We provide an environment which thrives on the freedom of each person's conscience. We lift up compassion, equity, and justice for each person. And we believe that we are all interdependent with each other and the wider world.

When we each decide to step into that intentional relationship with each other, then we can realize the fire of commitment and those steps into the future will burn bright with hope and promise.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Prayer from an Arizona Hopi Nation:

There is a river flowing now very fast. It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid.

They will try to hold on to the shore. They will feel they are being torn apart, and they will suffer greatly.

now the river has its destination. The elders say we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river, keep our eyes open, and our heads above the water. See who is in there with you and celebrate.

At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally. Least of all, ourselves. For the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey comes to a halt.

The time of the lone wolf is over.

Gather yourselves!

Banish the word struggle from your attitude and your vocabulary.

All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.

We are the ones we've been waiting for.