

Other Writings

Rev. Kate Wilkinson

1. Martin Luther King Invocation

We are gathered this morning, friends and strangers, to acknowledge that the struggle for justice STILL brings people together. We are gathered this morning to honor Martin Luther King and all men and women who have worked to make our world a better place. We are gathered this morning to celebrate diversity, solidarity and intentionality. And we are gathered together to participate in the world's oldest ritual of communal prayer, to break bread together. For this breakfast, this company, this legacy, and this reminder of the journey towards justice that we are on, may we be truly grateful.

2. Reflection and Poem

On my third trip to New Orleans, we finally had a whole day off to simply enjoy the city. We, a van full of women, were giddy as we left a collection of impressionist paintings of women on loan to New Orleans by museums all over France. We chanted "Femme, Femme, Femme" as a very patient Jim Voegel drove us to the next stop on our journey, a healing labyrinth built after the hurricanes.

I have always dreamed of walking a labyrinth, and as we drove, I envisioned high brick walls and rows of shrubs. Unfortunately we seemed stuck in an unintended maze of New Orleans streets as we struggled to find our way.

When we finally saw the sign for the labyrinth, we burst out of the van as one and our eyes scanned the park, our spirits falling as they finally rested on a small, flat, brick and concrete design inlaid in the pavement. This was it?

Trying not to look as disheartened as I felt, I approached the brick design. We had come all this way, and I might as well walk the labyrinth, such that it was. I can't even begin to tell you the transformation that took place on that walk. The path wound around and around, taking forever to trace, foot over foot. The healing energy of the labyrinth was palpable, culminating at the center in a cloverleaf design, where I stood, arms outstretched, for what seemed like hours. Others joined me and they too reached out their arms instinctively, like we were all being embraced by the healing energy of that labyrinth. I hadn't even realized how much I needed it.

A man in a suit and tie made his way in as I made my way out, and I could only hope that on the journey he would find what I had found...deep peace and healing.

Before leaving the park we got together as a group and cried and prayed, and spoke about our experience of walking the labyrinth. It was hard to put into words. When I got back to Boston, I tried again. This is what I wrote:

The Healing Labyrinth

Somehow we know, without being told
How to navigate this labyrinth.
It's a familiar path to us,
This universal path of grief.
We slowly wind ourselves toward the center,
Loosing ourselves in the task,
Tuning in and out to the world around us,
Steady on our course of tearfulness and longing.
Others walk with us
And yet our wandering is solitary,

Circling in and out,
Taking our time to reach the center.
Instinctively, we know we must stay there for a while,
Sit with our grief,
Allow it to wash over us,
Fill us up
Empty us out.
Allow ourselves to absorb the strength
to start the journey again.
Digging ourselves out.
Hammering our way out.
Building our way out.
Walking the path of grief again, in reverse.
We slowly spiral toward the edge,
So many times feeling it must be the end,
And then being drawn back in towards the center.
We feel the grace of but find no shortcuts to
This journey.
And so we continue on the path of healing,
Deferring to others as they make their way in
Circling towards the center of their grief,
As we make our way out of our own.
Our hearts somehow mended by the labyrinth,
The path we have all walked together.

3. Introducing a New Hymn: The Fire of Commitment

I hate to give away the culminating point of my sermon, but I think I'm going to do it. I'm about to talk about a couple of things, but the point of it all ends up being that I think we should be really proud of our Unitarian Universalist faith, proud enough to talk about it to others even, because in doing so we become representations of our values. And our values are something that the world needs more of.

So why am I telling you this up front? It's because I've found a song that sort of says the same thing. And I want us to sing it after my sermon. But I don't want us to be bad at it!

So...what Randy and I have come up with is a little tutorial of this song for you, before the sermon, so that you can just enjoy singing it after the sermon!

Let me tell you a tiny bit more about it now, and then I'll hand it over to Randy.

You might remember that last week, as part of the Heartfelt Play, we all sang *Standing On The Side of Love*. This morning's final hymn, *The Fire of Commitment*, is written by the same composer, Jason Shelton.

He is the Music Director at the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville, Tennessee, he served on the task force that developed *Singing the Journey*, the hymn book supplement that features a few of his songs, and he is also the first UU music director to receive fellowship as a UU minister. His music IS his ministry. His lyrics are based on UU theology and principles, and his music is his way of conveying the message of Unitarian Universalism to the world.

He says, "Many of our fellow religionists think of us as little more than the ACLU with a choir. When we neglect the sources of our faith and claim only our individual conscience as our guide without talking about what informs our conscience, we give up the authority that gives us theological credibility. We have a deep and abiding faith. When we embrace it we've got something to sing about."

I think we've got something to sing about. So let's learn Jason's hymn now so we can do just that at the end of the service.