

Coming Home, a sermon delivered at the
Lakehead Unitarian Fellowship, Thunder Bay, Ontario
by the Rev. Suzanne Wasilczuk
Sunday, May 11, 2014

Opening Words: Think of the Year as a House by Luke Stevens-Royer [assistant minister at White Bear UU Congregation, Mahtomedi MN]

Think of the year as a house:
door flung wide in welcome,
threshold swept and waiting,
a graced spaciousness opening and
offering itself to you.

Here – let the weary come
let the aching come
let the lost come
let the sorrowing come.

Here – let them find their rest
and let them find their soothing
and let them find their place
and let them find their delight.

And may it be in this house of a year
that the seasons will spin in beauty,

and may it be in these turning days
that time will spiral with joy.

And may it be that its rooms will fill
with ordinary grace
and light spill from every window
to welcome the stranger home.

Reading #1: “Guest House” by Rumi
This being human is a guest house
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!

Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.

He may be clearing you out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Reading #2: “Whose Are You?” by Victoria Safford

Whose are you?

Who carries you in their heart, thinks of you, whether you think of them or not?
Who are your people, the ones who make a force field you can almost touch?

Whose are you?

Who is within your circle of concern?
To whom are you responsible, accountable? Whose care is yours to provide?

Whose are you?

When you look in the mirror in the morning, whose bones do you see? Whose blood
runs in your veins? Who are those people, stretching back in time, beyond memory?
Where did you come from?

Whose are you?

When you walk out of your room, out of your house, out of your home, into the sunlight
of the day, to whom in this wide world do you belong? Where is your allegiance, by
whom are you called?

Whose are you?

At the end of the day, through the longest night, in the valley of the shadow of death
and despair, who holds your going out and your coming in, your waking and your
sleeping? Who, what, holds you in the hollow of its hand?

Whose are you?

Sermon/Reflection: “Coming Home” by Rev. Suzanne Wasilczuk

Home – an introduction [*words in italics sung*]

*Oh, give me a home where the buffalo roam
Where the deer and the antelope play
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word
And the skies are not cloudy all day*

*Home, home on the range
Where the deer and the antelope play
Where seldom is heard a discouraging word
And the skies are not cloudy all day*

What is home? Where is home?
What does that word – home – bring to mind?
To heart?
To spirit?
Does it gladden, sadden, chill, warm?

Home on the range is an expansive place
Filled with nature, wide open spaces
Seldom “a discouraging word”

Home – a contentious place to be

But home isn't always like that

*Mama and Papa are fighting like snakes
Baby is a cryin' like her heart will break.
[Open the Window, Elise Witt, Singing the Journey #1022]*

Home may be filled with discouraging words
Nothing but
Cutting words
Harsh blows – to mind, to body, to spirit.

Home may be a sad place
An empty place
A dying, mourning,
A place of missed opportunities.
Would of, could of, should of place
A discouraging place.

Homelessness

Home may be nowhere.

*I ain't got no home, I'm just a rambling round
Just a wanderin' person, I roam from town to town
The police make it hard wherever I may go
I ain't got no home in this world anymore. [Woody Guthrie]*

What is it – to be without a home?

I am one paycheck
beyond homeless.

I am two meals
beyond hungry.

I am three miles past
the point of no return.

I am forgotten Kelly Wallin [a homeless person in Duluth, MN]

Plenty of homelessness around.
Both sides of the border.
Here, in Canada,
Between 200 and 300,000 folks are homeless.
One third – 65,000 – are youth.
Lots of kids from unsettled, unsettling, discouraging situations.
Still, lots of GLBT kids.

*Mama and Papa are fighting like snakes
Open the window, let the dove fly in.
Baby is a cryin' like her heart will break.*

65,000 homeless kids.

<http://ysbfoundation.akaraisin.com/common/Event/AboutUs.aspx?seid=6147&mid=58>; accessed 9 May 2014.

<http://www.shelterhouse.on.ca/article/youth-homelessness-147.asp>; accessed 9 May 2014

A hugely disproportionate number of the homeless
are First Nations people –
an epidemic, some researchers tell us,
stretching from Halifax to Yellowknife.
Over half of the people living on the streets
right here in Thunder Bay
are aboriginal.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/aboriginal-homelessness-an-epidemic-york-researcher-says-1.2589861>;
accessed 1 May 2014.

Worldwide, almost 30 million people have left their homes –
because of drought,
because of violence,
because of war.
10 million in Africa. Another 5 million in Central and South America.
People who leave their homes, but remain in their countries.

Another 15 million people worldwide
have left their homes for another country – refugees.
From the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and other countries in sub-Saharan Africa
– 3.5 million.

From Palestine, 5 million people.
From Syria – an estimated 9 million people, either
internally displaced within Syria,
or seeking refuge in nearby countries.

<http://www.unhcr.org.uk/about-us/key-facts-and-figures.html>; accessed 8 May 2014

What is it to be without a home?

*I ain't got no home, I'm just a rambling round
Just a wanderin' person, I roam from town to town
The police make it hard [the bands of thugs, the soldiers] wherever I may go
I ain't got no home in this world anymore. [Woody Guthrie]*

Home in many places

We may experience having a home in many places.

More and more people move from their family homes, their birth places – for work, for school, for a change in cultural and political norms, for religious freedom, for adventure.

Many of us have two or more homes – the homes of our hearts.

Home is where our family is.

Where our friends are.

Where our memories are accumulated.

Stuff accumulated, too.

Wherever I hang my hat is home. [Marvin Gaye]

Home is where the heart is. [Pliny the Elder]

Where thou art, that is home. [Emily Dickinson]

Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in. [Robert Frost]

There's no place like home. [*Wizard of Oz*]

You can't go home again. [Thomas Wolfe]

These days, I've read

Home is wherever the WiFi connects automatically.

[on a bumper sticker]

Home is where our story begins.

Home is where we discover who we are.

Home is where we learn how to talk, to fight, to compromise.

Home is where we learn how to walk,
and how to walk away.

Home is where we live.

And, sometimes, home is where we die.

Here – let the weary come
let the aching come
let the lost come
let the sorrowing come.

Here – let them find their rest

and let them find their soothing
and let them find their place
and let them find their delight.

Home – a good, comforting place to be

In the best of all worlds,
home is a good, comforting, a soothing place to be.

Home is acceptance and appreciation
Home is challenging, but in a good, learning sort of way.
Home is familiarity – the people, the smells, the apple tree or lilac bush out front,
the pictures, the piano, the books, the stuff

In each of the houses I have lived in over the past fifteen years or so,
I sing this prayer:

Sim shalom tova u'vracha
Sim shalom. [Linda Hirschhorn]

Grant peace, and goodness, and blessing.

With smoke from sweetgrass and sage
I smudge each room.
And I think of what has happened – what will happen
in that particular room

Sim shalom tova u'vracha
Sim shalom. [Linda Hirschhorn]

In the best of all worlds,
home is a place of peace, of goodness, of blessing.

This faith community / Unitarian Universalism as home

When you walk out of your room, out of your house, out of your home, into the
sunlight of the day, to whom in this wide world do you belong? Where is your
allegiance, by whom are you called?

Whose are you?

At the end of the day, through the longest night, in the valley of the shadow of
death and despair, who holds your going out and your coming in, your waking
and your sleeping? Who, what, holds you in the hollow of its hand?

The first time I entered a Unitarian Universalist building
I made my way to the pamphlet rack.
I can never resist picking up something new to read.
I walked down to the basement – an Amnesty International meeting.
And then I walked home
A one room bed-sit
In what had been a big, fine, old Milwaukee house.

I read that pamphlet and
I discovered a faith community that cherished
Freedom
Tolerance
Reason
That said it was okay – more than okay – to question

Answered ‘Yes!’ to life and truth, ‘Yes!’ to love and justice

Years later I visited that same congregation
A Sunday in early September.
The first hymn we sang, totally unfamiliar to me:

*May nothing evil cross this door,
and may ill fortune never pry about these windows;
may the roar and rain go by.*

“Peace shall walk softy through these rooms... ‘til
Ev’ry casual corner blooms into a shrine.”
[*Singing the Living Tradition*, hymn #1]

I had found another home
A faith community that welcomed me
Fashioned me into someone more informed, more caring
Urged me to act for justice

This faith community
Tells us we are each a strand in the web of existence,
Attached to all and to everything
So, we matter.
What we do matters.
How we live our lives matters.

We are made of the stuff of the stars
Stardust precious and powerful.
And stardust is meant to shine.

*“twinkling like the Pleiades...
dancing like a candle flame...”
Where is the light? Oh, the light’s inside of you.
[“Where Is the Light?” Peter Mayer]*

Meant to shine.
For you, and for me
for all our sisters and our brothers, too

*Let your little light shine, shine, shine x2
Someone down in the valley, trying to get home. [Ysaye Barnwell]*

On this Mother's Day – this New Members' Day
we remember our homes
with all their pluses and minuses
all their nurturance and not nurturant
their triumphs and tragedies

We remember all those people who have fashioned for us,
And fashioned with us, a place to call our home

and all those people who are yet to find a
safe haven, a loving home.
All those folks down in the valley,
trying to find a way home

We remember our home,
this holy ground,
this blue green Mother Earth
on the very edge of this Milky Way galaxy

and we remember we are called to
let that stardust in us
shine.

May it be so. May we make it so. Blessed Be. And Amen.