

What It Means to Be Here

- a sermon reflection by Dawn Daniels, UUFCM Minister, delivered 8/24/14

Reading

- excerpt from "The Abundant Church" a sermon by Rev. Adam Tierney-Eliot

"We need to come together to be what we dream.

. . .

We come here to make sense of the world. This is where we come when we are in grief or in shock, when we are confused and lost. It is where we share our victories and recover from our defeats. It is an avenue for reaching out to the world and looking within ourselves. Ultimately, that is what church is. It is a place that challenges and heals and should do so with all the fullness and grace that its component souls can provide.

An abundant church should think in terms of abundance and of possibility. We should try to embody our goals of inclusion and our dreams. We dream for ourselves, for our children and for those people in the near and distant future who will be proud to say that "This is my Church."

At the August 3 worship service, Ricky Courlander shared a story about an old woman who named things. In this story, the old woman has a name for everything in her life – car, bed, toaster – every being and thing she had relationship with was named. A young puppy comes into her life and she resists giving him a name. He hangs around and hangs around and eventually works his way into her heart. In the end she names him Lucky. **He is given a name that has meaning for her.**

I mention this story because on that Sunday, my first Sunday back in worship with you, as I listened from my seat in the third row, I flashed on a memory from another Sunday, about six years ago, one of my first in service here as worship director. The worship service had just ended and as I was leaving the sanctuary, I was pulled into the green room by a woman with a most determined and pinched looked on her face. Clearly she was upset about something. When she closed the door behind her, I realized something of import was about to be shared. Turned out she was disturbed by a word I had used in the service. The offering reading I had chosen for that morning included the word "church." **"We are not a church,"** I was told quite clearly. **"You should not be using that word. We are a fellowship. It is important that you remember that."** A few more words were spoken, but I honestly have little memory of them, I was just so stunned by her intensity and admonition. Little did I

know then that I would stumble over and run headlong into the seemingly terminal Unitarian Universalist struggle with words, with the “language of reverence” over and over...and over again.

This congregation has been wrestling with the language of faith throughout the summer – it is a big important topic that we will undoubtedly revisit again and again as we dig further down through the layers of what it means to be here in this community of faith, this fellowship - this church - together.

*****At this point**, I made a decision to go in a slightly different, more risky direction with this message than I had planned. I was planning to share a lengthy excerpt from a sermon written by Rev. Nancy McDonald Ladd of the Bull Run Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Manassas, Virginia, titled “*Why Church Matters*” – that sermon, which will be delivered in an upcoming lay-led service, does a beautiful job of addressing our continued difficulties as Unitarian Universalists with religious language. I instead chose to share with the gathered community that morning an extemporaneous reflection of my own struggles within the UU tradition with the issue of religious language, as well as my perspective on what I see as the imperative of coming to grips more openly with this continuing struggle. I apologize to all who may read this explanation for the fact that I neglected to do an audio recording of this portion of my message. (I’ll do my best not to make that error again.) It is impossible for me now to recreate verbatim what was shared – let this stand as evidence that there will always be experiences we will share together in worship that will not be captured on the page. And that’s ok.

I played the recording of Sinead O’Connor’s new song, [Take Me to Church](#), at the close of my reflection – I’ve included the lyrics here below.

Take Me to Church

- by Sinead O’Connor

I don't wanna love the way I loved before
I don't wanna love that way no more
What have I been writing love songs for?
I don't want to write them anymore
I don't wanna sing from where I sang before
I don't wanna sing that way no more
What've I've been singing love songs for?
I don't wanna sing them anymore,
I don't wanna be that girl no more
I don't wanna cry no more
I don't wanna die no more

So cut me down from this here tree
Cut the rope from off of me
Sit me on the floor,
I'm the only one I should adore

oh, Take me to church,
I've done so many bad things it hurts
yeah, Take me to church
but not the ones that hurt
'Cause that ain't the truth
And that's not what it's worth
Yeah, take me to church
oh, take me to church
I've done so many bad things it hurts
Yeah, get me to church
but not the ones that hurt
'Cause that ain't the truth
And that's not what it's worth

I'm gonna sing songs of loving and forgiving
Songs of eating and of drinking,
songs of living, songs of calling in the night
'cause songs are like a bolt of light
And love's the only love you should invite
Songs of long and spiteful fails
songs that don't let you sit still
Songs that mend your broken bones
and that don't leave you alone
So get me down from this here tree,
take the rope from off of me
sit me on the floor,
I'm the only one I should adore!

oh, Take me to church,
I've done so many bad things it hurts
Yeah take me to church,
but not the ones that hurt
'Cause that ain't the truth
And that's not what it's worth
Yeah, take me to church
oh, take me to church
I've done so many bad things it hurts
Yeah, get me to church,
but not the ones that hurt
'Cause that ain't the truth
And that's not what it's worth