

**Sermon for Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Central Michigan**

**Sunday, March 29, 2020**

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**The Wisdom We Don't Want to Hear**

I want to speak to you today on the theme of Wisdom, and specifically about the Wisdom We Don't Want to Hear.

Throughout the month of March, our theme has been Wisdom. Last week Guy Newland preached about the Wisdom of Generosity. The week before that was supposed to be our service about the Wisdom of Generations, but we postponed that due to the coronavirus outbreak. Today I want to talk about the Wisdom We Don't Want to Hear—and I will certainly connect this theme to the situation we are in: the global pandemic reaching our state and most of us confined to our homes to a large degree.

As my words reach you, wherever you are as you hear them, may you be well and may my words bring you some comfort, some meaning, some connection between you and me, and some inspiration.

The first way that I think about the wisdom we don't want to hear is about what parents or other authority figures say to us—the wisdom they impart. In this sense, I'm thinking of "wisdom" with the same meaning as "good advice." And let's assume for the moment that what parents and authority figures tell us really is good advice. For example, if a parent advises their child to save their money for important things and not spend it foolishly, that's the kind of wisdom I'm talking about. Or when a teacher tells you to do your homework. There is wisdom there, but the person receiving the wisdom may not want to hear it. It's more fun to spend your money on treats than to save it for something else later. It's more fun to do almost anything else except homework.

It strikes me that there is a strong similarity to the situation we are in now. Health officials and responsible politicians—yes, *responsible* politicians, and we can see the difference—health officials and responsible politicians are telling us to wash our hands. To clean the surfaces we touch. To stay at home as much as possible. To cancel our religious services. There is wisdom in these words, but we don't want to hear it. It would be more fun to go out shopping and dining and seeing people; it would be much more satisfying to be together in this sanctuary and hold hands like we are used to doing.

Just as the parent has wisdom (due to experience) that the child doesn't have, health experts have knowledge (due to research) that the general public doesn't have. Their advice may not be what we want to hear, but we will be better off heeding their wisdom.

The trade-off here is between short-term gratification on one hand, and long-term reward on the other. It is more gratifying to spend money right now on something fun, but the long-term reward is having money later when we need it; we give up short-term gratification by doing our homework, with the long-term reward of knowledge and skills. And as a community, we are giving up a lot in the short term with this quarantine: sports, weddings, travel, social events; we are giving up paychecks; we are giving up the ability to visit loved ones in nursing homes....for the long-term reward, we hope and trust, of fewer infections and fewer deaths.

The trade-off is between two parts of our human nature. One part, because we are animals, is the part that wants pleasure now. Short-term gratification. But our species is called *homo sapiens*, and that word *sapiens* means "wise." We are a species that can think, analyze, and reason, overcoming our urge for short-term gratification and prioritizing long-term reward.

One definition I've heard is that wisdom is when we put into practice what we know. I see our community displaying a lot of wisdom in the face of this crisis. Even if we are receiving wisdom we don't want to hear.



Another example of wisdom we don't want to hear is the kind that we receive from people who know us really well. Like a spouse or partner, or a best friend. Or people in a support group or personal growth group that you're part of. In my case, I would include the men in my men's group. These people, my partner, my best friend, my sister, have seen at my best and my worst. They know what I call my shadow and my gold – the negative parts of me that I hide, repress, and deny are my shadow; the beautiful, powerful, creative and loving parts of me are my gold.

So when someone close to me offers me wisdom in the form of an observation or advice, when someone close to me says,

*Drew, I'm noticing something going on here. The way you're talking about this situation, that sounds familiar. Do you think that maybe what's really going on here is this...?  
Drew, are you willing to look at something in this situation?*

Sometimes when I hear that, from the people who know me the best, they are saying: I know you. I see what you're doing. I see the pattern that I've seen before. I love you enough to challenge you. In other words, they are seeing something of my shadow, that is hard for me to see, and they are calling me to be my best self.

Now, why would I not want to hear that?

This is true for me, and maybe this is true for you. My closest loved ones tell me a hard truth about myself or my actions or my decisions, and I know they are doing it out of love and calling me to be my best self--and I don't want to hear it.

Let that land and see if that's true for you, and what you can make of it. This is not an easy question.

The best answer that I can come up with is this: There may very well be a part of myself that is sabotaging because I am afraid of my own gold. It is easier to play small sometimes. This reminds me of one of my favorite quotations from Marianne Williamson, and I've used this one before. She uses God language here, so as Unitarian Universalists I invite you to translate that God language into whatever fits for your personal system of belief or non-belief. Marianne Williamson says,

*"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."<sup>1</sup>*

Blessed be the words of Marianne Williamson.

I think that these words are true for each of us as individuals, but also there is wisdom here for all of us collectively: for our American society. Stop playing small. Stop being the consumerist, selfish, disconnected culture that we have become. Be your best self. This is wisdom we don't want to hear.

As a society, I suspect that we are afraid. We are afraid if we rise to the occasion we really will transform our community, our health care system, our economy, our connections across time and space and generations. The wisdom from this coronavirus crisis is wisdom that we don't want to hear: take care of each other. Put community before profit. Celebrate and uplift public servants including trash collectors. Protect the old and the vulnerable.

And my prayer for all of us today is: May this be true for us as individuals. May we stop playing small and let our full light shine. And may this be true for our nation, our city, our community. May we own our gold. We are brilliant,

talented, fabulous, gorgeous. May we pay heed to the wisdom we don't want to hear—from our parents, from our teachers, from public health experts, from the ones who know us the best, and from the voice of God—wherever and however we find that voice.

May it be so.

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<sup>1</sup> Marianne Williamson, "A Return to Love, reflections on the principles of "a course in miracles.""  
HarperOne, 1996. Retrieved at [https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/17297.Marianne\\_Williamson](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/17297.Marianne_Williamson)