

Sermon for Sunday August 1 2010.

The topic of my address is “A Legacy or The Truth with Love”. What has occasioned these thoughts is my current preoccupation with Grandchildren. It is remarkably suitable that they are called “GRAND “ children; however, I now refer to them as PERFECT children. My perfect Isabelle whom many of you know and now Mac whose perfection is to be explored, are third generation UU’S whose parents of were raised in and by this congregation. Emily ,mother of Isabelle, lives here and attends with her husband and member Wade. Brodie, my eldest is the new father of Mac. He lives in the ski town of Golden British Columbia where he and his wife Leslie wave the liberal religious banner.

The consequences of raising your children Unitarian Universalist are huge. As much as possible I raised my children in a state of benign neglect ,locating them in safe places which would nurture, challenge and accept them for whoever they happen to be. This church was the institution which supported their value development and spiritual lives as they grew to adulthood . It gave them the space to become the loving responsible adults they are today. It also supported me as I developed as an adult . My emotional, intellectual and spiritual life continue to be a work in progress, informed by my church family.

Living here in Hamilton was potentially lonely. I continue to be challenged by my limited number of family ties. The hazard of marrying late,which is what most McIntyre’s have done, is that you loose grandparents early and have few children. I have only one brother who lives in Lindsay. My children grew up longing for grandparents and cousins

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nearby. My children and. I needed many sources of wisdom and unconditional love . We found that here.

I didn't have family to call and ask about childrearing mysteries. There wasn't much parenting skill in me which was pre-learned. I wasn't one of those teens who did a lot of babysitting because of interest in small children. I wasn't interested. I certainly wasn't capable of teaching small children. All those snowsuits and pee breaks would have undone me. What saved me was this congregation's ministry to me.

The congregation shared it's Truth With Love. When the girls were very small Hiram Wood quietly spoke to me one Sunday and said, "You're a good mother". Those few words , unsolicited, boyed me up during a difficult period in my marriage. When Brodie stove his fist through the wall as a teen, Bill Fulton assured me that his remarkably bright and reasonable son had done a similar thing and all would be OK. When I needed to attend church leadership school Elizabeth Beckett determined that what was needed was that she move into my house and look after my kids. When I couldn't work and look after my kids at noon, Barb Wallace fed and transported them from Montessori to Earl Kitchiner school. The Webbers took us on Christmas tree hunts. The Berquists organized intergenerational parties at Bronte Park. The Ellis family had us over for Sunday dinner, kept their fierce dog outside and treated my children like honoured guests. Individuals don't know how influential they are in the lives of children and parents when random acts of kindness are received. I think there is something intuitive, a kind of synchronicity that enables a healthy church community to support those who

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are most in need whether they express it or not. It isn't simply a matter of being nice folks. Dundas Golf Club has nice folks. It is the Spiritual Imperative which provokes this attention.

One of the ways we practice our spiritual lives is to celebrate our children. .My father refused to have me Christened in the United Church because he thought that would be presumptuous. He no right to predetermine my religious life. That is a very UU concept. The way most children are celebrated in the UU church is at a dedication service. We dedicate our lives within the congregation to individuals spiritual growth that includes children. We respect the fact that children will have individual views which will develop as they engage life. We acknowledge this responsibility at Children's naming and dedication services. I was asked to speak on the occasion of Isabelle's dedication. I have chosen that note to edit and expand as a sermon this morning. Since I get to be with Isabelle several days a week my life has changed, my values have shifted, and as a need to slow down almost in a zen like way of is in itself is a spiritual journey for me but that is another story.

My Words for Isabelle

"Dear Isabelle,

Your mother has asked if I would like to read a poem on the occasion of your dedication and naming ceremony at church on Sunday. I have looked for a few pithy words which

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would convey what I feel but have not as yet found something which brings to mind all I wish for you. Part of the problem is that thoughts of you trigger all I hope for your parents, aunt and uncle. My gratitude for having them in my life knows no bounds. My gratitude for having you knows no bounds. It is a whole new way of being in love.

When your mom was small I was very very busy. There were three under two. Your grandfather was largely not available. My mother your grandmother was in a nursing home and I was alone except for friends at the church and a few friends from work. I didn't have the time simply to be with your mother. My best effort which kept me sane was nursing until she was two. Making that space available to her connected and nurtured both of us. During the summer at Loon Lake it was different; I was present. That may be why it is such sacred ground for me. I see you now at Loon bravely joining her on the water and counting her down as she jumps off the dock and I am grateful that she has the opportunity to have that time and place with you. You don't know how you are making memories for all of us, including yourself which can sustain and nourish lifelong.

Barb Kulcher a UU Minister in our congregation once identified the Ministry of Being. She was a Community Minister who served as Chaplain at the Don Jail . She spoke of just being fully present with somebody in crisis, as what is needed. You don't need to talk. You don't need to know . You don't need to fix. You just need to be present and

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care. What I am experiencing with you since I have the luxury of time and very little responsibility is what i guess you could call,

“ The Parenting of Being”.

I get to observe and be fully present as you negotiate life. Other than protecting you I have to say very little. There are times you will individuate yourself and try on behaviour which is “ Beyond the pale” which will require boundaries ; however within those boundaries all I have to do is trust you. Sometimes our strengths become our weaknesses and vice versa. My lack of inclination to play games with small children invites you to explore independently at the park. I believe what you will be able to climb up you will be able to climb down. You do.

I trust you will continue to be intelligent, brave , hardworking, loving, and funny. You will also continue to push the envelope, be cunning, mischievous, ridiculously physically strong and independent. I will continue to Be here for you. Unconditional in my love.

You have chosen to be born into a Unitarian Universalist environment. Being a UU is not for sissies. You will have to get used to having your questions answered with another question. “Is Santa real?”

“What do you think?”

...Often you get a balanced view. “Do you go to heaven when you die?”.....

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”Some people think you do. Others think your love and positive energy continue to affect this world.”

...On occasion a more definitive answer will be offered....”Did Mary give birth to God’s baby?”

.....”All mothers give birth to God’s baby.”

Personal truths don’t come easily. I have shared your mother’s reflection on her spiritual journey when she was in High School. She understood the value of the process. Please be patient indeed generous when we ask you to stretch and grow with our well intended responses.

Sometimes being a UU sets you apart from the crowd and you may feel uncomfortable.

A classmate may inform you that you are going to go to Hell, because you don’t take Jesus as your personal saviour. You will need to be strong and generous. A practiced response such as, “ The Jesus I heard about wouldn’t be mean and send me to Hell. “ can be helpful.

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If a neighbour suggests that your family belongs to a cult you might let him or her know that, “ Emerson was a Unitarian and Paul Newman was as well.”

Sometimes you may have to stand up and tell somebody they are making you uncomfortable because they are being unkind. That is a very hard thing to do .At first it feels like not being Nice. You may have to stand beside your friend who is being teased. You may have to assert that a family with two dads is normal. You may have to say some jokes just aren't funny. All of this may happen before you are ten years old.

Perhaps you are thinking that this is a cruel joke. There has to be an easier way. The truth is that there may be easier ways but no better ways. You are likely hardwired to be iconoclastic . You are certainly too intelligent to believe everything that everybody will tell you. It won't be too hard. You will be surrounded by people who will support your inquiring mind. “Curiosity killed the cat” is not something we believe. Curiosity is celebrated. It is the discipline of being careful enough to pay attention. By being curious you will find out what you need to know about life, about human nature, about what is important and what is not. You will know enough to trust your instincts and be able to,”Keep your wits about you,” when under stress. ‘ It will be work but work which will serve you well.

Unitarian Universalists see Curiosity as a virtue. It is also true that this is not the case for some religious communities. At our worst we assume that people who aren't curious

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or need to be told what to believe are stupid. What is more likely true is that those people are overwhelmed by the complexity of life and the apparent threats to personal safety. It is important to create a safe place for curiosity to thrive. We must speak to each other with courtesy. listen respectfully even when we don't agree and worry less about being right and more about being kind. Your grandmother struggles with this every day. It isn't easy . Fortunately this congregation has been learning how to let me and others know when behaviour has been inappropriate. You need to expect people in the church to let you know when you have overstepped the boundaries. See those notices as care of you.

For Unitarians every day is a Beginning. We try to live examined lives. We try to be brave and keep our eyes open. This congregation pledged to you, to support you, to create a place where you can grow to be your best self. This is a sacred promise. You are a child of remarkable privilege .

You are not alone as a third generation Unitarian Universalist. You have a brand new cousin who is living in Golden British Columbia. where there is no Unitarian Universalist Church. Your Uncle Brodie can join the Church of The Larger Fellowship . He would then get a copy of The World, the UUA magazine ,and a CLF Newsletter. I am a member and find both very helpful. They remind me that we are a continental denomination of remarkable diversity and depth. The CLF also offers on line ministry. When you get older you will be able to talk with Youth on line all over North America and

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get a newsletter. Your Aunt Anne knows Young Adults in the US who she met at a Young Adult conference. She keeps in touch on line. We are an interconnected web. It will be hard for your Aunt and Uncle to raise Mac without immediate family close by. Leslie's parents live in Regina. Fortunately Mac has smart, principled parents who live life deliberately open to spiritual growth. They will find him an extended family of choice to help raise him. Their friendship circle won't be largely selected by a church. That will be harder but they will manage. I don't know what my relationship will be like with Mac. Distance will be a significant factor but I do have Skype and will learn how to use it. What I do know is that my capacity to love Mac is true. It is a remarkable thing that the human heart has unlimited capacity. In some ways Mac will grow up with less privilege but with no less commitment from family and parents. Even when far away he is in the hearts of friends who celebrated by giving me a granny shower. Mac is a member of his father's tribe. The legacy of this church community continues.

Part of your privileged life is your Aunt Anne. She works shift as a nurse and doesn't get to church on Sunday. She does join the Young Adult get togethers. She is single and a very special person taking her Unitarian Universalist values into the work place. When she was a personal support worker she would break the rules and light joints for a MS patients. As a RN she sees the large picture of patient care and works very hard in difficult conditions able to easily respect the diverse cultural norms of her patients. When your parents asked me if I was very excited that they were pregnant I said I didn't see that it had much to do with me. If they had decided to be child free that would have

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been fine. If Aunt Anne decides to be child free that will be fine too. Her life is enriched by knowing you and other children, and her heart has the capacity to be enriched by her work and private life.

And so my dear, you are beginning in a rich lotus land. I can't imagine a better place.

You are privileged but you are also burdened with responsibility. You will be taught UU Values and the expectation is that you will live your life according to UU Purposes and Principles. Your spiritual journey will likely take you another place to practice ; however, like your mother you will always be part of this congregation's Legacy.