With Our Hearts in Holy Places

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You have your cat people and you have your dog people.

There are those who say that people are like cats – fiercely independent and self-sufficient, curious and unattached. Sure, they come around for some attention and when the can opener starts, but otherwise, they pretty much entertain and maintain themselves.

Then there are the others who say we are really more like dogs. Friendly and sociable, we want to please and be liked. We want to be together and play together and enjoy life in the company of others who are like us.

I love cats, but on this issue I think I have to side with the folks who say that, overall, humans are more like dogs, at least in respect to the focus of today's sermon: being together in community. Despite our sometime striving to be independent and self-sufficient, we are, in fact, pack animals. We are neither feline nor canine, but from time immemorial humans have come together in clans, tribes, villages, and communities to be with one another for safety, companionship, sustenance, and inspiration.

And, in these communities, we establish structures and ways of being together that help us order and sustain our culture. Somewhat like wolves establish order and dominance in their pack associations, we have also created the means to order our relationships and maintain our societies. The structures we have developed help us deal with the dynamics of living in community, the intricacies and delicacies of human relationships that influence the success of our endeavors together.

We have ways to deal with the dynamics of power, limits, and boundaries. In our relationships, we exercise our abilities to acknowledge, include, and honor one another. We use our creative impulses to inspire each other to think about and plan for the future. We learn about our traditions and our collective wisdom is passed on through traditional and non-traditional means. These are some of the essential functions of community.

Angeles Arrien is an author and anthropologist who has studied and written about indigenous cultures for many years. Of Basque ancestry, she points to the experience of her own family as the source of her curiosity about the cultures and people of the world, and her desire to know more about why we are the way we are in those cultures and societies. One of her books, **The Four Fold Way,** articulates what she has learned about being in community.

I want to talk about how to be the best possible community. Spending this week with you, I've heard about your dreams for First Church, for this faith community, and your hopes for yourselves as the individuals who make up this congregation. We've shared stories of our lives, we've asked and answered questions, we've considered our future together. On this journey, we will continually need to revisit our hopes and dreams, our fears and frustrations. We'll need to find a way to be in relationship, to keep our hearts in a holy place, so that we can accomplish what we yearn for, create the community we dream of, and support each other along the way.

So, let me share with you what I've learned about making relationships, and communities, work. This sermon is about are the four elements that Dr. Arrien describes as essential roles within communities that function effectively and are sustainable for the long run. Her study of world cultures, of people who have learned to live in community together through the process of years together, is encompassed in what she calls *The Four*

Fold Way. She suggests that incorporating these traditional roles and approaches can enhance our own communities and improve our chances of living together harmoniously for years to come. We can be better together when we learn and practice the roles and responsibilities that make being together a complete experience.

Dr. Arrien offers these insights to a world struggling to survive and to all of us who seek a world community that honors and affirms the value of every human life. She sees them as vital to helping save us from destruction of our planet and each other through many of our current practices that don't honor all of life as sacred.

I'm sharing them with you because on my own spiritual journey, in my own personal practice, I've found The Four Fold Way to be a useful way to walk a "mystical path with practical feet." Much of life remains a mystery. We don't yet have answers to all of our whys and hows. But, the experience of many people, in many cultures, in many communities through the centuries does present us with some lessons about the elements of focus and the best ways to be together to create more of the outcomes we want and fewer of the problems we must learn to avoid, at our own peril.

In the answers to your questions included in the May newsletter, I mentioned the importance of The Four Fold Way in my life. It's not the total focus of my theology or spiritual practice, but I strive to include the Four Fold Way states of being in my personal repertoire because I've found that when I use them as my guide, I'm happier and feel more effective as a human being.

These guides allow me to live in greater congruence with who I am and the person I hope to be. Following the **Four Fold Way**, I have a better chance of being there for others while holding my own integrity. These four ways define, for me, the best way I've found to keep my heart in a holy place as I make my journey with others. It is in that spirit that I offer them to you, for consideration in your own quest for truth and meaning, for consideration of our journey together.

I want to talk about each of the opportunities of The Four Fold Way in the context of creating an effective, respectful, loving, and supportive community, the kind of place that we want to be in First Unitarian of Hamilton. I want to encourage you to think about each of these paths in relationship to your own life. Where are you most skilled and capable? Where might you have an opportunity for growth?

Because as we individually show up in this faith community, we influence how the Church as a whole works together to become our collective vision of the future. This week, many of you have shared with me your dreams and hopes for First Church. You've talked about what you would like to see in the worship, religious education, community building, and ministry of this church. As we work and learn and minister together, we can create among us more than we could dream of alone. There are exciting times ahead!

The Four Fold Way encompasses these paths:

- First, the way of the Warrior, a path whose task is showing up and choosing to be fully present,
- Second, the way of the Healer, paying attention to what has heart and meaning,
- Third, the way of the Teacher, telling the truth without blame or judgment, and
- Fourth, the way of the Visionary, being open to outcome, but not attached to outcome.

The first of the four ways is the way of the Warrior - to show up and choose to be fully present. The way of the Warrior is about right action, defending boundaries, finding one's inner resource of leadership, adventure, responsibility, and discipline. By fully showing up in the situations of our lives, and choosing to be absolutely present to them, we demonstrate our honor and respect for ourselves and for others. This leads us to appreciate the diversity within ourselves and within those around us, staying open and flexible in our interactions.

Those who are skillful Warriors value the art of judicious communication. They understand the meaning of promises and avoid misunderstandings by respectfully saying what they mean and honorably doing what they say they will do. By choosing to show up in the life, and being present in the moment, effective Warriors not only are aware of their personal power, but are also able to discern the best ways to express and use that power.

Ever find yourself driving somewhere and suddenly realize you have no conscious recollection of how you got to your destination? You're at a meeting (or listening to a sermon, perhaps) and find your thoughts drifting to the next thing on your "to do" list? We've all had the experience of finding ourselves not fully present in the moments of our lives, I'm sure. Warrior energy, however, is about consciousness – consciously choosing to show up wherever we find ourselves, focusing our attention on the situation and people around us, and disciplining ourselves to stay present in the moment.

Each of us has this kind of power and energy within us, although not all of may be aware of it or know how best to use it to our own advantage or for the benefit of our community. We are familiar with the shadow side of Warrior energy – rebellion, unchecked power, bullying, issues with authority, and so forth. Each of these four paths requires a sense of self and a level of self-esteem that allows one's personal aspects to be used to their best purpose. This is especially true for the energy associated with the Warrior.

The first path, then, the path of the Warrior, embraces the task of showing up and choosing to be fully present.

Secondly, in the way of the Healer, we're asked to pay attention to what has heart and meaning. Focusing in this way allows us to experience the power of love, of acknowledgement, of validation, of gratitude. To nurture our spiritual health, we look to our heart-centeredness and attend to the world from that place. Am I full-hearted? Am I open-hearted? Am I clear-hearted? Am I strong-hearted?

The quote from Rumi, a 13th century Sufi mystic, on the front of today's Order of Service speaks to the circle of love created when people embrace what has heart and meaning. In this quote from Rumi's extensive writings, he's talking about focusing our attention away from the world of the quantifiable, the mundane, and moving ourselves to the place where we engage the quality of our lives, in relationship with others.

Healers know that love is a powerful force in our relationships with ourselves and others. From this place, we acknowledge others – their presence, their skills, their character and personal qualities. From the place in each of us that holds this capacity for love, we acknowledge the impact that we have on each other and we find ways to extend ourselves to each other in friendship and in support.

The shadow of this Healer energy is found in poor boundaries, in allowing ourselves to be overcome with demands outside ourselves or in coping through addictive behavior. Many of the world's wisdom traditions point to the need for balance in our lives, spiritually, mentally, and physically. Practices that help to maintain balance are essential to walking the way of the Healer.

The Healer path calls us to pay attention to what has heart and meaning.

The path of the Visionary is third, and here we tell the truth, without blame or judgment. The visionary aspect of ourselves includes our creative purpose and life dreams. Here we are called to know and act from our authentic self, coming forward fully with our gifts and talents. Gandhi spoke of the visionary path when he said, "My life is my message."

Creating and holding a vision is not for only a few select people in the community. Indigenous societies encourage all members to seek and express the truth, to be open to the creative aspects of our spirits which open us to possibilities and options. Each of us is uniquely created and we live our life with a potential that no one else in the world has – to be our true and authentic self.

Truth-telling means speaking from this authentic place, the capacity to say what is so. At times, it can be challenging to speak without blame or judgment, because we get caught up in our desire to be loved, or be right, or to place responsibility outside of ourselves. That's the shadow side of the Visionary – abandoning our own truth, our own potential, or our own dreams.

The Visionary aspect of ourselves is the path of truth-telling, without blame or judgment, in honor of our authentic self.

Lastly, embracing the way of the Teacher, we allow ourselves to be open to outcome, but not attached to specific results or conclusions. This is a practice in trust and detachment, calling on us to develop and use our wisdom to discern. As Dr. Arrien says, "Wisdom is at work when we are open to all options."

Of course, being on this path confronts us with the need to be comfortable with uncertainty, with being in a state of not knowing. Arrien says that in some parts of Africa, someone who is in a place of not knowing is said to be "walking in the land of gray clouds," a metaphor that may resonate with your own experience.

To allow ourselves to be open to outcome, we must develop the skill of detachment, not because we don't care, but because we care so much, we want the best possible outcome to emerge in our community, even if that outcome isn't the one that we thought was the right way to go, at first. Even if the outcome isn't the one we wanted. The shadow side of the Teacher is attachment, confusion, and narrow-mindedness. When we cling to a solution that isn't viable, we're moving away from this path. Detachment can be done with great passion and caring, from a place of flexibility and openness and trust. In this state, we approach situations with the gifts of the path of the Teacher: clarity, objectivity, and discernment.

That is an outline of The Four Fold Way – the Warrior, the Healer, the Visionary, and the Teacher. Each of these paths has a role in creating vibrant, well-balanced, effective, and sustainable community. Some of us are more comfortable or skilled in one area. Each of us has capacity in these four paths, and all of us have gifts to bring to our Church. Our individual ways of being are joined together in a dance of being in relationship to one another and in relationship to the world around us.

We humans are social beings, and we find ourselves drawn to be in each other's company in myriad ways. One of these ways is in religious communities of support of our spiritual growth and expression. We share dreams and visions and hopes for this sacred and meaningful place to be with ourselves and with each other. We are part of the history of this place and we are part of the future, because those of our dreams which cannot be achieved during our lifetimes will be accomplished as one lifetime touches another, and another, and another. I'm so grateful for how you've shared yourselves and First Church with me this week. I'm honored to be among you.

As people of faith, let us walk a path together. Let us commit to making the journey a holy one. Let us create a way that is conscious, authentic, loving, and wise.

May it be so.