

For Nov 9, 2018 Shir Tikvah service

Justin:

We are so glad to be with you tonight.

So glad to be worshiping with you, to have our bodies in this space together: to sing and move, to listen and pray; to breath together in this sacred space.

Just as we gather here this evening, I'm reminded that over two decades ago, many of our people gathered in this space to worship, sing, pray, mourn, and celebrate. This is your space now, of course, and filled with memories of your people; for First Universalist, part of our religious journey winds right through this shared sacred space.

We feel that.

And we know, also, that we are gathering in a time of rising anti-semitism, rising white nationalism, and white supremacy; we are here just weeks after the horrific attack on the Tree of Life Synagogue.

We are with you on this Anniversary of Kristallnacht.

We cannot possible know the particular grief and anguish and resilience that lingers and lives in you right now, but we can say that we care deeply about you.

We can say that we bring our broken hearts and our love with us into this space. We are here, breathing with you, aching to create a more just world.

And it is that shared commitment, a commitment to heal the world, to love the hell out of the world, that we see as the driving force behind the conversations we've been having about the possibility of co-locating at 3400 Dupont Ave S.

And before I get too far into that, I want to tell you how much we love your Rabbi team. You are blessed by a trio of amazing, thoughtful, spirit filled, humble, generous teachers and leaders.

Over the past year, we have met numerous times for lunch, to talk about the possibility of our two communities co-locating, asking, "What would that mean, theologically? What would this mean culturally, and what are our cultural differences

and similarities? How do we bridge these difference? What would that mean for our identity as Unitarian Universalists, and for you, as Jews?”

I am a better human and minister because of these thoughtful conversations, and I have always left these conversations feeling inspired and hopeful about the state of our world, and what we can do together.

I also want to note - to say out loud - how strange it is that we are having these conversations about co-locating (not merging!).

Not strange in the sense of “why would be talking to one another about this?” but strange in the sense that in the research we’ve done, when two faith communities talk about co-locating, it is most often because either one or both of them is in decline, is shrinking in membership, or can’t afford the upkeep of the space they’re in.

So what is strange is that neither First Universalist nor Shir Tikvah is in decline. Neither is shrinking in membership. In fact, both of our communities are strong, vibrant, healthy, growing congregations. We are communities that have a clear vision of who we are, and what grounds us in those efforts. We are a church grounded in the Universalist spirit of Love and Hope. You are a synagogue who sings a “Song of Hope” for the world that might be.

We are entering into this conversation from a place of strength, and it brings me joy to imagine what it might look and feel like if we co-located.

It brings me joy to think about our collective children knowing and loving the space at 3400 Dupont Avenue and being instilled with our respective Jewish and Unitarian Universalist values, and working together to create a better world.

It brings me delight to think about how we might walk and roll and journey together in particular ways; it makes my heart sing to think that we might do a program like Beloved Conversations gathering, bringing our people together in small groups to learn about race, racism, whiteness, and what it means to be a multicultural, multiracial congregation.

I remember years ago, over a meal, Michael and I talking about our two faith communities and wondering: is there something big we are being called to do, together?

Now, as this conversation unfolds, there is a sense of coming home...not only being in this building, our previous spiritual home, but coming home to the right conversation. Coming home to one of the conversations that truly matter in these divided and hate filled times.

This excitement doesn't just live in my heart...it lives in Jen's heart, too, and I know she's eager to talk with you.

[Jen shares]

One of the theologians I turn to over and over in my own personal spiritual practice is Howard Thurman. Howard Thurman was an old family friend and spiritual advisor to Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Here are a few of his words that guide me:

God is at work enlarging the boundaries of my heart.

God is making room in my heart for compassion: the awareness that where my life begins is where your life begins; the awareness that the sensitiveness to your needs cannot be separated from the sensitiveness to my needs; the awareness that the joys of my heart are never mine alone - nor are my sorrows. I struggle against the work of God in my heart I want to be let alone. I want my boundaries to remain fixed, that I may be at rest. But even now, as I turn to God in the quietness, God's work in me is ever the same.

God is at work enlarging the boundaries of my heart.

These weeks, and, let's be honest, these months and these years have been hard on our hearts. We've seen the dramatic rise of anti-semitism and Islamophobia and racism with the president at the helm, and we've seen a rise in violence that can't help but frighten us all. In times like this, it would be natural to want to hunker down, to shut out the outside world and all of its hard news and reality; it would be natural to want to put up boundaries and turn inward, protecting ourselves and our people and fortifying our own communities of faith and leaving each other out on our own.

There are times when we just want to be let alone -- when we are weary and worried, times when we may long for our boundaries to remain fixed that we might be at rest -- but that is not how my understanding of the holy works, not how a life of faith that calls us always into deeper relationship with one another works.

We are called always and especially now, to enlarge the boundaries of our hearts, expanding our sense of who “we” means so that we can make room in our heart for compassion and empathy and solidarity. No one is safe until all of us are safe; my liberation is bound up with your liberation, and your liberation is bound up with my liberation. That is the life of the spirit that I long to live into, pushing and prodding and always enlarging the boundaries of our hearts.

This co-locating we are exploring is grounded for us at First Universalist in a desire to live even more deeply into our faith and the claims it places on our life. We long to make real our commitment to environmental justice and community engagement, finding ways to reduce our environmental footprint and use the building at 3400 Dupont to its fullest. We long to put ourselves into deep relationship with people who are different from us, that we might learn and grow and create relationships that change who we are and call a deeper work for justice out of us. We yearn for the spiritual challenge of rejecting the capitalist idea of mine, all mine, and leaning into the practice of sharing with all of its requirements for articulating our own needs and listening and responding to yours.

We know that we are still at the beginning of these conversations about sharing space together at 3400 Dupont, and there are many questions still to be answered. As Justin said, we would be two growing congregations coming together to share one space not out of need but out of want. We would choose this together from a place of strength. And, of course, there would be financial benefits to us living together, just as two individuals or families coming together to live under one roof; the financial benefits are real, and so are the challenges of whose turn it is to do the dishes or who ate the leftovers or left the toothpaste cap off in the bathroom. The challenges of really listening and coming to know each other’s needs, of making compromises and growing from the

relationship, of knowing that you are not in the work of keeping up the house or being in the world alone, of looking out from a place together. And that togetherness comes with gifts and challenges.

So rest assured, we are digging into the questions of how. How would we share the space, how might we come to know and love and support each other across congregations and across faith traditions, how might we retain our own distinctive identities while working to repair this broken world together, and how might we look out from one shared place. We are digging into these questions, and they will take us places. For now, right now, we are grounding ourselves in the question that honestly guides every major decision in my life, will this choice enlarge the boundaries of my heart? If so, then I'm in, whatever challenges come our way.

In this moment with the mid-term elections behind us and the mixed emotions of relief and celebration, exhaustion and a deep exhale, and still the rise of hatred in our world, what can we do to push against the habits of our country that are killing us all: the endless extraction of resources from the land and each other, the idea of securing and locking down-- my safety first and foremost and then and only then reaching out to tend to yours, the limited understanding of who the word, we, means that keeps us separated from each other in this time and place. What new practices can we create, what new relationships might we nurture, what new habits can we take up right here and right now that can change our world?

May the boundaries of our hearts enlarge, may our sense of we be ever expanding, and may we respond faithfully to the constant call to put our faith into action, repairing the broken places and loving the hell out of this world.

May it be so, and Amen.