

Home: The Practice of Belonging

The ache for home lies in all of us -Maya Angelou

Welcome back and welcome home! Our first theme for spiritual practice of this church year is about finding a home, finding a sense of belonging. In looking to see which of the Unitarian Universalist Principles this theme most closely relates to, we found that it, indeed, fits with many. What does it mean to be at home, to belong? The first principle addresses respect and dignity for all; the second, equity and compassion; principle three talks about acceptance of all. This month's theme abounds, and may be the cornerstone of our religion.

Home has a special meaning for each and every one of us. For some, it is a place you go; a place to take from and also to give to; it provides a feeling of safety, of comfort, structure, love. For others, it may be a destination; even the goal of an 'at bat'; it may be a road as Billy Joel sings of the Pennsylvania Turnpike in his song, "Home". It's the relationship you have to a place that makes it home.

And what of belonging? Being at home can give one a sense of belonging, cared for, loved, nourished. But belonging can also take place anywhere, at any time. Consider the phrase, "I am here, therefore I belong." People can find they belong right where they are, right now. This is expressed so often by members of our congregation as well as newcomers. Our sanctuary provides a sense of belonging to all who enter.

Questions for Discussion and Discernment on your own, or with each other:

1. What do you need to make a home?
2. How do you know you're home?
3. Imagine homelessness
4. What are the obstacles to feeling at home?
5. What are the qualities of belonging?
6. Is home a physical place?
7. How is home a port you sail from?
8. How is home a harbour you sail to?
9. When do you feel homesick?
10. Why is dying called going home?



Quotes and short readings:

WINDS OF HOMECOMING

Ah, not to be cut off,
Not through the slightest partition
Shut out from the law of the stars.
The inner – what is it?
If not intensified sky,
Hurled through with birds and deep
with the winds of homecoming.
Rainer Maria Rilke

Home is a notion that only nations of the homeless fully appreciate and only the uprooted comprehend.
-Wallace Stegner, *Angle of Repose*

It's like the song of a family where everything's always all right, it's a song of belonging that makes you belong just by hearing it, it's a song that'll always take care of you and never leave you. If you have a heart, it breaks, if you have a heart that's broken, it fixes.

-Patrick Ness, *The Knife of Never Letting Go*

Homelessness is about more than rooflessness. A home is not just a physical space, it also has a legal and social dimension. A home provides roots, identity, a sense of belonging and a place of emotional wellbeing.

Homelessness is about the loss of all of these. It is an isolating and destructive experience and homeless people are some of the most vulnerable and socially excluded in our society.

-Crisis: The Charity for Single Homeless People

Giving connects two people, the giver and the receiver, and this connection gives birth to a new sense of belonging.
-Deepak Chopra

Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountain is going home; that wildness is necessity; that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life.
-John Muir

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.
-Simone Weil

We are all longing to go home to some place we have never been — a place, half-remembered, and half-envisioned we can only catch glimpses of from time to time. Community. Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak without having the words catch in our throats. Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter, voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power. Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of healing. A circle of friends. Somewhere where we can be free.
-Starhawk

One day, Mike Clarensau asked himself the question: “What if we put belonging first, like Jesus did?” Christ welcomed people to follow Him without proclamations of faith or fruits of repentance. When Mike acted on that thought, his view of people changed, and his church set about loving people unconditionally. The congregation put belonging ahead of believing and becoming. When it did, people’s lives and the life of the church were powerfully transformed—and more than a few got saved.

From Belonging to Becoming: The Power of Loving People Like Jesus Did

As a child, I got lost on a hike up Mt. Cardigan. I was with my mother, my brother, and a friend of the family. At first it was a game, who could spot a trail blaze first? But then, as it started getting colder and darker, as I became thirsty and hungry, I could think of nothing else but the wood-paneled den back home. A cozy room with rust-red shag carpet and a mustard-yellow couch. In that moment, nothing symbolized warmth and safety like that little room with all my father’s records.

-Contributed by a member of the church

Home

Hold on, to me as we go
As we roll down this unfamiliar road
And although this wave (wave) is stringing us along
Just know you're not alone
Cause I'm gonna make this place your home

Settle down, it'll all be clear
Don't pay no mind to the demons
They fill you with fear
The trouble it might drag you down
If you get lost, you can always be found

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-Phillip Phillips

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“Perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition.”
-James Baldwin, Giovanni's Room

In our hectic, fast-paced, consumer-driven society, it's common to feel overwhelmed, isolated and alone. Many are re-discovering the healing and empowering role that community can bring to our lives. The sense of belonging we feel when we make the time to take an active role in our communities can give us a deeper sense of meaning and purpose.
-Robert Alan Silverstein