

Sharing Sorrow, Sharing Joy

Rev. Mark Hayes

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Reflection (Part 1):

A religious community has the potential to play many different roles in our lives. That reality is reflected in the variety of topics that we explore in our Sunday morning worship over the course of the year.

Our participation here can help us reflect on our beliefs and convictions, as we did in the recent series on the seven Unitarian Universalist principles. Sometimes we are called on to consider the value of various kinds of spiritual practice or discipline, like the service a couple of weeks ago on the art of doing without. Sometimes we are encouraged to grapple with issues in the larger social and political world, in services about moral courage, or the spiritual foundations of social action, or about specific issues like global warming or prison reform or marriage equality.

In order to be a vital and spiritually healthy congregation, it is important to maintain a reasonable balance among these various modes. To find a balance between our inner, personal lives and our outer, social lives. Between an inward focus on our congregation itself, and an outward focus on the larger world and how we live in it.

Right here in our religious community is where, ideally, all these levels of our life experience can converge in our attempt to find meaning for our lives. We'll be singing a song later in the service that has this line: "We search for truth, equality, and blessed peace of mind. And then we come together here, to make sense of what we find." And that's something we do together.

That doesn't happen just through sermons, of course. Every week we take the time to share joys and sorrows as a way of building and strengthening our sense of community. As a way of reminding ourselves that we need one another both in times of despair, when we need comfort, and in times of success, when we need someone to share in our triumphs.

This week, we devote our entire service to reminding ourselves of the need to be together and to share of our lives with one another, both joys and sorrows. In a few moments there will be an opportunity to share sorrows, and then a little later a chance to share joys. That order is intentional, in hopes that we can leave on a note of joyfulness and hope, even as we acknowledge the presence of sorrow as well.

[A time for the sharing of sorrows]

Reflection (Part 2):

Howard Thurman, in his book *Meditations of the Heart*, expressed the following sentiments, which I'm sure are shared by many among us:

I share with you the agony of your grief,
The anguish of your heart finds echo in my own.
I know I cannot enter all you feel
Nor bear with you the burden of your pain;
I can but offer what my love does give:
The strength of caring,
The warmth of one who seeks to understand
The silent storm-swept barrenness of so great a loss.
This I do in quiet ways,
That on your lonely path
You may not walk alone.

But I remind you, once again, that we need one another not only in times of defeat and discouragement, but in times of success and joy as well. When we experience joys ourselves, they are all the sweeter in the sharing. When we see and hear the joy of others, even when joy eludes us, we can take heart, being reminded of the normal up-and-down cycles of life. Knowing that our turn will come yet again, that our rose will open, that our soul will unfurl its wings once more.

Another benefit of sharing in others' joys is getting to know them a little bit better through seeing what it is that they value, that brings them joy. Come, sing a song with me - dream a dream with me - walk in rain with me - share a rose with me - share a joy with me, that I might know your mind and your heart.

[*A time for the sharing of joys*]

Reflection (Part 3):

One thing is clear. Life brings with it many occasions for both sorrow and joy. The two are really not as separate as they may sometimes seem. Without joy there would be no sorrow, and without sorrow there would be no joy. For it is often the loss of what has brought us the greatest joy, that brings the greatest sorrow.

I'd like to close this morning with three short readings that elaborate on that theme of how joy and sorrow intertwine in our lives. First is a short excerpt from William Blake's poem, "Auguries of Innocence":

It is right it should be so:
Man was made for joy and woe;
And when this we rightly know
Through the world we safely go.
Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine.
Under every grief and pine
Runs a joy with silken twine.

Next, this from Kahlil Gibran:

Then a woman said, "Speak to us of Joy and Sorrow." And he answered:

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked. And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears. And how else can it be? The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain. Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven? And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives?

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy. When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.

Some of you say, "Joy is greater than sorrow," and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater." But I say unto you, they are inseparable. Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.

Verily you are suspended like scales between your sorrow and your joy. Only when you are empty are you at standstill and balanced. When the treasure-keeper lifts you to weigh his gold and his silver, needs must your joy or your sorrow rise or fall.

And finally, from the back of our Hymnal come these anonymous words:

To laugh is to risk appearing the fool.

To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.

To reach out for another is to risk exposing our true self.

To place our ideas – our dreams – before the crowd is to risk loss.

To love is to risk not being loved in return.

To hope is to risk despair.

To try is to risk failure.

To live is to risk dying.

May each of us have the courage to risk despair, failure, sorrow, and even death, so that we might not miss out on the possibilities of hope, of success, of joy, of life. The blessings of joy be upon you all.

So may it be.