

“Body of Life”

Rev. Lynn Harrison
First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto
31 January 2021

Reading:

Even This Is Enough

- Vanessa Southern

So much undone.
So much to do.
So much to heal
in us and the world.
So much to acquire:
a meal
a healthy body—
a fit one—
a lover
a job
a better job
proof we have and are enough
just around the corner of now.
And up against it the reality of all that falls short and the limits of
today.
We honor the limits:
If your body won't do what it used to, for right now let it be enough.
If your mind won't stop racing or can't think of the word, let it be
enough.
If you are here utterly alone and in despair, be all that here with us.
If today you cannot sing because your throat hurts or you don't have
the heart for music, be silent.
When the offering plate goes around if you don't have money to give
or the heart to give, let it pass.
The world won't stop spinning on her axis if you don't rise to all
occasions today.

Love won't cease to flow in your direction,
your heart won't stop beating,
all hope won't be lost.
You are part of the plan for this world's salvation,
of that I have no doubt.
The world needs its oceans of people striving to be good
to carry us to the shores of hope and wash fear from the beach
heads,
and cleanse all wounds so they can heal.
But oceans are big and I am sure there are parts that don't feel up to
the task of the whole some days.
Rest, if you must, then, like the swimmer lying on her back who
floats,
or the hawk carried on cushions of air.
Rest in pews made to hold weary lives in space carved out for the
doing of nothing much
but being.
Perhaps then you will feel in your bones,
in your weary heart,
the aching, healing sense that
this is enough—
even this.
That we are enough.
You are enough.
Enough.

Sermonette 1: “Body of Life” – Lynn Harrison

Some of you may wonder:

What do some ministers do,
when they find a few minutes of spare time,
or find themselves awake in the night
over some congregational concern?

Well, I can't speak for others,
but here's what's been occupying me.

[Slide: Jigsaw puzzle of the moon, in process]

At Christmastime, I received the unexpected gift
of a thousand-piece puzzle of the moon.

It's a very difficult puzzle, and at this rate I just
might have it finished by this time next year...

Which is perfectly fine with me.

Because when I take time
to do this very simple physical act
of trying to fit puzzle pieces into place...

I reconnect, in a small but significant way,
with the concrete sensory experience of
being alive in my body—something I spoke about in
the first sermon in our Body series a few weeks ago.

This ordinary physical activity can be, for me,
as the poet Rumi once said,
“a way of kneeling and kissing the ground”—

A form of simple sensory prayer...

And of bowing down, too, to the sheer difficulty
of the puzzle, not to mention the awe-inspiring
enormity of Life itself.

After all, it is a puzzle of the *moon*...
a celestial body...
the contemplation of which puts my own

small human body into helpful perspective.

Somehow, through no effort of my own,
I find myself here, in this body, in this place,
for this short time, sharing cosmic space
with other human bodies, animal bodies,
bodies of water, celestial bodies...

All moving together in circles,
within circles, within circles.

The moon puzzle prompts me to contemplate,
also, how each of our bodies belongs
within the whole...
and that we are enough exactly as we are.

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As UU minister Vanessa Southern wrote:

“You are part of the plan for this world’s salvation,
of that I have no doubt.

The world needs its oceans of people
striving to be good
to carry us to the shores of hope
and wash fear from the beach heads,
and cleanse all wounds so they can heal.

But oceans are big
and I am sure there are parts that
don’t feel up to the task of the whole some days...”

Just as the little puzzle piece I hold (*hold one up*)
seems insignificant when I consider the enormity

of the puzzle and the many pieces that have yet
to fall in place...sometimes this small body
feels insignificant, and yet, it is essential
and it is enough...

However it looks
and whatever it can or cannot do.

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Both the curse and the blessing of the moon puzzle
and of the Body of Life on Earth
is that so many pieces look so very similar,
and yet they are, in fact, unique.

So many times, a particularly-shaped piece will seem
to me as though it absolutely should fit into
a particular place...

Just like we human bodies may be absolutely
sure that we have a particular solution
to a problem...

That some-body should behave in a
particularly different way...

Or that a particular person, place or thing
is the right one for us...

Only to find that in fact,
it is not a fit after all, and that we need
to stay open to another answer.

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There are times when we may wish

that our bodies were different,
in shape or size or sensibility.

That they could accomplish tasks they once did,
or find a place in a particular situation
that's different than the one we're currently in.

There are times when I am frustrated that
the puzzle piece that looks so fitting
simply won't go where I want it to...
that something about it is wrong.

But from the beginning of time,
this notion of individual worth,
the idea that every body has a particular shape
and way of being that's essential to the Whole...

It's an central tenet of so many wisdom...
that keep rippling out
in wider circles as time goes on.

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The idea was expressed in a Christian
text, in a letter to a community that Paul,
one of Jesus's early followers,
was trying to bring together with an
inspiring message.

He said:

“The body does not consist of one member but of many.

If the foot were to say, ‘Because I am not a hand,
I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it
any less a part of the body.

And if the ear were to say, ‘Because I am not an eye,
I do not belong to the body,’
that would not make it any less a part of the body.

If the whole body were an eye,
where would the hearing be?

If the whole body were hearing,
where would the sense of smell be?

...If one member suffers, all suffer together with it;
if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.”¹

Similarly, going back even further to the Hebrew Bible,
the book of Ezekiel² tells the story of a valley of dry bones, which are
brought back to life through the breath of
God...or to use language familiar to us, the “Spirit of Life.”

The song Danny sang earlier,
about each part of the body being connected to
every other one, is based on that very ancient Jewish text.

I’m sure many of you can think of other words of wisdom, both
ancient and modern, that speak to “the whole being greater than the
sum of its parts”...
and every part being valuable to the whole.

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For all the frustrations of my moon puzzle,
there are times when all I can see is the scattered chaos
of all the separated pieces...

¹ 1 Corinthians 12:14-17 and 26

² Ezekiel 37

When I'm searching for one that is missing and I
fear that I have somehow lost it along the way and
it will never be found...

And yet, in the moments when the pieces click together,
when a true and fitting connection is made...

When I glimpse the vision of the Whole
and how I—I!—can put the next right piece into it...

My body feels well,
and my mind comes to rest.

(I often wonder, actually, if we get a rush of endorphins
when we solve puzzles of any kind. I think we probably do!)

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So, where does your body fit?
How are you connected to others
in this Interdependent Web of Existence?

How do you hold the scattered-ness
of the pieces of your life,
within the broken wholeness
of this world?

Our bodies seem so small, so simple.

And yet, they contain multitudes...
and could inspire a million meditations.

They are worth reflecting upon with wonder
every day of our lives...
and gazing upon with reverence

Just as we gaze with reverence
at the moon and the stars
from which our bodies came.

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Sermonette 2: “Bodies in Motion” – Angela Klassen

On a crisp autumn morning in 2012, members of our Real Estate Task Force invited the children of our congregation to envisage and illustrate their ideal new home for First.

Excitement pulsed through the group as one great suggestion after another came forth:

A green, or living, roof encased in a glass dome! Also, a telescope to view the night sky and learn the names of the constellations.

A fantastical giant vine winding through the corridors, to follow to your proper class, and a climbing wall for after classes.

A music room, so kids could jam with each other and better accessibility features for all our friends using assistive devices.

More bathrooms, better couches, a *much* better TV/DVD Player - all among their 2012 visions of our new home.

Art supplies were dispensed so that ideas could come to life on paper, and in the hum of creativity, conversation turned to the practicalities. How old would they be when we moved, wondered one? What, or who, would take our place at 175 St. Clair? What if we couldn't find a place that was “just right”?, to which one child cheerfully replied - “Oh, we'll be *fine!* First is the *people*, not the *building*”!

Out of the mouths of babes!

The idea that we would, similar to the earliest Christians, organize ourselves around homes rather than a single building, using software that would not launch until a year after this conversation, would have been unfathomable then. But, here we are.

The good news is, we will *not* be meeting in homes for 300 years as those persecuted Christians of ancient times did! ;)

This time of temporary closure of our building has certainly shown us that although we are not “going to First” these days, *we, the living, breathing, multi-celled body of seekers* **are**, indeed, First.

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Week by week, as we come together online, we weave and re-weave the connective tissue that is sustaining, supporting and protecting all that First stands for –

Love, our doctrine,
The quest for Truth ...
Serving life ...
to build a better world...

This time of sustained public health crisis, and stay-at-home orders may find us chafing against our limitations in connecting with and serving others, but also appreciating that the “better world” we can build in these times is the one immediately around us.

As Theodore Roosevelt advised “Do what you can, where you are, with what you have.”

The quality of our interactions, the connections we make, the fortification of our own spirits and the community **we** co-create here

has such a vital role to play. In fact it may ultimately be one of the greatest impacts we can make now, and, perhaps even post-pandemic.

Within the embrace of our congregation's online life we continue to find, in our Drop-in and Journey Groups, task groups or committees, a powerful intimacy from which we learn and grow as we offer compassionate witness to the life experience of our companions, and listen with a willingness to be opened, indeed, changed by what we hear, what we learn together and with each action we undertake.

As we continue to gather in coffee hour breakouts and online discussion groups we may be gently challenged by our conversation partners whose insights evoke our fourth principle - "encouragement to spiritual growth"; *waking us up* to the reality of others, whose experience we may not share, or revealing how our own actions, inaction or, even ignorance, may be contributing to upholding systems which cause real suffering for others.

Speaking for myself, I bless the many members who's "nudges" have spurred me to undertake needed and valuable inner work, and perhaps you have had similar experiences.

This, to say nothing of the sustaining connections and creative interchange which are such a feature of our lives as a **vital and vibrant in-person community to which we so look forward to returning**, and which some members and friends of First have credited with saving their lives.

For some, this may be literal. For example, the nine refugee families which First and our partner organizations have sponsored to come to Canada of which six families are already settled or reunited with their families.

Others say this figuratively – that the messages, the music and the caring people who are mobilized year-round here have saved them from trauma-induced despair or a time of significant crisis.

Teen graduates of the Our Whole Lives sexuality education program often tell us, much later, that they were saved from what would surely have been a life-altering experience in their early intimate relationships because of how effectively this program equipped them.

Some discover their sexual orientation or gender identity sooner than they might otherwise, were it not for the support of OWL facilitators, peers and members of our congregation.

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Dharma teacher and author, Sharon Salzberg, thinks of these types of encounters as “Our Three Feet of Influence”, (*now doubled, for pandemic times, to “Our Six Feet of Influence”!*) She affirms that when we behave compassionately, honestly and ethically toward those we encounter, we make a much larger impact than is ever apparent in the moment.

“None of us can do this perfectly”, she goes on to say.

“Sometimes *you* are the one who is the aggressor because the unfolding of your day, or year, has you the one feeling ... alone.

Committing to speaking truthfully and without the intention to do harm, to listening carefully to what others have to say and to remembering that all of us are struggling to make sense of a changing world ... allow(s) us to stand strong amid the chaos.”

Salzberg asks us to picture it: If more people acted from this space...., there would be more and more terrain covered.

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Former Peace Corps volunteer, consultant and teacher, Meg Wheatley coined the phrase “islands of sanity” to describe the spaces amidst the destructive dynamics of this time, where we can still create the conditions for our basic human qualities of “generosity, contribution, community and love to be evoked, no matter what”.

This is not an “island mentality” of disconnecting from the world, of which she speaks, but rather a bordered, semi-permeable field.

An island of sanity, she says, “can be an interior space bounded by our own integrity: we know who we are, what we value, and what we stand for”. In this sense, –you- can be an island of sanity.

It can also be a home, a team, it can be a congregation or a school, for instance. Places which support our best human capacities for generosity, compassion, curiosity, creativity and insight. Where, through our commitment to presence and wise action, we “consciously refrain from adding to the confusion, aggression and fear overwhelming (so many) people” in our society.

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Up against the reality of all that falls short and the limitations of today, we can still use our gifts of reason, love, service and commitment to build the better world that is immediately around us.

No matter our lifestage, no matter *what* we may be doing right now, whether we’re studying, looking for work, working, retired, raising children, volunteering, resting, recovering - the quality of our intentions and our actions *does* make a difference.

If you're wondering about our young prophet – She's 14 now. And she was right. First really –is- the people. And we are more than fine. We. Are. an Island of Sanity.

In the spirit of this multi-generational community, I offer a few lines from our children's "chalice camp song", with words by Laila Ibrahim and Rumi for you to carry in the days and weeks to come:

It's a blessing we were born, and it matters what we do ...
Let the beauty we love, be what do
And we don't have to do it alone.

Go in peace.

Amen

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Benediction

words of Eric Williams:

Blessed is the path on which you travel.
Blessed is the body that carries you upon it.

Blessed is your heart that has heard the call.
Blessed is your mind that discerns the way.

Blessed is the gift that you will receive by going.
Truly blessed is the gift that you will become on the journey.

May you go forth in peace.