

Reflection

Rev. Lynn Harrison
First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto
15 January 2023

"We live our lives, forever taking leave."

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke said it...many others have too...
and indeed it's something we're aware of in our lives,
even though we may resist that knowledge.

Every song is proceeding toward its conclusion...
Every life is moving ever closer toward its end...
Every moment arises and passes away.

When something we love ends unexpectedly,
whether it be a relationship or an experience,

We're likely to feel shock, disbelief, denial, anger,
sadness, regret, fear, confusion...
so many intense responses of grief.

These feelings also harken back,
both consciously and unconsciously,
to other losses we've experienced in life.

And they may trigger anxieties
about future losses yet to come.

This has been my experience in the days
that I've known this change was coming.

And I imagine that many of you are experiencing
at least some of these powerful emotions today,
and have been over the past few days.

Yet my spiritual life teaches me that this moment,
this being here, now,
in the fullness of this experience
even if it is unpleasant...

This day, this present moment,
is all that I need.

Indeed, it is exactly what I need,
to live fully...and to live freely.

To paraphrase the words of the Hindu teacher Khalidasa,
found in our hymnbook:

"Look to this day...for it is the very life of life.
For yesterday is but a dream, and tomorrow is only a vision.

Look well, therefore, to this day."

If you are experiencing difficult emotions on this day...
as many of us are...this is a time to turn to the sources of strength that can
ground you, renew your spirit, and help you find peace of mind (if that's
what you need).

Meaning-filled activities such as spending time in nature,
practicing yoga, praying, meditating, reading the words of wise teachers,
exercising, offering support to others in need,
giving voice to your creative spirit, listening to music, enjoying art,
preparing nourishing meals, seeking out a caring listener
or providing deep listening to another...

These are important to do every day...
but especially in times of unexpected loss.

As we focus on living fully, and freely,
during a time of unexpected transition,

we may find it's also an unexpected opportunity for growth.

In his sermon today, Shawn will talk about the necessity of a change in ministry for First Unitarian Congregation.

In a few moments, Tanya Cothran, President of the Board of Trustees, will offer additional perspective.

As always, I so admire and appreciate Shawn's wisdom and I fully support his deeply thoughtful decision to initiate this change at this time.

Meanwhile, on a personal level, each of us can look to this day--this moment--as an opportunity to live into our capacity for resilience in new and deeper ways.

To loosen our grip on our expectations.

To open our hearts to the unexpected callings of this world.

To welcome with curiosity the abundant gifts of our lives, in whatever form they may come.

"To accept the things we cannot change and change the things we can."

"To serve life...that we may grow into harmony with the divine"...whatever we understand that divine Mystery to be.

As for me, after much soul-searching and prayer, and in conversations with Shawn and other leaders, I've arrived at a plan to continue to serve you--in a half-time role--past the time Shawn leaves at the beginning of June.

I will serve as your Summer Minister this year. And then your Interim Minister will arrive in August.

I will assist that person in getting oriented to the congregation... and then
I'll depart on October 1st...
just a few days before I turn 60.

I will be retiring from parish ministry.

But I will be continuing with guest-preaching engagements
at other local congregations--notably Don Heights in the coming year.

I'll be devoting more time to my family and my health
and spending as much time as I can making music...
which I hope will continue to connect us over time.

It's also important to say that although my timing
makes sense for me personally, I also believe that
it's necessary for the well-being of First.

Any new minister arriving to serve you
will need to have the full opportunity
to lead you in their own way.

The ongoing presence of a legacy minister
would be an obstacle to a successful transition.

Until that time, though, there will be many months,
Many days, many moments...

For us to live through this transition together.

To listen deeply to ourselves and to one another.

To be present...in the here and now.
To be grateful...for the time we have.

And to serve life,

in this life we are given.

May it be so and blessings to you all.