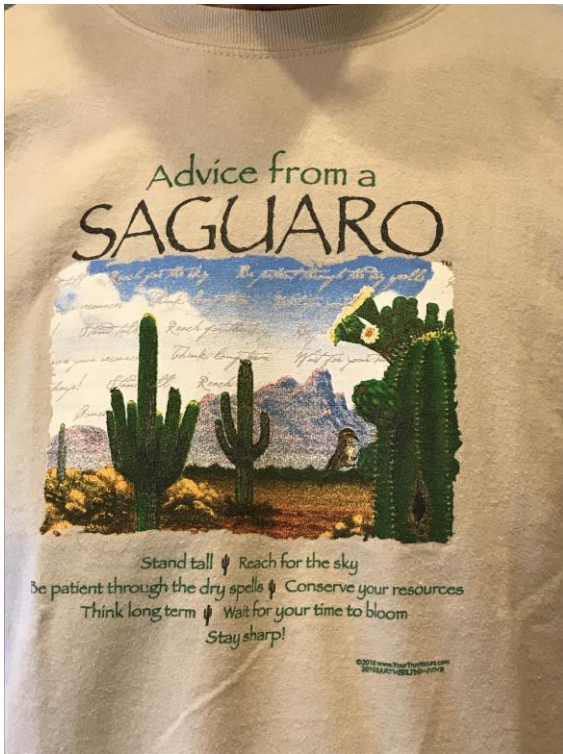


Tee Shirt Spirituality:

Summer Comfort and Year-round Commitments

Our Annual Service~Sunday, July 15, 2018

Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento



Blessing Ritual for Elected Lay Leaders

[Words to be recited by minister, congregation and elected lay leaders beginning a new term in July or continuing for another year. In unison, we spoke words of covenant, charge, and blessing.]

Pastoral Prayer

Roger Jones

Please take a deep inhale-breath with me and let it out. And now let us feel our bodies as good gifts of life by making a sigh or hum or other noise as we take in and let out another breath. Now please join me in that space of honesty and intention, as I offer these words of prayer.

Let us give thanks for the gift of life and the gift of this new day. We are surrounded by people of good will, all of us with human imperfections, with needs and gifts—loving Spirit of grace, bless this imperfect yet precious community. Grant us love, joy, endurance, courage and hope.

We gather together knowing that among us are various worries, regrets, griefs and sorrows—gentle Spirit of compassion, hold all of us in love.

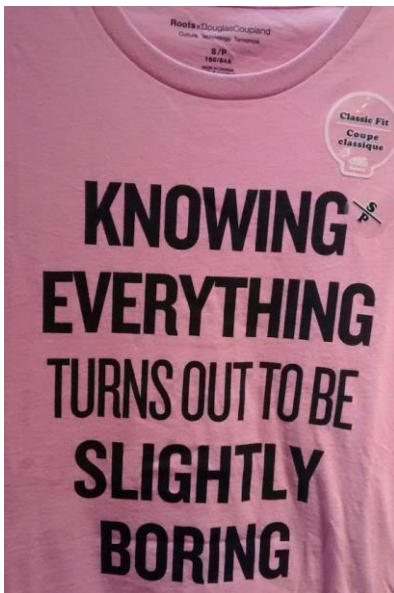
At all ages and stages of life, may we find causes for celebration and thanksgiving—bright Spirit of gratitude, hold us in joy and reassurance.

We call to mind all those near and far whom we are holding in care and hope—Spirit of healing and comfort, hold them in love.

News of this week has brought both relief as well as heartbreak. In Thailand, a team of twelve young soccer players survived their confinement in an underwater cave after nearly a month. We rejoice at the rescue of these children. May they and their loved ones find comfort and healing after this ordeal. Yet in the United States, we know that federal authorities continue the cruel separation of migrant children from their parents, and parents from their children, many of them toddlers and infants. Like refugees and migrants throughout human history, most migrant families have sought only to flee violence, repression and grinding poverty. Yet the force of the state has met them with violence and cruelty. Let us give thanks for the spirit of protest across the land, opposing cruelty, demanding mercy. May we continue to side with love and support the vulnerable. Let us give thanks for the resurgent spirit of compassion and hospitality. In these uncertain times, may our moral values guide us forward. Spirit of justice, give us endurance to keep speaking out, keep giving generously, keep supporting those who do the work of mercy, justice, hospitality, and healing.

May love and courage be with us and with all those we hold in our hearts, today and in all the days to come. So may it be, and amen.

Now with the sounds of the life of this community of all ages around us, let us pause for a few moments in reflection.



Homily: Tee shirts and Tyranny – Roger Jones

I wanted to show you a few of the tee shirts I found recently at an art museum gift shop. I only took photographs, as I have too many tee shirts already.

This one says: “Knowing Everything Turns out to be Slightly Boring.” That could be a celebration of ignorance but perhaps instead, it means telling everything you think you know turns out to be a boring way to be with other people.

This one says: “I miss my pre-internet brain.” I would add: *I miss my pre-cell-phone mindfulness.*

The final slide says: “Our only hope is to invent something smarter than ourselves.” It seems to me the problem is that we’ve been trying to invent things able to do things that we used to do with our own brains and bodies, and the problem is that we don’t have the wisdom to keep up.

Wisdom for our own lives means reflecting and learning from experience, and then making better decisions and choices. Wisdom for a whole society means learning from experience and learning from one another and then making the best choices we can. Right now in this country the lack

of wisdom is so dire that it’s tragic and it’s deadly. Indeed, the historian Timothy Snyder says we are at risk of tyranny. A specialist on the history of authoritarian regimes, Snyder posted a long essay on tyranny through Facebook shortly after the current U.S. presidential administration took power. He laid out the definition of authoritarianism and the warning signs he saw in actions of the U.S. president and congressional and senate leadership. His post went viral, and soon he turned it into a book: *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. Snyder compares the words and actions of the current administration to those of several Central European countries in the twentieth century, when they became totalitarian states. For example, the leaders of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany used rhetoric that scapegoated certain groups as the source of people’s pain.

In this nation, danger signs in the past year and a half include attacks on the free press, the undermining and condemning of leaders of partner nations and allies, and the befriending of dictators while defending their oppression of their own people and invasion of other territories.

We’ve seen the use of federal agencies to terrify vulnerable populations, including children and their parents. We’ve seen words and actions toward the criminalization of whole categories of people.

Snyder points out that a tyrant will declare themselves above the law, rejecting customs of transparency, refusing any scrutiny of conflicts of interest. If democratic procedures of government fail to serve their agenda, they go around those procedures. Lying is the trademark of tyranny, and if authoritarians are challenged, they lie even more. They trample on human dignity and respect, values to which peaceful and free societies must aspire.

The stakes are very high. To people who care about this country’s health, to other countries who worry about the loss of our integrity and leadership in international institutions, and to the most vulnerable of our fellow human beings, the risks are both real and unsettling.

So what does this have to do with tee shirts? After all, they are consumer items, pieces of cloth

fabric, with catchy words and images. Surely a shirt won't save us, no matter the inspiration of a famous quotation or powerful slogan. Yet the variety of slogans and commitments on tee shirts makes me think about the fabric of our common life. Timothy Snyder's 20 lessons are intended not to cause despair among us, but to promote the health of society. He suggests actions that all of us can do to mend and protect our common fabric. It's a rich book, so I will mention just a few practices that relate to what we do as a religious community. One lesson is to defend institutions—defend our systems of government from being undermined, defend the rule of law, protect voting rights and access, and defend the freedom of the press from coercion or suppression. Among the 7 Unitarian Universalist Principles, #5 is to affirm and promote “The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.” Here, I have a tee shirt with all 7 principles. [Showing the shirt.]

Snyder says it is important to support local institutions—those which make a community what it is, which bring people together face to face, which help us remember common decency and respect. Most of my tee shirts display my connections to institutions or movements, including Unitarian Universalism. This one is from a Habitat for Humanity project of the congregation I served in Minnesota before moving here.

This one celebrates the New York Public Library—libraries are pillars of a free society. They help folks to connect, learn, gain skills, find work, enrich their sense of beauty and creativity, and especially to get access to information and ideas without restriction. Two weeks ago, I walked around Brooklyn, New York, with an old friend. Sightseeing in hot and very humid weather was a drag—exhausting! We took a break in a neighborhood branch of the Brooklyn Public Library. That very plain one-story concrete building was buzzing with kids chatting, reading, hearing stories in groups, working on computers, and selecting new books to read. To me, sitting amid the sights and sounds of a lively community was as refreshing as the air conditioning.

Timothy Snyder urges us to “go to places we have never been before and make new friends.” In the words of Harvard Divinity School teacher Stephanie Paulsell, “People who are isolated in society are much easier for authoritarian regimes to harm than those who are held, seen, and remembered in community. Making eye contact and exchanging greetings are practices by which we recognized each other's humanity and [weave] each other into a shared life.”

Tee-shirts exemplify this connecting of people—the message or picture on a shirt should be like an invitation to conversation, perhaps beginning with a conversation. “Tell me about your shirt,” you can say. Of course, another person could reply: “I don't know, I bought it at a thrift store.” But even so, we've begun a conversation.

One more lesson from Snyder. When times are hard, we need to keep our values clear and our commitments vital. But merely knowing what we believe and knowing what we care about will not be enough when times are frightening and painful, when the fabric of our common life is being pulled apart.

To keep our commitments vital, he says, we need to practice them. We need to encourage others to practice and value their own commitments. We do this by serving together, and by remembering the power and beauty of community. We do this helping out, dialogue with others, fellowship over meals together, sharing music and the other arts, teaching and learning from one another. We learn this by eye contact or the real human voice, and authentic presence with one another. I thank all of you for doing that here in this community. I thank you for showing up, not only to restore your own spirits but to support one another. So may it be.

Ritual

[Those with tee shirts line up near the front. Each person approaches the center and shows the shirt; a lay worship associate reads aloud into the microphone what the message is.]