



"Coming of Age "
Rev. Krista Taves
May 2, 2010

Emerson UU Chapel, Ellisville MO

Sermon

Tom and Sam*, I remember the first time I met you. It was almost five years ago, the second week of June 2005, and I was here being interviewed to be the minister of this church. In our religious tradition, ministers are not assigned to churches, we compete with other ministers just like in the regular job market, and when a search committee has chosen their final candidate, we come to the church and we are interviewed for a whole week. There are breakfast interviews and lunch meetings and evening gatherings, and at the end of the week, after Sunday worship, the congregation votes on whether to call that person as their minister.

Tom and Sam, I met you for the first time the night that the children had their chance to interview me. Tom, you were around 10 yrs old and Sam, I think you might have been 8 or 9. You might not have had a vote about whether to call me, but I felt, and your parents felt, and the search committee felt, that it was important for you to meet me and spend time with me because I'm not just here for the adults, I'm here for everyone. And I have to say, it was the most challenging interview I had the whole week.

Let me tell you about some of the difficult questions I was asked:

"What grade are you in?"

"How old are you?" And when I said I was 35, the follow up question was even harder. "That's really old! Do you have any kids?"

"No."

"Then how do we know you'll like us?"

The questions got even harder.

"When you fight with your sisters or brothers do you hit each other or yell at each other? Do you usually win the fights?"

And then the most dreaded question of all:

"Are you a dog person or a cat person?"

And though all this, there you were, Tom, rather silent, with your classic unreadable smile, and I wondered what you were really thinking and feeling, at that time it was hard to tell, sometimes it still is. Your sister was there, about to start grade 9, the only youth there, and I worried that she felt out of place and too old to be there. And Sam, you were one of the ring leaders, pelting me with question after question! And your sister was with you too, and like Tom, she was kind of quiet too. But by the end she got some of her questions in.

It was a wonderful evening. We laughed and told stories and the questions got sillier and it was the most enjoyable interview I had all week and I found myself reflecting later that evening that even though the questions seemed silly, they



"Coming of Age "
Rev. Krista Taves
May 2, 2010

Emerson UU Chapel, Ellisville MO

really weren't. Underneath those questions were the real questions, "Can we trust you? Are you going to care about us? Will this be a good relationship?"

And those were the real questions under the serious questions at all the meetings with the adults. And those were the questions I had too. Is there the possibility here of a deep trusting relationship between a minister and a congregation? Will they care about me? Will we grow into right relationship with each other?

Those are also the real questions that are in the minds of every person who comes to visit this Chapel. "Can I trust these people? Will they care about me? Will my life and my experience count here? Could this be a good relationship?" And those questions are at the bottom of every decision that we make about how we will be a church. With what are we entrusted? What are we called to care about? What do we need to do to be the stewards of this liberal religious tradition so that we are in right relationship with each other and our beloved principles of freedom, equality, respect, justice, and compassion? That is the whole point of our long term strategic plan that will be offered to the congregation on Friday and brought to the congregational meeting on May 16th. The recommendations focus on programming, social justice and outreach, human resources, our property and our governance structure, but the real issues underneath all the recommendations focus on the fact that our liberal religious tradition saves lives, and we are called to use all that we have to share our faith with others so that person by person the principles of freedom, equality, respect, justice and compassion can become real in our hurting world.

Tom and Sam, when you offer us your credos, you are entering our liberal religious tradition. You have the opportunity to show us how you have taken the principles you have learned in our religious education program and made them real in your own value and belief system and, hopefully, your life. There's a saying that you can believe anything you want in Unitarian Universalism. It's not true. It is not responsible to believe anything you want because ultimately a faithful life is not simply about fulfilling wants. Then the exercise of our faith is primarily a selfish thing.

There is a difference between want and need. Our responsibility is to develop in ourselves a commitment to the values and principles that this world needs and that we need so as to manifest the fullest possibility of creation. Our lives are the tools of that fulfillment. In Unitarian Universalism we do have different beliefs, but they are frames, buildings so to speak, for universal values that we believe will lead to that highest fulfillment of creation. So we have frames that include Christianity, Humanism, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Agnosticism, Unitarianism, Universalism, and much more, but our values are remarkably the same, and they are the glowing core of our faith: freedom, equality, respect, justice and compassion



"Coming of Age "
Rev. Krista Taves
May 2, 2010

Emerson UU Chapel, Ellisville MO

When we as a congregation listen to our young people's credos, it's not just because we want them to feel good about themselves one morning, it's because we need to hear them. We need to hear how the people in our midst are living and embodying our Unitarian Universalist values so that we too grow stronger and wiser and more faithful.

Because let's be honest, sometimes life is very hard. We are all wounded. We have all been betrayed. We have all betrayed others. Because this is a hurting world we are part of the hurt and disappointment, and it's easy to forget, easy for all those beautiful values to get lost in the complexity of life and to seem highly unrealistic. We live in a world where power and selfishness have been reframed as the highly esteemed values of ambition and progress. And these values are hard at work – in the oil slick that is spreading out towards the coast of Louisiana, in the SUV filled with propane, fireworks and gas that sat in Times Square last night, and sometimes in the places we should feel the most safe – in our homes, our churches, our schools, our marriages, our families - and far too often in the corridors of power in the public and private sphere. And I will admit, that sometimes it's hard to see how our universal values are changing the world. Are they just pipe dreams?

But for all of this, we gather this morning to honor two of our young people who have come to us to share their deepest thoughts and most cherished values and beliefs. We should never underestimate what an act of faith it is to come here week after week and commit to compassion and freedom, and to hold onto the hope that there is more to this world and more to us than our wounds, more to this world than betrayal and power and selfishness, that equality and freedom and compassion are the most powerful things in the universe, and that's it's not unrealistic or simplistic or dreamy to believe that. They are, in fact, the only things that can save us.

In Unitarian Universalism we commit to this earthly salvation one credo at a time, one worship service at a time, one stewardship moment at a time, one covenant group at a time, one strategic plan at a time, one act of social justice at a time, one offertory at a time, one friendship at a time. That is our understanding of salvation.

Tom and Sam, you are part of our living faith, you have been since your parents brought you here. But now it's time for you to claim your own place in our religious tradition. Make this church your home. See in the friendships you have here, with the children, with the other youth, with the adults and with me, as offering the promise of the fulfillment of creation. Let your credos be the beginning of your lifelong commitment to the values of freedom, justice, equality, respect and compassion and you will join a kind of salvation that is much more real than anything any of us can possibly imagine. Amen.



"Coming of Age "
Rev. Krista Taves
May 2, 2010

Emerson UU Chapel, Ellisville MO

** The names of the youth who presented their credos on May 2 have been changed as we do not publish the names of children and youth under the age of 18.*