

## Sermon

I was born in the year of the October crisis and I'm not talking about the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, I'm talking about the FLQ Crisis in October 1970. For those of you unfamiliar with Canadian history, FLQ stands for Front de la Liberation du Quebec, the Quebec Liberation Front. The FLQ was committed to Quebecois independence from Canada. This desire has a long history. When Britain defeated France on the Plains of Abraham outside Quebec City in 1759, they were exceedingly harsh to the residents, seeing them as an enemy presence. They exiled thousands to Louisiana. The rest became cheap labor. They co-opted the Catholic Church and the French upper class just enough to maintain the status quo. Quebecers revolted many times, unsuccessfully, until the 1950s when they used unionization to press for change. English Canadians realized that their number was up and the doors began to open. This slow change was called the Quiet Revolution.

Many Quebecers didn't buy it. They saw the Quiet Revolution as an attempt for English Canadians to look open while keeping their privilege intact. The FLQ concluded that only armed resistance and political separation would secure their freedom. In 1969 they bombed the Montreal Stock Exchange. In October 1970, they kidnapped a British Trade Commissioner and murdered the Quebec Minister of Labor. Prime Minister Trudeau, a French Canadian federalist, invoked the War Measures Act, thus suspending all civil liberties, and sent in the army.

He also established a Royal Commission to study the situation and in 1971 they had their answer – peace and justice would not come from a Quiet Revolution but rather a through public policy based on commitment to change. They proposed an official policy of multiculturalism within a framework of bilingualism. It made French and English the two founding nations of Canada. It established federal funding for the preservation of French culture and language. And finally, it recognized that the country was more than French and English. Canada would celebrate and protect the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of all its citizens.

Now you would think that the public response to this policy would be great! Who wouldn't want more diversity? Who wouldn't want to welcome everyone into this cultural mosaic? But the response was anything but. Many English Canadians were very ambivalent, sometimes outright angry, fearing that their British heritage was under attack. Hadn't Britain won the war?? Native Canadians were upset that they were not included as a founding nation when they had been the first nation. Immigrant communities were the most positive. They hoped their children would no longer be bullied or kept under a glass ceiling when they entered the work force. They no longer had to let go of their culture of origin and assimilate to be loyal Canadians. Many Francophones didn't trust it. A policy that valued all ethnicities was a slick way of undermining Quebecois culture and language.

Then there was a whole group who argued that the policy of multiculturalism did nothing to address the root causes of inequality. It focused on culture and language without seeing the connections between racism and poverty. How was it going to change the systemic patterns of inequality that defined so much of our society?

Can you hear the coyotes? (Pehute Legend, "Why there are so many languages?") It's not good enough. It doesn't go far enough. You don't include me. I don't trust you. Clearly the Multiculturalism Act was not enough to put aside more than 200 years of bad blood. Resistance to the policy uncovered some of the most racist elements we had ever seen publicly, and unearthed many unspoken resentments in Canadian society. Even my immigrant grandmother was dismissive. "I came here in 1927 and got nothing! Struggled for everything I got. And now we want to give immigrants a silver spoon?"

But the government moved ahead anyway and for all the hubbub, and for its weaknesses, a whole generation of kids, me included, were taught to live multiculturalism. Multiculturalism was our normal. Being Canadian didn't mean giving up anything, it meant being all you were. No melting pot for us. We were all equal and precious just as we were. And 40 years later, you can see what a different world our generation is creating. We were trained to look at difference as normal, not as dangerous and learned that attitudes matter and can change the world in real ways.

But we had to work so hard to get there. Far too often multiculturalism became an impersonal formula, not unlike the skit we just saw (Diversities R Us, Weaving the Fabric of Diversity, UUA), something we paraded around on Confederation Day and in street festivals. How many of you watched the opening ceremonies of the Vancouver Winter Olympics? Pretty amazing, and I heard from many friends down here it was beautiful, but I hate to tell you, it was a formula that so many Canadians know by heart - Take French, English, Native, and a smattering of other ethnicities, add snow and a maple leaf, and stir. That's our Uncle Sam and Apple Pie.

And in fact, the opening ceremonies brought widespread criticism from many Canadians, and I think what many Canadians found so distasteful is what is so troubling about the skit you saw today. The affirmation of diversity so easily becomes a formula. And when it becomes a formula it becomes about image rather than authenticity. It becomes about us and what we want to look like and about how we want to feel good about ourselves, rather than about a relationship that we want to build.

We live in a society that is hyper sensitive about diversity. On one side you have an active cultural war against diversity. On the other side you have people who really want to advocate and affirm the diversity of this country but there's just so much baggage by now. You know there was all this optimism in the 1960s. "All you need is love" right? And the whole world would change. Well it didn't happen like that and now it's such a minefield and it feels like no matter what you do, someone is going to challenge you. No one wants to look prejudiced. No one wants to look like they are

excluding someone. You can so easily be criticized and labeled if you make a mistake or if someone decides you've made a mistake. Heaven help if someone throws the race card or the sexism card or the ableism card or the ageism card, and if you deny that's what you done, there may be condemnation, and if you agree with the criticism, you could be written off as hopeless and unable to change. There's a lot of original sin thinking that comes into play when someone makes a mistake about the sensitive stuff. You know, that "once a sinner always a sinner thing." And what that means is that we are surrounded by clouds of shame. Shame if we make a mistake. Shame if we don't do enough. Shame that despite so many attempts this is still a deeply unequal world. And so it's harder to remember that we all have a place at the Council of all Living Things, or what it would mean to sit at its table. It's much easier to sit in silence.

We all want to be accepted. We all want to be people who accept others. And we also all carry histories filled with not being accepted, being excluded, being oppressed. Welcoming diversity and choosing to trust means having to let go of a lot of pride. In Quebec, for instance, the saying on the license plate reads, "Je me souviens", "I remember" and what they are referring to is that they remember their past. The glory of being part of the massive and powerful French Empire, of being the forgers of a new land, they also remember the indignity they suffered under English oppression and how they yearned for freedom. For some Francophones, being open to the possibility of trusting an English Canadian, feels akin to betraying that history. And they're not the only ones in this predicament. Think of what it must have taken for Protestant and Catholic to make peace in Ireland? What would it mean for Israelis and Palestinians to see one another as brothers and sisters? And how many of our families and our church cultures have been defined and framed by age old grievances that somehow get carried over to the next generation? And we haven't even gotten to the history of racism and slavery in this country. We are stuck in cycles of denial and guilt, and shame and pride keeps us stuck there.

So if we're going to get out of the pride, to resist falling into the formula, to stop holding back for fear of making a mistake, what's it going to take?

In Unitarian Universalism, we say we are a faith of the covenant, rather than a faith of doctrine. By that we mean that the core of our faith tradition is not a set of beliefs that you must adhere to, but rather a set of sacred promises that we make to each other. Those sacred promises are our covenant. We know that the promises will change, and we know that sometimes we won't be able to keep our promises, but we make them anyways and prepare for the journey of living those promises. What that means is that we believe that the holy, or the divine, or revelation happens not in right belief, but in the desire for right relationship. In opening ourselves up, in allowing ourselves to become vulnerable, to step back from fear and move into curiosity and desire, this is where revelation happens, within us and between us as we seek to live the covenant. And of course sometimes we make mistakes. And then we come back to our covenant and begin again. The whole purpose of creating the curriculum "Weaving the Fabric of

Diversity" which we're starting today, was in part a response to the fact that it's been sometimes too easy for us to move into the formula. And by that I mean that we moved into right belief rather than right relationship.

Our formula, the UU formula, is saying that we love and affirm diversity without doing the homework to know what that really means. We step into the formula when we wring our hands and say we want to be diverse, and talk about what it would mean, but don't follow it up with action. We step into the formula when diversity becomes more about seeking approval and feeling good about ourselves, rather than about living our mission and vision in the world. You know you're in the formula when you end up knowing very well how to love and affirm those who are like you, and just like the English and the French back in 1971, pulling back and crying wolf when we're asked to leave behind what we know, the differences and the sameness that we define ourselves by.

So we're starting a journey. Every Sunday for the rest of August, and into September, we'll be looking at different kinds of diversity and trying to help each other to see with new eyes. I'll preach on the theme of the day, and then a whole range of people from this congregation will be offer adult education sessions to follow. And it's not about telling us what we've been doing wrong, or preaching at us, or getting everyone onto an agenda. It's about the conversation and the relationships between us and the world we are called to serve. It's about the journey. It's about taking the risk of making mistakes. To use that quintessential Canadian term, it's about stepping into the mosaic where we're honored in our histories but asked to see them as a stepping stone into a different future.

And that is living our covenant.

May the spirit be with you.