

Generosity of the Heart

by Rev. Kali Hayslett

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Generosity

“the quality of being kind, understanding and not selfish” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com>)

It’s quite a word

When I was thinking about what I might say today, the first thing that came to mind was generosity of the heart

Today we are talking about matters of the heart.

Really every Sunday, we gather to share what is heavy on our hearts.

We in UU congregations share our joys and concerns

And we leave space for those things left unsaid

For worship by definition means, “to gather together and create something of worth,” (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worship>)

to share what is true within us.

And I cannot talk about the human heart without talking about resilience

The dictionary describes resilience as “able to become strong, healthy, or successful again after something bad happens.” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com>)

By this definition every person you have ever met is resilient.

We as human beings are built to be resilient.

When we are young we often think we are indestructible

It takes experience to learn how fragile we really are

We find strength through experience

We learn

And somehow even after tragedy

we find a way to go on

time and time again we have the courage to reach out to others for support.

Resilience needs not be a solo task.

We can lend a hand physically but also emotionally

We often cannot stop the pain or fix what has happened but we can come alongside the injured

That’s what first drew me to chaplaincy.

Chaplaincy is really about two things:

Hospitality and presence

Notice how I didn’t say religion,

Christianity,

Or even Prayer.

Chaplaincy is about living out the “prophethood of all believers”

The history of Unitarianism is based not just on the principle of the priesthood of all believers, that dates back to the reformation,

but to what James Luther Adams referred to as the “prophethood of all believers.”

James Luther Adams was a Unitarian Universalist Minister and social activist

Valued and appreciated for his vision of a free church

Of Fellowships like this one

Open and accepting, with an understanding of diversity of faith within the same congregation
The “prophethood of all believers” is the idea that not only is god accessible to anyone but that each of us is called to a higher purpose.

That it is not just a right, but an obligation,

that each of us seek to name what is wrong in our world and do what we can to change it.

James Luther Adams shared this teaching in what he called the 5 smooth stones of religious liberalism

(<http://uubedford.org/spirituality/sermons/55-five-smooth-stones-of-religious-liberalism-the-legacy-of-james-luther-adams.html>)

James Luther Adams believed in these 5 tenants:

That revelation is continuous.

That relations between persons ought to rest on free consent and not on coercion.

That we have a moral obligation to work toward the establishment of a just and loving community.

That the good stuff doesn't just happen; we make it happen.

And that with what the universe provides and all that we can do, ultimate optimism is justified.

It is the 3rd stone that I want to talk about today.

In JLA’s words, I believe that “religious liberalism affirms the moral obligation to direct one's effort toward the establishment of a just and loving community.

It is this which makes the role of the prophet central and indispensable in liberalism.”

Prophet meaning any person

He affirms, and I believe, we are all prophets

I came today to talk to you about what I know

Preachers should only preach on the things they know

As I am new to your congregation, there’s plenty for us to learn about one another

I have spent the last six years of my life as a chaplain

Ministry was not exactly something I planned on but something I grew into

I remember being in seminary and being asked to share my story about what brought me to ministry

And many of my colleagues described a singular profound moment or even a series of moments, calling them from their youth

I could not share any story like that

I was born into an Atheist household

And my family discovered Unitarian Universalism together when I was 5 years old

I ended up at a small UU fellowship in Ames, IA for two reasons:

Because my parents didn’t want my sister and I to end up Atheists by default and because our neighbors were UU and had invited us to church

It seems to have worked for us

My sister continues to attend her local UU church and raise her kids in the religious education program

As I grew up I loved the study of religion and followed it through the Religious Education curriculum of our fellowship into college

After I graduated I settled into a job working with adults with developmental disabilities

While this work was rewarding, I couldn’t shake this nagging feeling, I needed to be doing more,

my life needed to mean more
so after some “soul” searching and heated discussion with family,
my atheist parents weren’t initially so set on me pursuing ministry
I decided I was going to go
I have developed my own personal theology that it doesn’t matter to me if there is a heaven or a
hell,
what matters is this one true life I have been given
What matters is that I am living that life fully
That I am living it with kindness, understanding and without selfishness
For generosity is the core of our moral obligation
If we are to live out our Unitarian Universalist values we must practice generosity daily
We must practice this generosity even when it’s hard and it’s the last thing we want to do
We must practice generosity towards those we wish to minister to even when their values are
different from our own
And they might rather reject our help
And we must be resilient
I have been on a journey for several years now
I have been through multiple states and multiple jobs
And each time I have moved I have looked for what my ministry might be
Because for me, ministry isn’t about a church, it’s about people and connections
It’s about matters of the heart
I learned through chaplaincy that ministry is about presence
It’s about showing up with an open heart
And that’s why I am here, sharing with you
Because my life has brought me to Montana
I never imagined I would here
I never have imagined becoming a minister
I never imagined that becoming a minister would lead me to chaplaincy
I didn’t even know what a chaplain was before seminary
And then there I was, in a hospital, talking to people I had never met before, sharing in their most
intimate of moments
Moments of overwhelming sadness
When people often believe everything has betrayed them or left them to fend for themselves
I am present in those moments
I spent a lot of time sitting with people in the awkward silence of life’s most stressful moments.
I remain present
My job was about offering water and coffee and saying I’m sorry.
Holding hands, offering tissues, saying prayers
I remember being called to the emergency room one afternoon. An elderly woman was being
brought in by ambulance because they suspected she was having a stroke.
As the chaplain, it was my job to greet the family that came and help them get settled in while
they waited.
Waited to know if things would get better, or worse.

As they unloaded the patient I walked up to the granddaughter, who was her caretaker, and introduced myself.

I said, "my name is Kali, I am the chaplain. I am just here to keep you company."

She sighed and said "oh good."

I asked, "is there anything I can do for you?"

"Can I have a hug?" she said

I said "Yes."

Chaplaincy is about showing up.

Showing up with an open heart.

Without judgments, without assurances, just offering space

Chaplaincy is religious liberalism at its best.

It is nondenominational, often non religious

Chaplaincy makes space for the prophethood of all believers.

That you and me and anyone we meet is capable of being a prophet in their own lives and the lives of those they touch.

My life's journey thus far has taught me that I am a chaplain no matter what my job title is

I hope for you the same is true

That no matter what life throws at you, you may see who you truly are, and may you live that one life fully

I have never been the type to give up easily

And so here I am in Montana

Standing before this warm, kind and inviting fellowship in Wyoming, talking about generosity

About resilience

And what we as human beings are capable of

Despite the pain present in our world right now,

I ask you to spend a moment on all the good that we are capable of

Of the kindness and understanding that our faith demands of us

Because "we have a moral obligation to work toward the establishment of a just and loving community."

Here in this Fellowship, in our homes, in Sheridan, in Wyoming, in all the world around us

Because a just and loving community is not impossible

But it's not easy

It will take time, generosity and resilience

It will mean standing up for the least among us

And sharing kindness towards even those we cannot imagine deserving it

And it begins with one action

And it never stops