

## Cadences

One of the most profound questions we will every ask, if not the most profound is : “Who are we?” In our Call to Worship today we sang, “Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?” All important questions. But of the three, intriguingly, the one that seems to get the least attention is perhaps the most important. “Who are we?” I think sometimes we just assume we know: based on where we think we’ve come from and where we believe we’re going.

Crucial to the question of “Who are we” is of course, yet another question, what “we” do we mean? “We” who are U.S. citizens? “We” who are of European heritage? “We” who are not of European heritage? “We” who are Unitarian Universalists? Or perhaps as simple as “We” who are not hungry. Or “We” who are hungry.

There are so many ways to divide ourselves. And sometimes it feels like we’ve found each and every one of them. In a few minutes we’ll talk more about that. But for right now, let me share just a little bit about the “We” who make up the Evergreen Choir.

Over the past ten years, I’ve been witness to the selfless service this choir has given to Evergreen. Day after day. Week after week. Some for the full ten years. Others coming and going as they were called. They have given a real and important “Service of Song.”

There have been any number of times over the years when people have asked me how I get such a great sound from the choir. But it's not me. It never has been. It's the choir. It's the people in the choir, who make the choice to be *a choir*. Each member “gets it.” Each and every singer understands that choir is about being a part of a whole. Choir is community incarnate.

When I was younger, I recall a phrase booming from my black and white television, yes I’m that ancient, “The Army builds character.” That may well be true. But I can tell you this for sure. Being in choir builds character. I look at our choir, see how many characters there are in it and know that this is true!

The title of today’s sermon is “Cadences.” Cadence is a musical term, apt for a service of song. A cadence is a conclusion. Sometimes it’s the end of the work, and sometimes it’s the end of a section, or movement, with a new section to follow.

Each of us, in our lives, will have many cadences. And after every cadence, no matter how “final” it may seem, something follows. A new movement begins. Until, of course, the final cadence. Yet even here there is much discussion as to whether something follows or not.

But there is something about cadences in music. These days, of course, there can be a “grunge” cadence, a heavy metal cadence. But there was a time, particularly in the classical and romantic periods... and even today ... when the only proper cadence was deemed to be a major chord. It was called the “Tierce de Picardy” or the Picardy third. We heard what kind of change it makes, when Ruth played “Rise Up Oh Flame,” but instead of ending on a minor chord, she used the Picardy third and gave us what is considered a more gentle, harmonious sound.

For me, I am glad to have this day and this choir and this truly harmonious sound as my cadence at Evergreen.

And after this cadence, what? Many of you over this past year have asked me about that. Some know that I have begun an Interfaith Church, though I haven’t spoken much about it, not wanting to distract from my work here. Some particularly have asked, what’s the difference between Interfaith and UU? I’ll try to answer that.

But an important word of caution. It is not that one is right and the other wrong. It is not that one is better and the other not as good. It is rather that there are differences, and Interfaith calls to me.

So I lead the Living Interfaith Church. A Jewish minister, leading a church. How Interfaith can you get! I had planned on starting services in September. But the congregation decided they wanted to start sooner – so we have!

But a “Church?” You may or may not be aware, that the origin of the word “church” is from both Old English and Old Germanic. It means circle. A church, in its most basic meaning is a circle. I like that idea. It’s hard to have a hierarchy in a circle. Not impossible! But hard.

So: Interfaith? Interfaith cooperation is something we well understand. It’s people of differing faiths coming together to do a project. Our wonderful interfaith shelter in Snohomish County is a grand example. Interfaith dialogue is a little harder. It involves people of differing faiths coming together to discuss their differing truths,

without rancor or screaming, before returning to their own houses of worship. This is a wonderful step forward. But what is Interfaith, as a faith?

Baha'i, Jew, Muslim, Christian, Humanist, Seeker, and others. It may sound like a large number, but right now there are twelve to fifteen of us, yet already that diverse, who come together to worship together. One crucial aspect is that NONE of us is asked to leave our beliefs at the door. We bring them in with us. What *is* asked is that each of us respect the beliefs of the person sitting next to us, who has also not left his or her beliefs at the door. That forms the core and the joy of what I mean by the path of Interfaith. A path to which I am deeply committed.

This past year, at the Interfaith Community Church in Ballard, which I'll also be leaving next month, I led a celebration of Christmas, where a friend who is a minister talked about Jesus as Christ, a friend who is Muslim talked about the respect with which the Qur'an views Jesus as a great prophet, and I discussed peace on earth, good will to all as a universal aspiration. I was privileged to lead similarly Interfaith services for the High Holy Days and Ramadan. And for four years I've led a glorious Interfaith Passover Seder for the entire congregation, that has included not only Jewish, Christian and Muslim, but Buddhist, First Peoples and other perspectives. A key aspect of Interfaith, then, is not to ignore our spiritual holidays, nor to see them as competing ideas of "the truth," but rather as different and profound ways of viewing the sacred that we can share.

Indeed, key to Interfaith is acknowledging that each of us encounters the sacred in our own way. **And each encounter is valid.** How could it not be? It's what we've encountered.

As example. Suppose I get up in the morning – admittedly a good way to start the day – but I'm just a little groggy and on my way to the bathroom I run into the door – nothing like a sermon based on personal experience! Nothing serious. Just a red indentation on my forehead reminding me of what happens when one encounters an immovable object.

I get to work, and someone sees that gentle red crease in the middle of my forehead and exclaims "Aha! I know what happened to you!" I look at him or her as if, perhaps, this person is from Mars, but then what my co-worker tells me is, "You were groggy when you got out of bed this morning, right?" I'm amazed, but I have to admit: "Yep."

“I knew it,” my co-worker tells me. “The exact same thing happened to me. You were groggy. You reached high for a book. It slipped from your hand and hit you in the forehead.”

I explain that ... no, I actually ran into a door. My co-worker then argues with me. Based on his or her experience, that person knows what I must have experienced to have that crease, and once I see the light, my co-worker is certain I'll realize the truth that a book fell on me.

All too often this is how we treat each other's sacred encounters. We know what we've experienced. We know the truth of it because we experienced it. And then we apply it to the world.

The idea of Interfaith is to come together, to share our individual experiences of the sacred – not to convert, not to convince, but out of respect, and love for one another – and perhaps to learn a thing or two.

At last month's Living Interfaith service, we looked at an amazing commonality among our spiritual paths, as different as they are. And that is that while our spiritual paths ask us to worship in so many different ways, while our spiritual paths envision God, or no God, in so many different ways, what we are asked to DO about it is remarkably similar. For every spiritual path contains its own version of the Golden Rule. From the New World, Old World, Africa, China, India, Europe, Middle East. God or Goddess or no God. **Love one another.**

So if love is the answer, and we all know it, why are we still hating?

I do want to be clear that I do **not** believe that Interfaith is the only path to realizing at last the Golden Rule. But it is a path, a workable path, a path, I believe, that can help us be better Jews, better Christians, better Buddhists, better Muslims, better Humanists, better Seekers – because it involves listening to each other as well as working together, and so I have committed my life to it.

So, at this age, instead of retiring. I'm starting a new church. I have waited most of my life for someone else to do it, so I could join. But I am increasingly aware that I am “time-limited.” And the words of Hillel haunt me. “If not now, when?”

Some of you here have asked me, so sweetly, if it's ok if you come by. My answer is of course. You are welcome. You will not be asked to leave who you are at the door. What you will be asked is to remember that the person seated next to you has also not left him or herself at the door.

So, my friends, we come to our cadence. I turn the page and move on. But I will never forget these ten years. I will never forget the people I have worked with, the music we've created, the spiritual connections we have made. I have learned a lot these ten years. I hope in some small way I have been able to give back as well as to take.

Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?

We inhabit an increasingly small planet, and an increasingly endangered one. It will require not only our heads, but our hearts if we are to at long last learn to love one another and to treat each other with compassion.

Shakespeare wrote, "If music be the food of love ... play on."

May it be so.