

## **Blessings on the Journey**

A Farewell Sermon by the Revs. Phyllis L. Hubbell  
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The First Unitarian Church of Baltimore  
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**John:** In one of humanity's archetypal stories, Abraham hears God's call to set off from his familiar home to a distant land that God would show him. "Go forth," God says, --

Go forth from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

In trust, he embarks on an epic journey to an unknown destination.

Over the centuries, this story has been taken as a metaphor for the journeys of life to which all of us are called. We must leave behind the familiar and the comfortable for a dream. We will miss our former companions. We may not find new ones. We may stumble and fall far from those who love us.

**Phyllis:** Those fears were with us we left our careers at the law to venture into ministry. They were with us as we decided the journey was calling us on to co-ministry after settling in and making good friends in Canada. So they today, as we venture not just into a new type and place of ministry, but as we face the passing years of our lives..

The time is right for this change, both in the life of this church and in our own.

Life at the law was secure and comfortable. But had I stayed, I would not be the person I am today. I've have grown here at this church. I had never known

anyone who was deaf before I came to this church. I missed one meeting of the Worship Committee at which someone suggested that since we were committed to diversity we should have sign language interpreters and the rest has become part of our history.

You have given me the great gift of your stories and your love. You have accepted my missteps and my imperfections. You have challenged me to grow. I am not only a better minister. I am a better person for having walked with you these fourteen years.

**John:** I had been involved with antiracism work for many years. I had not known *any* glbt folks well before I came to the church. I had not been active in advocacy. I had never been interviewed by the press. I had only been to one rally before, Martin Luther King's great march on Washington, where I stood around the fringes, hoping none of my law partners would see me. David Eaton, my former minister worried that I didn't have enough passion for justice. He was right. It was here that I found my passion. Here, with your support, I found my voice.

**Phyllis:** For many of you, too, these last fourteen years have been challenging as well. Like us, you've had the chance to know people you might never have known anywhere else, know in a deep sense, experiencing the world through their experiences, through their eyes or ears, or beautifully expressive hands. Your horizon has widened as your spirit has been stretched.

You have known the joy of being part of a growing, vital congregation. You have watched banners go up, and fears come down. We have traveled together to conferences and workshops. We have eaten together, celebrated together, and

cooked for Our Daily Bread. We have made music together and danced, we've studied and learned, and painted and nailed and scrubbed. We have drunk coffee and folded newsletters, cleaned out the catacombs and shoveled the snow and the pigeon poop. For many of us, the life of the church has become *our* life, and we have become one. The holy, by whatever name she is known, has become our home.

**John:** The poet and mystic, Tagore, has compared our lives with the flight of the cranes. He prays:

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests, let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee.<sup>1</sup>

Building on this image in a classic little book called Praying Our Goodbyes which former member Jan Schutzman has sent to us, author Joyce Rupp spoke of the longing of our “pilgrim hearts” – the “part of us that is never home, that is always stretching and yearning to be home but knows that we have not yet arrived.” Rupp suggests that –

When we recognize this faith dimension of our lives, it can make the necessity of goodbyes a little easier to understand . . . . We can see our life experiences from the perspective of going home, and we can know that the . . . yearning of our spirits is natural because we are in the homeward process.<sup>2</sup>

We see “home” as the goal toward which our souls strive throughout our days. When we are following the call of the holy, we are paradoxically both on the

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<sup>1</sup>Rabindranath Tagore, quoted in Joyce Rupp, Praying Our Goodbyes (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1988), p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 63-64.

journey, and at home simultaneously. It's only in living the discomfort and the challenge of our journeys that we also experience the beauty of life lived in its fullest depth, that we become the people we yearn to be, that we discover the meaning and the purpose of our lives.

As we travel, Rupp says, we are (in the words of an ancient Aztec prayer), “on loan” to each other, “but only for so short a while. “

Deep down we know that all is on loan to us. Life does change and sometimes so quickly. . . . We go to bed one evening feeling good about life . . . We awake in the morning and . . . our world can be turned upside down. . . . All of life is filled with loss and with letting go. For the one who believes that all is on loan, this is to be expected. . . . The present moment is treasured and enjoyed all the more because it is so precious and so fleeting.<sup>3</sup>

Our losses are still painful, but our focus “is on life and love . . . because [we know] that the one thing that does last forever is love,” which is on *permanent* loan to us.

**Phyllis:** The way leads on for each of us. Constantly we say goodbye. Constantly, we say hello. If we are blessed, for a time we travel together in worshiping communities, joined in our celebration of life and seeking for meaning, united in our witness to that which is greater than ourselves, to the Spirit of Life, the Spirit of Love, to the Great Mother God who calls us to cherish and honor the earth, to the eternal God who calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves. We search together. Journey together. Even when apart. Even at the forks of the road.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 69-70.

Until we meet again, may we travel our respective roads with courage and grace. Always together. Always separate. May we never tire of the search for truth, the search for meaning, and the quest for justice. Together and apart, may we bless the world.