

FINDING HEART:  
EMPOWERING YOUR MINISTRY

A Sermon By  
The Rev. Susan Manker-Seale  
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I think it's very cool that President Barak Obama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize this week! Isn't that great! The Nobel committee praised his "extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples."

Obama is one of those human beings who is in touch with his core values. He also strikes me as being in touch with his ministry. I first heard him on the radio two summers ago while driving in the mountains near Tahoe. He was speaking to a huge crowd in Berlin, and his words were so respectful of the different peoples of the world and so hopeful for a global community of peace that I was moved to tears. We have been starved for a vision that crosses national borders and calls to us as a larger humanity. I am so happy Obama was recognized this way.

Obama knows how to minister to the people. He is in touch with his heart, with what he truly believes is most important for the world, and he has the heart, the courage, to strive to make those values manifest in the world. This is lay ministry, and anyone can engage in it. One does not need to be ordained; one need merely to be in touch with their heart and to have heart, to care deeply and to work towards a compassionate purpose.

Jelaluddin Rumi, the thirteenth century mystical poet and Sufi doctor of theology, said, "Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground." This has been my favorite quote for many years, but sometime in the last year or so I lost touch with it. I actually forgot it, until a woman put it into my hand last Thursday night at the first multi-faith worship service for Pride. She played the flute for the service, and afterwards she handed me her card. She had quoted Rumi on it: "Let the beauty we love be what we do."

How many times do we have to be reminded of the power of the heart? The Dhammapada says, "The way is not in the sky. The way is in the heart." It's in here, the power, the knowledge, the yearning, the seed of all that we do in our lives, the force behind the choices we make, the things we avoid, the paths we seek. It's in here, and if you desire to minister to the world, this is where you start.

I may make it a tradition to tell this story of Jeff Knowles, one of our Charter members who was my age and was our religious education director for my first two years here. He died two years ago next Sunday, and those who knew him still miss him, including our children, now teens, now young adults.

Long ago, we met each other at camp, at de Benneville Pines in the San Bernardino Mountains. He loved to be a camp counselor, and I was often Minister-in-Residence for camps as my children were growing up. Jeff and I had driven across the desert to California at least twice that I remember, ferrying kids to camp. Sometime in those years, I realized that Jeff had a deep and abiding love for children, a concern that their rights be respected and that they be included in all that we do as much as possible. His own upbringing may have led him to this passion, but also I think that Jeff's life was one of care-giving, for his brother, Kit, and whenever she would allow it, his sister, Kathy. And having grown up UU, he had developed an empowering sense of his own lay ministry - maybe even spurred by his mother, Virginia's, decision to enter the UU ministry after having been a religious education director herself.

Jeff's concern for children led him to have his own business in providing characters for children's parties, and his living room wall was filled with costumes. In our day and age, it's probably a little more difficult for a man to openly care for children, but if you keep your safety measures in place, as for anyone, it can be a healing ministry - like our Santa Claus tradition. Jeff's heart was firmly for the children, fed by his past and his present, informing his choices in his life, and Jeff had the heart, the courage, to make his compassion manifest in the world, through his business, his volunteering at church and camp, and his monitoring of our congregation's relationship with our children.

What's in your heart? What has guided the choices you've made in your life? Do you sometimes feel a yearning to do something more, something greater than what you have managed so far? Do you need to make a change in yourself, your life, your world?

This is the ninth year of our Finding Heart Ministries small-groups program. When the rest of the UU world was developing the idea of Covenant groups, we were creating what we called Finding Heart. They're probably close to the same thing, only the original covenant groups seemed focused on discussion and topics, and, of course, a covenant about how we were to be together. I, we, wanted our Finding Heart groups to go deeper, to help each other connect with what is deepest in the heart, our core values, to uplift them, to celebrate them in small-group worship, and to get the courage, the heart, to make those decisions and changes that transform our lives into a ministry, inspired by the heart, propelled by heart.

“Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.” What I love about that second part of the quote is that it ties this path firmly to faith, to worship, to appreciating the world and life. Whether you believe in god or a higher power or the deep mysteries of life, the analogy for where the truth resides has been and still is called “the heart.” When you are aware of what you love, and allow that beauty to guide your hands, you are kneeling and kissing the ground of this earth we share.

Dale Golis gave me a copy of a 2007 article from the *UU World* entitled “The Heart of Our Faith,” by Galen Guengerich. Galen is one of my colleagues in ministry, and I love a lot of what he said, especially this: “I believe that gratitude is the appropriate religious response to the nature of the universe.” He proposes, and makes this the subtitle of his article, that “Gratitude should be the center of Unitarian Universalist theology.” Some of us, like Galen, are looking at collective ministry, at defining what is at the heart of who we are as Unitarian Universalists, as

an individual congregation tied to other congregations in the covenant of our Purposes and Principles. This next weekend we are going to gather in our all-congregation retreat to look again at our collective ministry, mostly in terms of actions, but we also need to be aware of the propelling force that resides in our hearts. It's something to meditate on this coming week before we gather on Saturday. And I hope to see you all there.

This Sunday, though, today we kick off the Finding Heart Ministries program for another year, and invite you to sign up for a small group of eight to ten people to meet for six weeks in a row at first, and then once a month or so for the rest of the year if you wish, to explore your heart, share your hearts in intimate worship, and garner the heart to engage your lay ministry actively and purposefully. Ron Meikle is the Coordinator of Finding Heart this year, and we have seven groups with facilitators lined up and listed in the order of service. They'll speak a little later, just a bit, to share their passion about this program.

I'm going to close with another quote from Rumi that I just found in my little book called *Thinking Outside the Church*. Rumi says, "It is a burning of the heart that I want; it is this burning that is everything, more precious than the empire of the world, because it calls God secretly in the night." May you burn with what is most precious to you, and with heart, and gratitude, bless the earth with both your presence and your actions, your ministry.