

## Finding Home

It is the nature of living beings to seek connection. The most fundamental reality of human experience is that none of us can survive on our own. We are utterly and endlessly dependent on people known and unknown, for our lives - our food, our clothes, our care. But the nature of our physical interdependence does not necessarily yield what our emotional and spiritual health needs most of all: love, and community. Friends. Real, lasting, and authentic human relationships.

Our family was able to see *Harriet* this weekend. This story of Araminta Ross, who drew on her own resources of strength and courage, and fled slavery, heading north. Making it to Philadelphia on her own was an incredible feat - and yet, she didn't actually do it alone. She was sheltered by an Amish farmer, who let her hide in his wagon and who carried her to safety before revealing he knew she was there. She was cared for by strangers along the way, and taken in by free Black leaders in Philadelphia when she arrived - people who fed and clothed her, helped her bathe and and helped her get work, people who even helped her take her free name: Harriet Tubman. Tubman was buoyed in her life by her abiding trust in her God - that was her rock. But she both had her being and her brilliance in taking the moral courage her faith gave her, and turning it to the freedom of as many people like herself as she possibly could. She freed her literal family, and the larger family of those who were enslaved. And it was made possible by an incredible array and

alliance of morally deep and profoundly courageous people who risked their own lives, their families and their freedom to create the Underground Railroad. Through their efforts, thousands of formerly enslaved people made their way to freedom in the North and in Canada.

The brightest stars in our moral firmament have come when a constellation of particular qualities and events align: when the world around us is eclipsed by evil - - evil such as slavery, genocide, violent persecution, or rising tides of hatred...when such dangerous times arise, some people respond by searching their hearts or consulting the dictates of their faith, and determine to do what good they can - to try to save what they love. To accomplish this, we need others who are also willing to face their fear and claim a higher good -- people who have moral courage, the courage of their convictions. We need at least a small group of people with whom we can hold hands and face the darkness. We need allies and co-conspirators on that hard road. We cannot do it alone.

One of my own great heroes of moral courage is Sophie Scholl. Sophie was a Lutheran Christian in Germany during the rise of Hitler. Her father was the Buergermeister of her town, but he did not support Hitler, whom he called "God's scourge." Scholl's Christian upbringing emphasized the "underlying dignity of every person," which I hope sounds very familiar. When she attended college, her brother, Hans, with a few others, started what would be called the White Rose Nazi

resistance movement. Sophie immediately joined. Their main activity was writing anti-Nazi pamphlets and distributing them, with messages such as ““Nothing is so unworthy of a nation as allowing itself to be governed without opposition by a clique that has yielded to base instinct...Western civilization must defend itself against fascism and offer...resistance, before the nation’s last young man has given his blood on some battlefield.” As a woman, Sophie was assumed to be less likely to be noticed or suspected as she distributed the pamphlets. However, the Gestapo was on high alert for any sign of resistance, and the group was soon caught. Sophie and her brother were sent before the chief justice of the People’s Court of the Greater German Reich, and ardent and vituperative Nazi. They were found guilty and sentenced to death. However, even her executioner was moved by her bravery in facing her death, and recorded her final words, which were: “How can we expect righteousness to prevail when there is hardly anyone willing to give himself up individually to a righteous cause? Such a fine, sunny day, and I have to go, but what does my death matter, if through us, thousands of people are awakened and stirred to action?”

Sophie and Hans Scholl are considered by the German people to be the fourth greatest Germans of all time. The reason they had this capacity for heroism is the same as we see in the stories of great souls throughout human history: personal

faith, a community of like-minded souls, an ethical and moral compulsion, and the courage to face the dangers of their moment in history.

Not all people who step forward to resist an evil tide are heroes whose names echo throughout history. We remember the name Mohandas Gandhi, but not the names of the hundreds of Indians who joined him in the Salt March and were beaten by the British. We remember Dr. King but not the name of every single person who faced death on the Edmund Pettus bridge. We remember Susan B. Anthony, but may forget that Harriet Tubman also fought for suffrage...and that there were many women who were beaten and jailed and even died seeking equality.

Every generation has its fights, its dangers, its demands, its ills. Every single one. This generation certainly does. What creates the conditions for brave, bold souls to engage their moral imagination and tackle the challenges of their day? More than anything, it is having a place to call home, a place where like-minded people can encourage and strengthen one another, a place where deep and authentic connection makes inspiration, hope and purpose possible. A place like - a church. A place like All Souls.

It was true when Henry Whitney Bellows and members of All Souls sought to make sure the temptation to accommodate the South was resisted, when they created the Union League - or when Louisa Schuyler and other All Souls women

prevailed upon Bellows to create pressure for what would become the US Sanitary Commission. It was true when members of All Souls resisted the regressive and deadly fearmongering of the early AIDs epidemic, and set themselves to the task of a public campaign to understand HIV/AIDs and treat those with the illness as human beings with an illness -- not as lepers and pariahs.

When you tell the stories of people who rose to their moment -- or even when we tell the stories of significant history being made by people at All Souls -- it elides certain other truths that we need to face. Dr. King put it succinctly: "...worship at its best is a social experience with people of all levels of life coming together to realize their oneness and unity under God. Whenever the church, consciously or unconsciously, caters to one class it loses the spiritual force of the "whosoever will, let him come, doctrine and is in danger of becoming a little more than a social club with a thin veneer of religiosity. ...a church that has lost its voice for justice is a church that has lost its relevance in the world."

We are the church. You and me and Galen and our kids upstairs and our friends who aren't here today...we're the church. What we do together, in worship but also in whispers; at coffee hour and at the Board meeting later today...in the streets or in our kitchen...What we do and create together is the crucible of our faith. Every time we gather, we create the conditions for people to grow in love, to talk about

important matters of ethical, spiritual, and moral power, to feel seen and included - or we do not. Each encounter with someone we know or someone new is our individual portion of saving grace -- will we offer it, or will we withhold it? Will we speak authentically, but also with compassion and care for one another? Will we encourage each other to be brave, to answer the call of justice and do the work of love?

“I am a member of the great family of All Souls.”(Channing) Like any family, this church family -- all of us, together, yes, even you who slip in and then flee when the service is over -- we really are in this together. If you come and go, remember that it is the faithfulness of those who show up again and again, who commit to this place and who offer their time, their treasure, their talent and most of all, their love, that make it possible for us to invite and include everyone who arrives. It's ok if sometimes, what we do together is laugh and eat and dance - that is important.

Indeed, did you know that when we have studied people who have survived genocide and war and other brutality, the way we humans process and begin to recover is by singing and dancing, eating and laughing together? We need one another. We need the joyful times, times of quiet and reflective togetherness, times when we talk strategy and put our creativity to work. We also need to listen and talk together deeply, so that we can have hard conversations that lead to transformation, that build our resilience and courage to go out and face the evils of

this age. Because friends, hard tides are rising again. We need to be able to hold hands and know there is a family behind us when we go out into it.

One last thing to hold is that being and becoming the great family of All Souls means that we must genuinely take time together. Sherry Turkle is the Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of the Social Studies of Science and Technology at MIT. And if you ever get to spend time with this MIT professor, what she will tell you is that the thing we need most in our current wildly interconnected, screen-centered world, is face to face conversation. We need to sit with one another, and let the interaction happen. “Conversations, as they tend to play out in person, are messy—full of pauses and interruptions and topic changes and assorted awkwardness. But the messiness is what allows for true exchange. It gives participants the time—and, just as important, the permission—to think and react and glean insights. “You can’t always tell, in a conversation, when the interesting bit is going to come,” Turkle says. “It’s like dancing: slow, slow, *quick-quick*, slow. You know? It seems boring, but all of a sudden there’s something, and *whoa.*”

As people making our way in the world, we spend a lot of time “fronting;” we have times when we feel pressure to appear serious, competent, unapproachable (like on the subway), or some other way that may be more appearance than essence. We need places and people with whom we can be our full and authentic selves --

places where we can try new things, make mistakes, be forgiven, practice forgiving others, laugh and be silly, and simply feel not so alone. Galen has put forward a vision of All Souls as a “laboratory congregation.” In order to be able to be bold and try out new things that might reshape the religious landscape and transform Unitarian Universalism or the world around us, we need to be a place where we trust one another, have comfort with and confidence in one another, and know that we can do hard things and get through hard times. And why should we doubt that? For over two hundred years, generations of people have come to All Souls, made it their home, and been our foreparents in this great family. They have survived war and economic devastation, the loss of church homes and the gain of new ones, they have built opportunity and seen the passing of great people and projects. In their time, they laughed, loved, sang and ate together. Let us remember that just as they built a home that we have inherited, we, too, are building a home for ourselves, and for our children’s children. Let us love finding our own place in the great family of All Souls. Amen, ashe, blessed be.