

Affirmation Blessing – (You are ok)

This is an affirmation blessing that I made up for our daughters over a series of bedtimes after my wife and I made them aware of our divorce:

You're ok. You've always been ok. And you're going to be ok.
Even if you don't feel ok right now.

Remember that you are beautiful in form and in spirit
And you're FAR more powerful than you know.

And you are loved, as you love, and I feel your love.

And I love you, more than you can possibly know.

And I will love you until the white wings of time scatter my bits throughout
the cosmos

And even then, I will love you and you will feel my love.

Good night, sleep well.

This night will end.

And morning will come.

A Shared Ministry

“We are woven together with everything like the threads of a brightly colored tapestry.”

I've created a couple dozen unique services since I started doing them in 2008.

Probably because I grew up in the Catholic Church, where sermons always related to the Gospels, I thought it a good practice to reference the 7 Principles of Unitarian Universalism and explore and illustrate how they related to the getting through the day of as a human being.

Over time, I discovered that regardless of the subject matter, the underlying message I was sending over and over and over again was about connection itself, because that just organically became the most important thing.

Feeling connected is essential to any spiritual practice or physical law, and just getting through the day as a human being. And by spiritual practice, I mean those rituals that we do to feel generally present within ourselves and with the world around us. They could be overtly spiritual or theologically religious like meditation

or prayer - or not. They could be a daily run, writing in our journal, practicing the piano; basically anything that we do ritualistically because it helps, in some way.

Unitarian Universalism is a covenantal religion. Covenant is about how we are to be together, and so our principles are about connection. And as I drew our principles into my services, I discovered that there were three principles that were the pillars; that were essential and central and threaded through the others:

- The inherent worth and dignity of the individual
- Respect for the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part.
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning

I am not a numerologist, but to paraphrase multiplication rock, three is an essential number. It takes a minimum of three legs to hold up a stool; three wheels to make a vehicle that doesn't fall over when you walk away from it; and the music we've listened to today is understood in three parts - rhythm, melody, and harmony.

These three principles lean on each other, and in doing so, create a stable support system for developing a personal religious practice, which frankly is a more basic human need than food clothing and shelter.

Every animal needs to be fed, warm, and safe. HUMANS are narrative and need some kind sense of our significance. We look at ourselves, and everything around us, and try to understand where our place is in society - in life:

What does it mean to be [insert your name here]?

There was a time as a young man that I struggled mightily with seeing my place in things. I was sure I would never find it. This made me feel lonely and apart. I felt useless. Meaningless. Not in control. This made me feel depressed, and my depression made me disengage.

And that was the worst thing I could do. Because the only way to understand the meaning of something or the value of something, is to put it next to something else. Not to see if it's better or worse, but to see how it's similar or different.

And by disengaging and staying away from others, I had no context to understand myself.

You remember that rosy paint color that looked so perfect on the color chart? You took it home, put it on the wall, stood back and said, "Oh my, no. That's pink."

So, my pink post-teen self hadn't really tried to fit yet. I had not put myself out there, I had not really tested my value. I had not truly administrated my life. So, I decided that some self-care was in order.

I asked for help. I got some counseling – counseling is a ministry. I ministered to myself in several ways. For one, I started writing every day – and as I did that my songs got deeper.

And as I ministered to myself, I realized that I became more present.

As I ministered to myself, I realized that I began to feel the respect and esteem of others.

As I ministered to myself, I realized that my relationships to people around me improved.

As I ministered to myself I ironically, became less self-centered.

As I engaged, I realized that there was a world around me and there was this exchange happening.

People fed me dinner and I would tell them how delicious their food was. I played them some songs and they would tell me how much my songs touched them. It wasn't until much later that I realized that as they fed my mouth and stomach, I was feeding their ears and their minds. Our interactions were affirming each other's value. We were ministering to each other.

You know why flight attendants instruct you to "put on your oxygen mask before assisting others"? It's because as much as admirable as it is to want to help others, we are no help to anyone if we're passed out in our seat. Regular self-care maintains one's own value and maintains our value to others.

My sister has a side business (it's actually her passion) doing workshops and on-to-one sessions helping people define their value and realize their potential on their path forward. She puts forward the concept as Filling Up Your Cup. The goal, of course, is an overflowing cup where you have extra for others. But it's more than that. Because if you know how to fill up your own cup, then your glass may at times be half-full, but it's never empty.

I will tell you that without Kristin, I don't know how I would have landed on my feet after 15-years as a stay-at-home dad who needed to become self-sufficient in my mid-fifties. She helped me cobble together a coherent resume from the myriad of things I had done since my last staff job.

My sister is a minister.

Kristin and I are of that age when the ministerial role of assisting our aging mother has forced all three of us to watch it all change while wishing that we could just keep it the same. But that's often part of the responsibility of ministry: To make decisions that are not just unpopular but may not even be what the minister would prefer.

So why does a minister make that particular decision? Because it is for the greater good.

It is very painful for the three of us, our mother, and her children, to navigate the shifting ministerial roles in our family covenant. Our Mom and Dad had ministered to us growing up. And while my sister and I are returning the favor to our mother, who understandably, doesn't always appreciate the ministry, Kristin and John are also ministering to each other.

My chalice here is two figures locking arms. But I want to find a version that has three figures: because it's an essential number. And it's the ultimate analogy of community. Because each figure is touching the other two. Each figure is connected to the entire community.

That chalice is a representation of covenant. And it illustrates that ministry does not travel one way. Any one of those figures can, at once, be administering to the right, and accepting from the left. A shared ministry.

Ministry is care. Ministry is empathy. Ministry is competence. Think of anything in your life... where ministry is NOT at work.

You might say, "Well some countries give their cabinet directors the title of Minister. That doesn't seem like ministry to me - they may be political operatives and not operating for the greater good."

Point taken. That's where competence comes in. Competence, not competition. Ministry is never about winning. It's not about self-interest. It's about lifting others up. Yet it's not about selflessness.

Have you ever looked closely at a milking stool? It's three legs lean toward each other under the seat. To put a fine point on it, those three legs are literally falling together. And the reason they don't fall is because they are holding each other up and holding up the seat of the dairy farmer. They are performing a greater good. Plus - 3 legs are stable on uneven ground. More would be a lesser good in this case.

The ground we find ourselves on right now is very uneven. If ever the "think globally, act locally" aphorism had resonance, it's now.

A virus has spread across the globe. If you think I'm referencing COVID, you're only partially right. The real virus is the human instinct to "see what we wanna see and hear what we wanna hear and believe what we wanna believe". It has taken the purveyance of a common truth that was the promise of the internet and turned it into a narrative battle ground. And while the "collateral damage" from COVID was a loss of sense smell and taste, this other virus is destroying our common sense of responsibility. Without that, we share nothing.

The argument we're having over masks? Remember the airplane – you put your mask on not just to save yourself but to help others. That's ministry.

Our 6th principle starts with the phrase, "The *goal* of a world community..." My friends, the idea of a shared ministry has to go viral because we really don't need more evidence that a world community is not a goal, but actual reality right now.

And if there was ever a time that we needed to establish a worldwide covenant, it's now. It feels like we're falling, so let's fall together.
