



White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church

Grow Your Soul & Serve the World

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Theme for October

Purpose – the practice of letting your life speak

Each month, our church gathers around a monthly theme and practice to guide our congregational life: worship, small groups, religious education, justice, and classes. Use these readings for reflection around the dinner table, in your own prayer practice, alone or with others.

More online at www.wbuuc.org/themes.

QUESTIONS

What resources (people, texts, experiences) have helped you explore purpose in life?

How have you experienced *purpose*, or life being *purposeful* in small, everyday ways?

How do you express your values or beliefs through your actions and way of living?

How do you balance the realities of your life with the deep longing of your heart?

QUOTES

The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

I believe that the purpose of life is to be happy.

- The Dalai Lama

The mystery of human existence lies not in just staying alive, but in finding something to live for.

- Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am.

- Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*

I have finally concluded, maybe that's what life is about: there's a lot of despair, but also the odd moment of beauty, where time is no longer the same. It's as if those strains of music created a sort of interlude in time, something suspended, an elsewhere that had come to us, an always within never. Yes, that's it, an always within never.

- from Muriel Barbery's *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*

But if I am to let my life speak things I want to hear, things I would gladly tell others, I must also let it speak things I do not want to hear and would never tell anyone else! My life is not only about my strengths and virtues; it is also about my liabilities and my limits, my trespasses and my shadow. An inevitable though often ignored dimension of the quest for 'wholeness' is that we must embrace what we dislike or find shameful about ourselves as well as what we are confident and proud of."

- Parker J. Palmer

Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign language. Do not now look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them. It is a question of experiencing everything. At present you need to live the question. Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answer, some distant day.

- Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*

POETRY & LYRICS

Reverie In Open Air

I acknowledge my status as a stranger:
Inappropriate clothes, odd habits
Out of sync with wasp and wren.
I admit I don't know how
To sit still or move without purpose.
I prefer books to moonlight, statuary to
trees.

But this lawn has been leveled for
looking,

So I kick off my sandals and walk its cool
green.
Who claims we're mere muscle and
fluids?
My feet are the primitives here.
As for the rest—ah, the air now
Is a tonic of absence, bearing nothing
But news of a breeze.

- Rita Dove

Alone

Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone.

I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.
There are some millionaires
With money they can't use
Their wives run round like banshees
Their children sing the blues
They've got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone.

But nobody
No, nobody

Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.
Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The race of man is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
'Cause nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

- Maya Angelou

READINGS & EXCERPTS

*The following are excerpts of **Leading from Within** by Parker J. Palmer*

*Note: This piece comes from Chapter V of Parker Palmer's book, **Let Your Life Speak**.*

If you are also here, doing what you do, then you also exercise leadership of some sort....consciousness precedes being, and not the other way around, as the Marxists claim. For this reason, the salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness and in human responsibility. Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better...and the catastrophe toward which this world is headed—be it ecological, social, demographic or a general breakdown of civilization—will be unavoidable. Material reality, Havel claims, is not the fundamental factor in the movement of human history. Consciousness is. Awareness is. Thought is. Spirit is. These are not the ephemera of dreams. They are the inner Archimedean points from which oppressed people have gained the leverage to lift immense boulders and release transformative change.

We can make choices about what we are going to project, and with those choices we help grow the world that is. Consciousness precedes being: consciousness, yours and mine, can form, deform, or reform our world. Our complicity in world-making is a source of awesome and sometimes painful responsibility—and a source of profound hope for change. It is the ground of our common call to leadership, the truth that makes leaders of us all.

But Annie Dillard has given us a vivid image of what authentic spirituality is about: In the deeps are the violence and terror of which psychology has warned us. But if you ride these monsters down, if you drop with them farther over the world's rim, you find what our sciences can not locate or name, the substrate, the ocean or matrix or ether which buoys the rest, which gives goodness its power for good, and evil its power for evil, the unified field: our complex and inexplicable caring for each other, and for our life together here. This is given. It is not learned.

Why must we go in and down? Because as we do so, we will meet the darkness that we carry within ourselves—the ultimate source of the shadows that we project onto other people. If we do not understand that the enemy is within, we will find a thousand ways of making someone “out there” into the enemy, becoming leaders who oppress rather than liberate others.

Can we help each other deal with the inner issues inherent in leadership? We can, and I believe we must. First, we could lift up the value of “inner work.” That phrase should become commonplace in families, schools, and religious institutions, at least, helping us to understand that inner work is as real as outer work and involves skills one can develop, skills like journaling, reflective reading, spiritual friendship, meditation, and prayer. We can teach our children something that their parents did not always know: if people skimp on their inner work, their outer work will suffer as well. Second, we could spread the word that inner work, though it is a deeply personal matter, is not necessarily a private matter: inner work can be helped along in community. For example, there is the Quaker “clearness committee” mentioned earlier in this book. In this process, you take a personal issue to a small group of people who are prohibited from giving you “fixes” or advice, but who, for three hours, pose honest, open questions to help you discover your inner truth. Communal processes of this sort are supportive but not invasive. They help us probe questions and possibilities but forbid us from rendering judgment, allowing us to serve as midwives to a birth of consciousness that can only come from within.

We must come together in ways that respect the solitude of the soul, that avoid the unconscious violence we do when we try to save each other, that evoke our capacity to hold another life in ways that honor its mystery, never trying to coerce the other into meeting our own needs. We have places of fear inside of us, but we have other places as well—places with names like trust, and hope, and faith. We can choose to lead from one of those places, to stand on ground that is not riddled with the fault lines of fear, to move toward others from a place of promise instead of anxiety. As we stand in one of those places, fear may remain close at hand and our spirits may still tremble. But now we stand on ground that will support us, ground from which we can lead others toward a more trustworthy, more hopeful, more faithful way of being in the world.