

Second Unitarian Church
 15 August 2010 Worship
 "Purpose of Life"
 © Rev. Rudra Dundzila

Readings

1) From Stephen Covey's The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

The most fundamental application of "begin with the end in mind" is to begin today with the image, picture, or paradigm of the end of your life as your frame of reference or the criterion by which everything else is examined. Each part of your life—today's behavior, tomorrow's behavior, next week's behavior, next month's behavior—can be examined in the context of the whole, of what really matters to you. By keeping that end clearly in mind, you can make certain that whatever you do on any particular day does not violate the criteria you have defined as supremely important, and that each day of your life contributes in a meaningful way to the vision you have of your life as a whole.

The most effective way I know to begin with the end in mind is to develop a personal mission statement or philosophy or creed. It focuses on what you want to be (character) and to do (contributions and achievements) and on the values or principles upon which being and doing are based.

2) From the non-canonical Christian scripture, The Falling Asleep of Mary

Saint Thomas, who had been preaching in far-off India, found himself swept up in a swirling cloud which took him to a spot in the air above the tomb of Mary Mother of God, where he witnessed her ascent. He asked her where she was going; in answer, she tossed her girdle to him.

Thomas ultimately landed near the tomb, where he met the other surviving apostles. He begged them to let him see her body so that he could say goodbye, and that's when it was discovered that she had left the earth in body and in spirit, to intercede on the behalf of the faithful. The apostles found her clothes left behind in the tomb, where it was said that they emanated a wonderful fragrance, a true "odor of sanctity".

Sermon

Danny, one of my acquaintances, recently graduated with his masters in psychology at IIT. He's going on for his Ph.D. He wants to work in industrial psychology, human resources management.

A group of us was out a bar having some drinks with him. He said the weirdest thing. He wants to become rich and powerful.

That surprised me.

I didn't perceive those goals in him. Most psychologists I know want to help people. I know people in this congregation who are therapists. They have a clear vocation to help others.

And I've also seen Danny's compassion, care and concern for people.

But at 30, he feels he's behind his friends. He lives with room mates in an apartment. Other grad students. No condo, no house, no family. He's single, dating other students.

So money has become an issue for him. He wants to be rich, since he feels poor. But he will make good money once he gets his doctorate, esp. in industrial psychology. That's a few years away.

And he wants to be powerful. I don't know what to make of that. To me, people like HH the Dalai Lama or his Grace Archbishop Desmond Tutu are powerful. They inspire people with their gentle charisma and depth of spirit. They are role models for others to follow.

Danny got me to think about my own life purpose.

Some years ago, I developed a mission statement for myself.

My goal in life is to help people through spiritual growth.

But it's hard to fulfill my mission in all aspects of my life.

For example, my humanities courses always address life's great questions through the arts. They ask the spiritual issues of life: who am I, where do I come from, what am I doing, and what does it all mean? But they also teach the nuts & bolts of interpreting art, music, literature, and philosophy. AND I have to evaluate students, and give them grades.

My seminary courses directly challenge seminarians about their vocation, mission, and ministry. They work on, what they want to do as ministers. This fall, I'm teaching Transcendentalism & Social Action for the Starr King School for Ministry.

Likewise, my graduate course in education challenges college faculty to figure out their role as educators. I adjunct for Roosevelt U.

Our hymnal has my mission statement in poetic form. It's reading 595. I repeat it most every morning, after I finish my meditation and prayers (I ran out of time today, but I did practice yoga).

Let's recite it together. 595

May all sentient beings be well and enjoy the root of happiness; free from suffering and the root of suffering. May they not be separated from the joy beyond sorrow. May they dwell in spacious equanimity free from craving, fear, and ignorance.

This is what I seek with my life.

My current challenge is to be a dean in the spirit of this mission. After a year as dean, I'm still learning to find a balance between my mission, managing faculty, responding to students, and applying policies fairly, justly, and compassionately.

In the mean time, I'm using my flexible vacation time for advanced yoga and meditation teacher training. This was not possible as a faculty member: my vacation was tied to the semester. This is an important fringe benefit for me!

I've talked to a number of you about your purpose in life over the past month.

I realized we have many teachers in our congregation.

So many of you said, you want to make a difference in your students' lives. And your students face so many challenges. They come from poverty, without good role models for school. You want them to get a good education, so they could have rewarding jobs and fulfilling lives.

The therapist, and counselors, and social workers among you said similar things. You want to help people through their challenges and difficulties. And to navigate the system. Social and senior services are so very complicated. And some people do need help to survive.

In my conversations, one of you said, your purpose was to serve God and humanity. I said, that sounds like a boy scout motto. You said, it comes from a memorized grade school catechism. You claimed you haven't thought of your purpose in life. That surprised me. You left the church of your youth to become a Unitarian Universalist. That must have involved some sort of examination of conscience. I think you might have been pulling my leg.

One of you said, you wanted to be happy. I asked you, how do you understand happiness? You had a hard time explaining it, but it wasn't personal pleasure. Happiness is being useful, serving, and helping others.

The most touching purpose of life came from the mothers.

I talked to several of you. All of you said, your purpose is to raise your children. That makes so much sense. I could relate to that as a former foster father.

That was Mother Mary's purpose too. Today is the Protestant feast of St. Mary, Mother of Jesus. Catholics call it the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and for the Orthodox it's the Dormition or Falling Asleep of Mary Mother of God.

The gospels portray Mary as the patient mother of Jesus. She stands by his side as he teaches, is persecuted, and is sentenced to death as a political prisoner by the religious authorities. She faithfully accompanies her son through life and his horrid death. One of his last words to her were, Mother, behold thy son. What anguish that must have been for her!

As a mother and a compassionate woman, Mary suffers with her son.

As a mother, she faces more than most mothers. But we have modern day Marys, like the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, whose children disappeared at government hands

And Mary becomes the Christian image of compassion. A counterbalance to the image of God the father who doles out justice.

As you know, a miraculous tradition develops around Mary: Catholics and Orthodox and some Anglicans believe she is assumed body and soul into Heaven, the first of all humanity. We Unitarian Universalists believe we need to create heaven on earth.

Purpose to life is not only a spiritual quest. Stephen Covey discusses purpose of life in his book 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. The book's about leadership. Purpose of life is habit number two.

The habit boils down to two principles.

1. Discover your purpose
2. Reorganize your life around your purpose.

In the end, that will bring you happiness.

First, be creative. Have imagination. Envision your potential. Make a mental image of what you want to be. Figure out our purpose. It's not given to us in a scripture or doctrine.

We need a clear vision of our life goal.

Covey advocates that everyone should write a personal mission statement. A statement of purpose.

Now Covey is a church-going Christian. I think he's a Mormon. But he's written a secular book. A national bestseller at that. And he's made a pretty penny on it, as well as become famous.

Covey teaches that the most successful people are guided by their purpose. They do not flicker as the breeze may blow. They have a goal, and they pursue it. They visualize it. They affirm it. They head for the goal with their family, with their jobs, with their hobbies, and with their friends.

For example, the Dalai Lama's goal is to cultivate universal responsibility for one another and the planet.

Bill Gates' goal is to help make life easier through technology.

President Obama's goal is to bring hope to the world, especially the young.

So, first, we figure out our purpose.

Then, second, we need to make that purpose happen. We need to make it come true. We need to make it real. We need to do something about it. We need to work on it.

This means setting goals. And pursuing them. How can we achieve our mission? Today? This week? And in our life time?

Some people go on an annual retreat to check in with themselves. Like those of you who go to MUUSA.

One of you told me you do this on your birthday. You take the day off. You sleep in, get a massage, pamper yourself a bit. But you also take stock. An annual inventory. How did the year go? What did you accomplish? What are your goals for the next year? Then you have a party with family and friends in the evening.

That sounds like a wonderful way to celebrate a birthday!

I'm inviting you to work on your purpose during the week.

How would you answer the following three questions. They're printed in your OOS.

- Are you right now who you want to be?
- Who you've dreamed of being?
- Doing what you wanted to do?

You don't have to answer them right now.

These are guide questions that help you figure out your purpose in life.

To check to see if you are on the right path.

And they help you make adjustments, along the way.

Tonight, or this week, take some time out. Answer the three questions for yourself. Think about them. Journal on them. Doodle with them. Paint. Sing. Dance. Write a poem. Or simply take a walk.

But contemplate the questions.

Figure out your answers to them.

Let them help you find your purpose in life.

And check in with yourself to make sure you're on the right track.

2U is here for us to help each other out in our spiritual quests and commitment to social justice. We all want to live better lives, and to change the world for the good of all. To love, to grow, and to serve.

Our congregation has a purpose.

And we each have personal purposes. In small group ministry, in church committees and ministries, and among our church friends, we check in to see it how things are going for us. With our lives. With our purposes. That which matters most.

Every week at worship, we recite our covenant. That reminds us.
2U also has a purpose and mission. They're printed on the front and back of the OOS.
But we probably don't notice them.
This week, we're going to read our purpose and mission statements together.
The 2U statements will help you with your own purpose statement.
Let's read the 2U purpose together, printed in your OOS.

Second Unitarian Church of Chicago is a vibrant community that inspires you to develop your own spiritual path and live out your values in the world.

Now, let's read the 2U mission together, printed in your OOS.

We are a Unitarian Universalist community celebrating life, welcoming diversity, and promoting spiritual growth and social responsibility.

These are the goals of our congregation. They're not a catechism to memorize. They serve to inspire us for the good, for the better. Let them be an inspiration to you personally. Let them help you work out your own purpose.