

Children's Sunday  
Rev. Carol Allman-Morton  
June 6, 2015  
UUMSB

Why is learning about our spiritual lives important? Why do we have lifespan faith development? In some communities of faith, people might describe the need for religious education as a matter of life and death, that to be saved, people need to learn certain things. That is the kind of fundamentalism that our faith grew apart from a long time ago. However, I would still suggest that our imperative to keep learning and exploring our faith lives is life saving. It is not about our immortal souls, but about how we are going to live in the world, what kinds of people we are going to be, and what our values are. The values we explore, and the spiritual tools we foster *are* life and death. People can do terrible things to each other in this world, and systems of oppression hurt people we love, and strangers we will never meet. But what we explore and learn in our community can make a difference in how we respond, what we do in the world, what choices we make, how we make choices, and what we value. Our spiritual and religious lives foster growth, awareness, love, and compassion. In these ways, it is indeed life and death.

Growing up, there was a woman in my congregation who was one of my Sunday School teachers named Julia. I think she must have been in her 80s when I was small. I remember that she was very particular about how we used scissors, “move the paper not the scissors to get a nice line.” She was a local artist, I think she drew in pencil, but my memory is fuzzy since I was so young. I remember my mom took me to her house once and while they were working on something inside, Julia sent me outdoors with a glass jar to collect the open beech nuts that looked like stars all over the ground under her tree and she let me take them home. I kept them in my room until I went away to college. I was a bit intimidated by Julia, I remember her being stern and of the generation of women who had slogged through so much they weren't going to take any guff from anyone. I don't remember any of the lessons from my class with her, I think I was about five years old, but I do remember the impression she and her peers made on me. I remember thinking that women ran everything, since that was true in my world at the time. I learned about patriarchy later on, but my early religious education helped shape my assumptions about the world, and how to understand power and relationships. Learning in community can indeed be a saving act.

How do you make decisions every day? When you are going to do something that is hard, because it is the right thing to do, how did you decide to do that? What helps you to move through fear, or struggle? Though you may not be able to point to a particular moment or lesson in your life that clarified it all for you, the ongoing exploration of our beliefs and identity are bound up in all our choices. We are never in a vacuum. All that came before us influences our present, and our future—for better and for worse.

Back in January we did a project together where I asked you to respond on slips of paper to a couple of questions. They were: What are the theological and spiritual concepts that you feel are most important to you and your development? What is the core of your spiritual life? What spiritual practices are most important to you, or about which you would like to explore more? Some of the most common themes in your responses reflect our mission and covenant as a

congregation including: love, compassion, justice, overcoming fear, forgiveness. One person wrote they seek, “to relieve myself of prejudice, strengthen my patience and lessen my judgments.” There were lots of references to meditation, practice, courage, and music. There is a range of language available to us to talk about our beliefs, values, and spiritual lives. How we live them out our beliefs will help us to learn who we are, and share that with others, especially our children.

This year in Sunday School, our children have been exploring ethics, covenant, peace, truth, and more, through the lens of our sources and using a covenant written by Reverend James Vila Blake, versions of which are used by congregations all over the country. Each week their work was focused on a different part of the covenant, and here are the words:

Love is the spirit of this church,  
And service its law.  
This is our great covenant:  
To dwell together in peace,  
To seek the truth in love,  
And to help one another.

Each week, in addition to stories and conversation, there is an activity. I thought we might share in an activity today as well. I invite you remember back to a time when you had to make a hard decision, what tools did you use to make the decision? What were the resources and sources you went to, in or outside yourself to decide? In a couple minutes, we will find a neighbor and take just a few minutes to tell them the story of how you knew what to do. You don't need to go into detail of the situation itself, that may be extra personal, but what were the resources and sources you went to, in or outside yourself to decide? Let's take a moment for quiet and to think about our stories.

Alright, let's find a neighbor and share what were the resources and sources you went to, in or outside yourself to make a big decision? I will let you know when a few minutes have passed and you can switch telling the story. If you would rather not participate, that is of course fine, you can just listen to the voices wash over you instead, but I think this will be illuminating for us all.

[Activity]

Thank you all so much! Let's do a little reflecting on that experience.

How many of us went to another person for help?

How many of us went back to something that someone had taught us?

How many of us go back to that moment and think about it when we have to make other decisions?

How many felt lonely when trying to decide?

Connected to others?

How many might do it differently today?

In a religious learning community with so many understandings about the theological

sources of our traditions and how we understand the world, we can know that we are held by this community through our searching and deciding. There is a place for us here. We are challenged as a theologically open and diverse community, we have to work to listen and understand each other, to learn more about each other and the world... and we model to our children this expansive and challenging way of being in community. What we explore and learn can make a difference in how we respond, what we do in the world, what choices we make, how we make choices, and what we value. Our spiritual and religious lives foster growth, awareness, love, and compassion. Our tradition saves lives, spiritually and literally, through the choices we make, the people we are. Our spiritual development is a matter of life and death in that we are interconnected with and dependent on all of creation for our lives, and hold that responsibility in turn. It is wondrous. Today we honor our children and the learning they have done over the year, and we honor the whole lifespan faith development team. May their work over the next year be blessed with abundance and great learning. May we continue to learn and discern throughout our lives, see and feel our interconnection, and be supported as we find our path through this life.

Amen.