

## “Community of Integrity”

Rev. Danielle Webber

Kelowna Unitarians

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### Centering Words

*Unexpected Gifts: Discovering the way of Community*

By Christopher Heuertz

“For as long as I can remember, I’ve found myself exploring this complicated part of myself, my yearning to know and be known. I’ve always been in a variety of communities. The most authentic ones are on a continual journey of failing miserably. In those circles of relationships we’ve let one another down and disappointed one another: Many of us haven’t been the kind of friends we hoped we could be to one another. We haven’t always fought fair. We’ve made plenty of mistakes. Sometimes we have given up on one another. But I believe tragic flaws bear unexpected gifts. I trust in the reasons to stay, even though I’ve experienced more than adequate excuses to leave most of the communities I’ve participated in...

Becoming the best version of ourselves often requires that we stay. Stay when things get hard. Stay when we get bored. Stay when we experience periods of unhappiness. Stay when the excitement wears off. Stay when we don’t like those we’re in community with. Stay when we fail or are betrayed. Stay when we know who we can become if we have courage to be faithful in the undramatic.”

### Reflection

Rev. Danielle Webber

Becoming the best version of ourselves often requires that we stay. Stay in community, stay in discomfort, stay in the boring, and stay in the challenging. This is such an interesting idea, a recognizing that to have integrity we need to have alignment between our inner convictions and our outer actions. Inner convictions of being part of the beloved community we hope to create, and staying even when this community isn’t always beloved. Inner convictions of worth and dignity, and outer actions that match. Inner convictions of Show respect, communicating for understanding, Participating in community life with trust and commitment, and expressing encouragement and appreciation. And outer actions that align with these ideals.

January we have been focusing on this idea of Integrity, what does it mean for us to find a ritual of integrity with our Fire Communion Service, but also how do we maintain our sense of integrity, when we don’t always see the misalignment in our words and actions, like some of our Unitarian forebearers. But another important aspect of January, especially to those who have stronger ties to the United States, is Martin Luther King Jr. Day, a day originally organized and promoted by the labour unions, but later supported by the general public to be passed as a federal holiday in recognition for civil rights. But besides civil rights, and African American Rights, The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr was known for making popular the idea of Beloved Community. The King Center – a resource center, community institution and memorial centre was opened in 1968 with the mission to prepare global citizens to create a more just, humane and peaceful

world using Dr. King's non-violent philosophy and methodology. They say about Rev. King's philosophy of Beloved Community: "is not a lofty utopian goal, to be confused with the rapturous images of the peaceable kingdom, in which lions and lambs coexist in idyllic harmony. Rather, the Beloved community is a realistic, achievable goal that could be attained by a critical mass of people committed to and trained in the philosophy and methods of nonviolence. Beloved community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. Poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood, and brotherhood. International disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolutions, and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

Dr. King's Beloved Community was not devoid of interpersonal, group or international conflict. Instead he recognized that conflict was an inevitable part of human experience. But he believed that conflicts could be resolved peacefully and adversaries could be reconciled through a mutual, determined commitment to nonviolence. No conflict, he believed, need erupt in violence. And all conflicts in The Beloved Community should end with reconciliation of adversaries cooperating together in a spirit of friendship and good will."

Rev. King's description and discussion of Beloved Community, to me, speaks of a community living with integrity. A recognition of the inner convictions, meeting the outer actions. One thing that I recognized as I was reading through the material on The King Center's website was that in many places it spoke about THE Beloved Community, and how Beloved Community was a global vision. So often in the past when I have spoken, thought or preached about Beloved Community it had more to do with one community becoming beloved. One community (usually faith community, but could also be a community of my friends and family) that were striving to achieve this state of Beloved-ness. But as I read through this material, I recognize that no one community can become beloved, because Beloved Community is when all of life is living together in right relations.

So what does this mean for Kelowna Unitarians? How does Rev. King's description of Beloved Community, and the ability to stay in community when things get challenging or boring, and the concept of Integrity have to do with Kelowna Unitarians?

In December, the Board here at KU agreed to meet 2 times a month for the next several months in order to start working towards a longer term understanding of who our faith community wants to be, and how we want to engage our work. In the last 18 months the board has been doing a lot of the maintenance work of running a church, focused on hiring staff, finding volunteers, organizing clean up sessions, and supervising staff. We have not spent a lot of time looking at the future of Kelowna Unitarians, we have been maintaining the present. And so we will be using these extra meetings to begin discussing what that future might look like, and what steps we want to take towards it. We are going to begin by talking about our Mission, and our vision. Getting a firm understanding of what our purpose is, we will also be able to have more in depth conversations around goals for our future, not just growth goals, or healthy congregation goals, but goals that speak about who we are going to be out in the city of Kelowna, about how we will

help lead our city towards an understanding of Rev. King's Beloved Community. Perhaps we will continue to build our relationship with the Canadian Mental Health Association, and move in sync with that relationship towards a more beloved community. Or perhaps we will recognize that our energy is calling us to recommit to being a Welcoming Congregation, get re-certification, and explore the opportunities for relationships with other communities in Kelowna working to create more justice for LGBTQ+ folks. Perhaps we could re-certify as a Green Sanctuary, and become more engaged with the other environmentalist movements within the city. There are so many different ways in which we can focus our energy, our commitments, and our time. I believe that one of the struggles with finding our sense of integrity is going to be in honing our commitments down to what we can fully commit to, and not over committing and underperforming. As soon as we choose to put our energy into more than one area, or more than a few connected issues, we can quickly lose focus, or take on more than this community can manage. By sticking to our community intentions, and making clear our community values, will allow us to ensure that as a community we have integrity. We will be able to hold discomforts, and stay with the situation when things go wrong. We will be able to find integrity in the way we treat one another, but also in our relationships with other organizations, and other faith communities in the city.

Another aspect that is really important in Rev. Dr. King's work on Beloved Community is the practice of non-violence. King's believed that this was most important when it came to social action, but nonviolent communication is also a very key point that needs to be lifted up as well. Recognizing that there is something for which we would normally argue about, disagree and cause frustration and harm with our words, and allowing ourselves to find a compassionate way to communicate them. This is something that I still need to practice. At our last Board meeting there was an aspect of my work here that I was really unhappy with, and that I believed needed to be changed. Rather than going into the Board meeting with demands on how things need to change, and I was going to be taking control, I was able to pause, observe the struggle I was having, identify the feelings that I was struggling discover my needs, and then make a request to the Board about changes. Instead of slicing open a pillow full of feathers I was able to stay, with my own discomfort in a situation that I did not really have control over, and ask for the support that I needed in doing my work.

Being able to recognize different aspects of Beloved Community in our own interactions, and especially in our interactions with each other in this room, will allow us to work our way towards a community of Integrity.