

I believe in living a poetic life, an art full life. Everything we do from the way we raise our children to the way we welcome our friends is part of a large canvas we are creating.

Maya Angelou

What light is to the eyes - what air is to the lungs - what love is to the heart, liberty is to the soul of man.

Robert Green Ingersoll

When I began writing this search for meaning, I was looking for a magic pill. I didn't know it at the time, but I wanted the Answer, with a capitol A.

Many of you know that my family and I have been living for the last several months with Lisa and David Fry, and there are many opportunities for ad hoc discussions and conversations. In one of these recent conversations about school and growing up and politics, I learned from them that the phrase "Under God" was not always part of the Pledge of Allegiance Poem that I said every school morning from Kindergarten through third grade. I was incensed, and started to think about the fact that there seems to be no common thread in American public schools. Part of the joy of growing up as part of a community--whether a family, a city, a culture or a country--is learning common values. What are our children learning? How can we make peace in the world if we don't have anything that we all believe in? Well, I still don't have the answer to that question. But I started to take a look a little closer to home. What are my children learning from the communities I choose for them: their school, our family, and our church?

Probably the thing my children most see is rushing around. If the adage "what you do speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say" is brought to proof here, then what I, and the majority of the other

adults in their lives, care about most is that they hurry. In fact, the phrase that my children hear probably more often than any other is “hurry up.” Not that they do things well, or even carefully, or kindly, but that they do them quickly.

This adage “what you do speaks so loudly I cannot hear what you say” is first attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson. What Emerson actually said, in his 1875 work “Letters and Social Aims,”¹ is this:

Let us not look east and west for materials of conversation, but rest in presence and unity. A just feeling will fast enough supply fuel for discourse, if speaking be more grateful than silence. When people come to see us, we foolishly prattle, lest we be inhospitable. But things said for conversation are chalk eggs. Don't say things. What you are stands over you the while, and thunders so that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary.”

What he was saying is that we say and do many things to please others or make ourselves appear to be certain ways. Instead, we should be still, “rest in presence and unity.”

How many of us can say that we, every day, rest in presence and unity? I meditate for at least five minutes at least three times a week. Is that living a mindful life? Too often I rush from place to place, stressed and afraid and trying to get what I feel I need to survive one more day.

In the book “Tending the Flame: The Art of Unitarian Universalist Parenting” Michelle Richards makes the point that “In order to nurture our children's spirituality, we must first find a way to nourish our own,” (p. 8) (Richards) . She likens our spirituality to a well that must be replenished as others drink out of it lest it dry up. I come here, to Live Oak Fellowship, not just to be amongst

¹ <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2011/01/27/what-you-do-speaks/>

friends. I come here to refill my well. I come here to be a part of a community, a spiritual community that is asking hard questions and growing and learning and changing.

One of the ways that we at Live Oak have chosen to do this work is in learning mindfulness as a congregation. I am not a Buddhist, but by using the UU source that we look to “Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life,”² we have decided as a congregation to use the metta prayer in every service. And according to the guidelines for metta prayer, it is important that one begins by praying for oneself, and then moves to praying for someone we care about. Next we pray for someone we feel neutral about, then for someone we dislike or even hate (notice that we have replaced the ‘we’ usually in the order of service with a ‘they’ to reflect these guidelines). Last we pray for all the world. We have committed to this as a spiritual practice, not just as a song we sing.

Yesterday was the APC Harvest Festival. Many of us were involved in planning the day, many others showed up and volunteered the day of, and a couple who couldn't volunteer helped in other ways. Even Debra and Abraham came to visit us, and provided a lovely interlude of joy. This is another commitment that we at Live Oak have made as a congregation: to help heal our world through the practice of social action and justice work. We live those things out by our collections every service, by the way we treat each other, and the things we do, both individually and as a group, to make the world a place we more want to live in.

As we move closer to election day, and have started hiding facebook posts from our republican friends and family members

² <http://www.uua.org/beliefs/principles/index.shtml>

(if we have any), I challenge all of us to remember that our goal is not to be right, or even to be heard. Our goal is to slow down, bring presence to everything we do, and when we act, act in principle. Act, first of all, with loving kindness and compassion for yourself and others. Ask yourself if you are living the principles you espouse. And if you find, like most of us, that your actions sometimes fall short of your words, stop. Meditate. Breathe. Ask for patience and compassion for yourself and for others. And move forward knowing that the world is getting better, one kindness at a time. This is why I bring my children here, what I want them to learn from Live Oak.