Rev's Reflections

Institutional Self-Care

Last week, I enjoyed time with my dear friend Mike, in from Cleveland. The weather was terrible, so we visited historic sites — all reminders of the birth of our democracy — and what has become my favorite place in New England, the Fuller Craft Museum in Brockton, MA.

As horrifying news stories unfolded, we reveled in beauty and history. While Israeli Embassy workers were being killed in DC, we marveled over quilts that looked more like paintings, commentaries on the interconnectedness of a world made of fragments. As the war escalated between the ~~dictator~~ president and Harvard University, we learned about the Salem witch trials and the disinformation of the time. I can't help feeling that "educated elites," especially in New England, are the witches of our time.

In less than 5 months it's already become a cliché to talk about the chaos and violence of these times, especially when we and the people we love are so frequently the targets of the regime's revenge. The term "self care" has taken on a whole new depth of meaning. For me, it's still about caring for myself by stepping away to appreciate friends and art on occasion, so that I can return to the work rejuvenated and effective. It's also become about taking time to care for the people in the institutions that matter, to listen deeply to one another's deepest wishes and fears. Self-care at UUCSC is about caring for UUCSC; caring for each other.

On Sunday, May 18, it was so wonderful to get to do just that after the service. The 40 or so of us present broke into five different groups to really hear about the wishes and longings of two people per group: one younger adult and one long-time lay leader.

It was difficult, but we managed (for the most part) to ask earnest questions, and to avoid giving advice or solving problems. The point of the exercise was to understand each other better, so that we can all know how much we mean to each other, and to see each other as whole people, not just generational tropes based on pre-conceived notions.

In my small group I barely spoke. I simply paid attention to the stories before me, all patchworks of history and meaning. Fragmented and sometimes messy, but always whole and important. We didn't solve a single problem or even come up with a plan, but it was meaningful work nonetheless. It was an act of institutional self care necessary while doing the hard work of connecting while there are so many forces trying to divide us.

After the summer break, in August or September, we'll regroup and build on the work we've begun, the work of balancing stories that sometimes seem to be in tension with one another, the work of finding another way, perhaps a "third way."

I hope you'll join us.

In Peace
Rev Denis