

Communal Time, Synchronized Movement

Sermon by Reverend Rebecca M. Bryan

January 21, 2024

I have been preaching about the importance of, and need for, religious community for as long as I remember. I knew this as a child who didn't have a consistent religious community and who longed for a place to belong. I was fortunate enough not to carry scars from religious doctrine, though I had my share of wounds from men in religious authority.

When I was a young child, nature was my most common sanctuary and I belonged to the animals, weather, and outside world.

Yet even though we didn't attend church regularly, we did attend faithfully on Christmas Eve and Easter. Those two services saved my life, and I am not exaggerating. I will never condemn people who "only come to church" on Easter or Christmas, or in our case, Candlelight.

They too belong here. They too are a part of this beloved spiritual community. And so are you. Whoever you are. You are a part of this community. Your differences of opinion, variety of religious experiences, and unique gifts, cares, and concerns, are essential to our collective wholeness. We are less without everyone here and those who are not yet here.

We have been studying the theme of interconnectedness this year. It is resonating deeply with many of us, reminding us to prioritize connection and diminish division and separation. We are part of the world around us. We are part of nature. We are each other's keepers. We are part of the divine dance. We are recipients of its gifts and responsible in our part for its future. We can no longer pretend we are separate or that who we are meant to be is inconsequential. We must remember we belong here and to each other.

These are challenging times. Many of us would prefer that things were different. But wishing that were the case does not make it so.

There are things we can do, and being part of community is one of them. Community and spiritual or religious community, especially, offer many gifts. It exposes us to people of different

ages and backgrounds. It asks us to think about and even care about things that we would not have otherwise. Religious community creates a sacred space where we can explore, with others, the big questions in life. It offers us relationships and people who care deeply. People who will show up in our difficult times and celebrate with us in our joyful times.

Yes, being part of a spiritual community also asks things of us. It asks us to give of ourselves. To care about others. To balance prioritizing our needs with the needs of others. James Luther Adams used to say, "Church teaches us about being human."

But here's the thing: we both give and benefit from giving when asked. We grow from doing things we might have otherwise shied away from. We realize that giving is as much about receiving as it about offering.

Who among us hasn't been lifted out of a self-centered bad mood by ushering, or coming to a small group, or showing up at a vigil at Market Square? Who hasn't felt the energy of love and care that is visceral in this place?

We've all been shy. Most of us have cried at times sitting in the pews. We've all been frustrated and wondered why things are being done the way they are.

But guess what? You are always welcome. You are welcome for you who are. You are welcome in yoga pants and bow ties, when you are in bad mood, and when you are in a good mood. We are more whole from being together.

There is another gift of being part of spiritual community that is less frequently acknowledged. That is the gifts that come with participating in communal time and synchronized movement. The feeling that wells up as we all recite the Chalice Lighting words or Affirmation of Faith. The uplift that happens when we feel the buzz before service starts and the calm that comes with the sound of the singing bowl. The welling of care that you feel listening to joys and sorrows, even when you don't the person. The assurance

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and rootedness that you feel knowing that every Sunday morning at 10:30am people are gathered here in person and online, and you are a part of that, even when you're not here.

Communal time and rhythm is an essential grounding experience necessary for all of us, especially in challenging times, personally or in the larger world. It feels better when we know we are a part of a community and not alone.

Let me remind us all that we are never actually alone. We are part of a universal collective energy. Science and religion tell us that. It is easier to feel it when we are also part of this community.

Next, you're going to hear from three people, each of whom will share a little bit about how being a part of this communal rhythm affects them and brings more meaning to their lives. There were many examples we could have used to demonstrate this. We chose these three because of their timeliness, importance, and focus on community.

I hope you will hear the invitation in these offerings made by other FRS members and choose to participate in one or all of these things, and/or in other ways. There are so many. You can usher. You can be a worship associate. You can come to meditate online or in person. You can sing in the choir or help with the children and youth.

You belong. You are part of us. We are better for it.

Amen.