

I Am Listening

Rev. Brigid Beckman's message for Sunday, October 31, 2021

Are you listening?

"I am Listening"

AM I listening??

I AM listening...

BREATHE

I am listening...

Over the years I've labeled the incessant narrator chattering away in my mind with different names. The first time I remember hearing the terms "monkey mind" and "the editor" was years ago at a workshop. I laughed out loud when I heard poet, author and writing teacher, Natalie Goldberg instruct us on how to tell it to be quiet-- in far saltier terms than I'm going to share here today! :-)) I've spent a lot of time over the past few weeks noticing my often noisy "inner roommate," as Michael Singer teaches in the Untethered Soul. This past week especially, I had ongoing conversations with what felt like a whole houseful of inner roommates! As I wrote and thought and prayed and meditated and planned and paced and started this message over three times seeking the perfect words to say today on this "**official-minister- candidate- weekend**"... Wow...

"We" were talking so much I almost didn't hear that quiet voice of God whispering...

"Share your journey." Share your journey.

So on Friday, I scrapped the talk that was causing so much inner friction. Instead, I want to simply share my spiritual journey, my winding journey to ministry, the journey that led me here to this morning, to this moment of potential with you, Unity Church in Albany who quite possibly has been calling me home to walk with you.

As my bio tells you, I was ordained through One Spirit Interfaith Learning Alliance in June of 2016.... On my page I typed three dots, and then stared at them, trying to find a segue that wasn't going to get those roommates riled up again! How to bring you on my journey from the little girl Mary Brigid, steeped in my Irish Catholic roots to becoming an interfaith minister-- without talking at you for 3 hours! :-)

In August I brought you into some of the threshold moments of that journey, naming them, and seeing with the gift of hindsight the hand and voice of God in all of those times of transition and transformation. On September 9, 2011, the voice of God sounded just like my friend Jen.

Jen and I had met at my friend Casey's Nia and Yoga studio in 2007, both of us navigating life newly divorced. Nia is a movement practice that, like yoga, ideally is also a spiritual practice. As we dance with growing awareness of the voices of our body, mind, and spirit, we are invited to choose joy rather than fear as our filter for all of life's circumstances. On that September evening after a Nia class, Jen mentioned that she was all set with her wedding plans to her wonderful new partner, Mark. All set that is, except for someone to officiate! I laughingly mentioned my son had his certificate of ministry from the Universal Life Church and I could see if he was free. Then I looked at her and said, "Wait a minute. I know you and love you. I'll go online and get MY certificate and I'll do your wedding!"

We hugged and laughed and cried at the absolute rightness of it, that in this place and through this spiritual practice where we each had found our joy again, I said yes to hold the space for Jen and Mark to make their vows to one another. That was 10 years ago, and like all those transitions I spoke about this summer, I had no idea how much this "yes" would change my life. (Before that first wedding dad wanted to make sure this was going to be a legal marriage, and mom wanted to know what I was going to wear. I stopped by their house on my way-- and they prayed over me.) So many voices in this beginning that were whispering to me as the voice of God...

I am listening God...

It was also from this Nia community that I was asked to co-celebrate a Hindu-Christian-Jewish wedding for my friend Casey's son and his wife. Being part of a ceremony that so beautifully blended the sacrament of love at the heart of these three faith traditions awakened my desire to know more about other religious paths. But it was acting as the unofficial "minister in residence" during the weekend of celebration that began to call me into the role of minister, and not simply officiant.

I am listening God...

It was again my friend Jen whose God-voice led me to the profound discovery that I was meant to help commemorate grief as well as joy. The 19 year old daughter of Jen and Mark's dear friends died in her sleep, a week into her sophomore year of college. When Jen called me to ask if I could help the family mourn and celebrate this young life and honor her passing, I said yes. In an auditorium of 400 tender, grieving hearts, I felt the strength of the divine Spirit, and the simple, beautiful grace of being an instrument of peace.

I am listening God...

A few months later at a Christmas party at Jen and Mark's house, I stood and chatted with Casey and Mark. He put his hand on my shoulder and said, "When are you going to start your church? Jen and I don't know where to bring our kids..." We talked about the challenge of finding a spiritual home for a family blending two faith traditions that no longer quite fit either parent anymore. I laughingly said, "Someday I'll start Our Lady of the Barefoot Dancers"...and "someday I'll find a program that gives me more credentials than my online certificate..." Someday. As we left the party later that evening, Casey turned to me and said, "If you weren't afraid of how you'd pay for it, what would be your excuse for not finding that program." Sometimes the voice of God is a pointed question from a friend...

I am listening God....

And here, my lovely Catholic parents enter again. Their dear friend Marie, a former Catholic nun, was an ordained interfaith minister. We met for breakfast one chilly winter morning, and the seed for One Spirit seminary was firmly planted.

My first spiritual home was my childhood home, and I know I'm blessed that my early foundation helps me trust that "God is Absolute good, everywhere present." Those early years included plenty of ups and downs, as any family of 6 kids faces. But before even memories of going to church, or Catholic grade school, are my memories of praying together as a family. We prayed the rosary at home and in the car on road trips, and mom helped us turn our hurts and disappointments over to God, and my beautiful parents here are still my prayer partners in all I do!

Finding a short answer that explains to folks what it means to be an interfaith minister is a lot like trying to give a short answer to, "So what *is* Unity Church? Is that the same as UU?"

ONE spirit. UNITY. It's all about reverence for what connects us, not fear over what seems to separate us. My studies at One Spirit didn't make me an expert in comparative religion. The deceptively simple foundation of the program is to combine studying the world's wisdom traditions-- intellectually through reading and doing written homework-- but more importantly by committing to exploring some form of practice from each. And then paying attention to how and where we find connection, resonance-- and discomfort and challenge. Essentially, One Spirit grounded me in a deeper way of listening to the voice of God, the unifying consciousness beneath, and within any of the differences wrought by our human expression of our relationship with the Divine.

In many ways, the religious tradition I know most intimately is the Catholicism I was raised in, and where I spent much of my adult life. St. Vincent de Paul parish is even where I met Roger, some 35 or so years ago! Yet for a host of reasons, that container eventually felt constricting.

There certainly, and sadly, was no room in that for me to have this kind of public ministry. Yet that “NO” led me to the “YES” of One Spirit and my ordination... I am listening God...

“I will say yes and yes and yes to LOVE. I will be Love’s hands and voice and heart in action, and I will use all of me to do all the good I can do in this world.”

That is the vow I wrote-- or rather the vow that my own voice of God within revealed-- when I was ordained in June 2016. It’s so easy to feel the yes when I’m in the flow of living my life from my center! But can I pull that vow out of my pocket when the winds of circumstance threaten to pull me back into fear, and into listening to those testy inner roommates?? There are times when in the silence the voice of God within helps me pause, listen and then yes, I can affirm my vow to BE love. And as I come back to this again and again, there are times when the only way I can hear that God-voice is through YOUR voice.

I am listening God...

95% of my role as Director of Spiritual Life at my school was life giving, challenging in beautiful ways, and helped me experience a sense of dancing with my sacred purpose. Last December, the 5% that was painfully challenging felt like a chain dragging me down. It’s been “interesting” to look at that experience through the Unity principle of how our thinking creates our reality...but that line of thought is part of the talk that didn’t want to get written this week! :-)

For today, there is this. When I couldn’t see my way out of the darkness, the voice of God called from the love of the dear ones who walk with me through my life. So many voices of love and encouragement and tangible support! And the voice of God within whispered, “ Be still...slow down...breathe...” One night in early January I put myself on a mini retreat at home. In the quiet I let myself soften into envisioning the path ahead of me. I played with pastels on a blank sheet of paper, creating a finger labyrinth that led me to the knowing: “The Way is winding, yet clear if I stear from my center.” On the back of this page, with a bright magenta pen are words that streamed from my deepest consciousness:

There are words about the home that was calling out for me, about those grandbabies who would be my soulmates... but here is the piece that resounded when Roger reached out to me this summer, "Hey Brigid, welcome back to Albany! Did you know Unity Church is looking for a new senior minister?"

I am manifesting my next livelihood. I claim it even while I remain open to it. I work with people of deep integrity who collaborate and work for a better world. My livelihood supports me but also makes way for justice and equity and BELOVED COMMUNITY. I work with others who are working on themselves, and on changing the world-- with open hearts, intelligence, humility. I am working for racial justice.... And I work with people who can laugh at themselves, and value rest, joy AND good, hard work. My work makes safe spaces, brave spaces, joy filled spaces...

Yesterday in the rich, tender, vulnerable sharing at the workshop, you gave me the gift of co-creating a safe, brave, joy filled space together.

God comes to you disguised as your life. This simple truth in this quote by Paula D'Arcy echoes in my spiritual journey at every turn. My whole life IS IN God, and always, always it is my individual, inner need to slow down and LISTEN, combined with my need to listen in community-- that awakens and reminds me that God is everywhere present. And that then helps me pull that vow out of my pocket-- and step fully, humanly, in ways graceful and in ways sometimes stumbling-- into saying YES. I will BE Love in action always, and in all ways.

So, my friends, thank you for listening. On this morning when I am feeling the joyful weight-- not the heavy weight-- of this potential and possibility that we have called out to the universe for each other, I will leave you with another round of wisdom from Jan Richardson, a poem that anchored me that January night, and many times since then.

Blessing That Makes a Way for You

What I know is
that this blessing will begin
as soon as you set out.

That this blessing
will meet you
in every step.

That it is gladly
bound to you
and cannot do
without you.

That you are
part of the path
this blessing makes:
that it creates a way
not only for you,
but through you,
and in you,
that it finds its road

as you find yours.

I can hardly fathom
how it is
that this blessing
is already waiting for you,
even as you fashion it,
step by faltering step.

But there it is,
in all its wending mystery.

So may you meet it
with courage.

May you enter it
with clarity.

May you walk it
with wisdom.

May you travel it
with joy.

May you come to it
not as one buffeted

by chance,
but as one
who has chosen.
Uncertain perhaps;
unready perhaps;
but this path.
This one.
With abandon.
This.

May it be so. And so it is. Amen.