

# Reflections in Seaglass

**Blurb:** You can stumble across the small pieces of beauty, wisdom and truth that surround us all the time, but to find them in earnest takes training and intentionality.

**Speaker:** Rev. David Pyle

**Bio:** The Rev. David Pyle is the Regional Lead and a Congregational Life Consultant with the MidAmerica Regional Staff.

Rev. Pyle holds a Masters of Divinity from the Meadville Lombard Theological School and a Bachelors of Arts in History and Political Science from East Tennessee State University. He completed his Clinical Pastoral Education Residency at Advocate Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge, Illinois. He has served as a minister for congregations in California, Michigan, and Illinois, and as an Administrator for a congregation in Texas. He also serves as the Deputy Command Chaplain for the Army Reserve Sustainment Command. He lives in Oak Grove, Kentucky.

## Opening Words

“In spite of despair staring me in the face on the political horizon, I have never lost my peace. In fact, I have found people who envy my peace. That peace, I tell you, comes from prayer; I am not a man of learning, but I humbly claim to be a man of prayer. I am indifferent as to the form. Every one is a law unto himself in that respect. But there are some well-marked roads, and it is safe to walk along the beaten tracks, trod by the ancient teachers.” -- Mahatma Gandhi

## Chalice Lighting

Each Sunday Morning, we light our chalice, this symbol of Unitarian Universalist faith that connects us to congregations across the world. This morning, \_\_\_\_\_ will light our chalice. As she/he/they do(es), let the flame be the divine light that shines in each of us, reflected by the truth at the center of every being.

**Opening Song #16 “Tis a Gift to be Simple”**

**Extinguishing the Chalice**

We extinguish the chalice flame, but not the light that guides us, that gives us perspective, on our own search for beauty, truth, and meaning.

## **Closing Song #118                    “This Little Light of Mine”**

It began innocently enough. I imagine such things often do.

I remember the day it began. It was a late afternoon, and my wife Xandi and I were walking the beach in Port Hueneme California, just about a decade ago. As we were walking, Xandi stopped, leaned over, and picked up something. Usually that meant an interesting shell, maybe a Sand Dollar. Xandi and I have a collection of shells from every beach where we have lived or visited since becoming a couple.

Xandi exclaimed “ohh! Seaglass!”

I had never really seen seaglass before, or so I thought. I have now seen this moment of awakening happen in dozens of other people. In truth, if you have walked beaches for any amount of time at all, you have seen seaglass, but your mind just has not registered having seen it. I’ve come to believe you have to be focused on looking for seaglass to find it... and once you have learned that focus, you find it is all around.

*You can stumble across the small pieces of beauty, wisdom and truth that surround us all the time, but to find them in earnest takes training and intentionality.*

I will never forget it, as Xandi stood back up, in her hand was a small piece of green glass. It had been etched over time by the sand and the waves, by collisions with rock, by the etching of a salty sea. It had been battered and worn from the beer bottle it probably once was to this smooth, etched, weathered piece of green beauty in her hands. What had begun as trash, as something someone had thrown away, had been turned by time and the world into a jewel.

*It is in how a truth is worn, how it is weathered by the rough and tumble time and tides that it is brought to its essential nature. A truth that is too new has yet to find its beauty.*

My eyes must have lit up, and my heart must have soared. And so began what has been my primary spiritual practice over the next 18 months... walking the beach at Port Hueneme Pier each morning, searching for seaglass. And one of the first realizations in moving into that spiritual practice was that, though, as I walked the beach with my eyes cast downward searching the sands for small sparks of color, I was not doing so alone. It soon became clear that there was a community of "sea glass pickers" walking the beach, and that I had yet to be granted full membership into the community.

*Entrance into any community, especially a spiritual community, takes a little time and effort. While a community must work to be open and allow for those who are new, those seeking entry also should realize that it takes time to build bridges of commonality and relationship.*

I remember how I first began to be "accepted" as a fellow seaglass picker. As I walked my meditative search pattern through a particular pile of rocks, an older woman who was searching that same pile asked if I was looking for seaglass. When I said yes she smiled, and then opened up the lid on the paper cup she carried, and showed me her finds for the day. I then showed her mine. We chatted for a moment, a feeling of kinship that we could not define, admiring each other's finds, and then in silence we moved back, each into our individual searches.

*A common search for truth and meaning creates a bond between people, one that is difficult to explain in words, and feels awkward when you try to define it... but it is no less real.*

There are different levels of community though. I remember another morning, walking the beach, when I was searching a particular rockpile, head cast downward, my entire awareness focused upon the search of my eyes for the particular telltales of color and texture that signify a piece of seaglass, when I was startled by someone yelling at me that, this was her pile of rocks, darn it, and I should go look somewhere else...

*People can become possessive over truth, believing that there is a limited amount of it in the world, and that if they can possess the most of it they will*

*be better off than others. They will have power. If someone else finds a truth before they do, it feels like a loss to them, not a gain for all.*

After I moved away, my mediation broken and in some inner turmoil, another seaglass picker whom I had shared finds with before came up to me and said “Welcome to the club David. You are not really a seaglass picker until Nancy yells at you at least once! Did you know she calls you bigfoot?” We then had an amazing discussion about how some people believe that anyone who picks up a piece of seaglass before they do is, in essence, taking something away from them that they would have eventually found... rather than realizing that there is plenty of seaglass for all.

*A sense of scarcity related to the search for truth and meaning can lead one to anger at others who have found a truth before you, and a willingness to create walls of separation because of it.*

I also discovered that, walking the beach in a grid search pattern, almost like walking a meditation labyrinth, with my eyes cast downward in a questing gaze, looking over each pile of rocks and expanse of sand, is a wonderful way to get people to ask me what in the world I think I am doing. Seaglass pickers don't ask... they know. They can spot the patterns. The other “congregations” that search the beach each morning can usually tell as well. I can identify the seashell pickers, the fossil pickers, the metal searchers, and the driftwood seekers by their patterns. At least at Port Hueneme beach, those who search for Sand Dollars are often those new to the beach or tourists. Newbies...

But I have found that searching for Seaglass brings people to come ask me what in the world I think I am doing. I has happened not only in Port Hueneme, but in the decade since in Florida, Delaware, Massachusetts, and even in Puerto Rico. Strangers will ask me “What are you doing?” or “Have you lost something?” One person once asked me if I was on medication. My favorite question I have gotten has been “What are you searching for?”

Indeed. What am I searching for... If I said "truth" it might be even more confusing, so I just tell them, I'm searching for Seaglass, and will often open my little bag to show them.

The reactions have been amazing.

"Ohh! Pretty! I never knew there was any seaglass here!"

"Wow! Where does it come from?"

"I didn't know the ocean made glass!"

"What do you do with it?"

"Are you unemployed?"

"So, you wander the beach picking up trash? Well that's nice of you!"

"I don't believe you. I come to this beach all the time and have never found any sea glass".

"Wow... can you teach me how to find sea glass?"

*An intentional, disciplined, and focused search for truth and meaning, conducted through daily life and your own human experience, is so counter cultural that people often don't know what to make of someone who is practicing it, and do not really know how to respond.*

I have taken to telling people, when they ask me what I am doing wandering the beach in a search pattern in the early morning hours, that it is a part of my prayer life and meditation. First, because it sounds very spiritual of me, and second it shortstops some of the stranger questions. What was illuminating to me when I started calling it a spiritual practice was the reaction of fellow seaglass pickers.

They immediately knew what I was talking about. There is something inherently meditative and spiritual about the practice of seaglass picking. In fact, I think I have learned as much about meditation from talking with my fellow seaglass pickers as I did from years sitting on the cushion.

One fellow picker told me that, each time she finds a piece of seaglass, she offers a short prayer of gratitude to God, and that it brings the feeling of gratitude into her whole life.

Another fellow picker once “preached” to me the whole sermon she has crafted on picking up seaglass, on how God takes the places in our lives where we are broken, and over time rounds off the rough edges, polishes and etches away the surface, and turns our broken, hurting places into jewels.

Several fellow pickers have told me how inspired they are how “mother ocean” can take something that human beings made and then throw away, and turn it into beauty, and how that inspires them to create beauty in their own lives. These are often the artists who search for seaglass to use in their art.

One told me that she gives away all her seaglass... it is not about the seaglass at all. It is that she is a calmer, nicer person for spending an hour each day searching for the seaglass. It is about the search, not what you find.

I have come to believe that every seaglass picker has a sermon. Or three. And once you are in the community, they will share those sermons with you. Mostly, they are worth listening to. The difference between them and I is that I occasionally get to preach my seaglass sermon from actual pulpits.

*We all have at least one sermon in us, but the more intentional we are about the search for truth and meaning in our lives, the deeper that sermon will be rooted.*

One of the most powerful seaglass sermons I have ever borne witness to on the beach was by a young woman. As we each gazed upon our finds of that morning, she shared that one of the most important lessons for her to learn was that not all the glass you find on the beach is ready to be seaglass. Some of it is not yet “cooked”. It has not yet been weathered enough by the waves and the sands. She shared that the most important lesson for her was learning to keep just the “fully cooked” seaglass, and to

let the “undone” seaglass return back to the ocean on its journey into becoming something beautiful.

*Not all truth you may find is ready to be held forth. Truth takes time to develop, to have the extraneous worn away, to get down to the essential. This kind of truth that has been worn by time goes by many names... some call it scripture, others may call it wisdom. Over time and experience, you get to know when a truth is “fully cooked”, but you have to learn how to recognize it. Too often a truth is held forth before its time.*

Two of the most important lessons I have learned while searching for seaglass has been that you can see different shapes, kinds, and colors of seaglass at different times... and that no matter how often you have covered a particular section of the beach, you have never found it all.

It took me awhile to realize that what color seaglass I would find had a lot to do with the direction of and amount of sunlight. If there is not much sunlight, then I am most likely to see the green seaglass... and indeed it is the easiest to see in any light. In diffuse sunlight, I am most likely to find the seaglass this is clear when wet and turns white when dry. The most difficult seaglass to see is brown, because it often looks just like the rocks, unless there is direct sunlight upon it. Any seaglass can be found in any light... just some light makes a particular color easier to see.

And then there are what I think of as the special colors. The rarest colors. Blue is the easiest of these to see, but it is still rare. I have found blue in many different shades... from dark, cobalt blue to a seafoam teal. My heart always jumps a little when I see a bit of blue, often near the water’s edge. On only three occasions in my life, I have bent over to pick up a piece of brown, and as I held it to the light my heart would stop... for it was not brown, but red. Red is deceptive, and can only be noticed when you hold it up to the light. Once I made it all the way home thinking I had found a piece of brown, until Xandi picked it up and held it to the light. And I cherish the two pieces of yellow, and the one piece of orange... as well as the three sea-etched glass marbles that I have found. I also cherish the piece of leaded glass with a wire frame running through it, and have told myself stories about where it came from.

*Truth etched by time and tides into wisdom can be found differently at different times in your life. Sometimes, the light from you is shining just right to see something that has always been there, just never illuminated before.*

I remember early on in my seaglass picking, where I would think there was no point in going over a section of the beach that I knew a fellow picker had already been over. Then one morning, there were so many pickers out I almost just walked home. But, I had come all this way, so I went out and started walking... and found amazing beautiful piece after beautiful piece, over ground I know others had already covered.

Later, I took to walking over the same bit of beach several times during the same morning, and each time I would find pieces of seaglass that I had either not seen before, or that had arrived since my last pass. The beach is always changing, after all, just as I am always changing. Each time I walk over an area I bring a different perspective, a different angle of sight. Others stepping on the rocks uncovers that which lies beneath. Each wave that passes brings the new, and uncovers that which is always there.

*You have never found all of the truth, beauty, and wisdom that there is to find. The universe is full of more truth, beauty, and wisdom that can ever be uncovered. Sometimes it is obscured, but often it is simply that, the last time you looked, you were not yet ready or able to see it. So, while we seek new places to search for truth, beauty, and wisdom, do not neglect the ground you have already covered. It always contains treasures to be found anew.*

So may it be, blessed be, and amen.