



UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION

Strengthening Our Roots

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Rev. Shelley Page

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I loved them the first time I saw them. Last spring in the canyon, I rounded a curve and there they were—a stand of quaking aspens showing off their exquisite breathtaking spring green. I was enchanted! And then being the curious soul that I am, I started learning about all things aspen and my enchantment took on new dimensions. I was inspired to hear of their amazing longevity, I mean 80,000 years! And stunned to know that they live in community with a mass of tangled roots supporting each other. So imagine my delight when this year's stewardship team started brainstorming about campaign themes and aspens came up enthusiastically. Clearly aspens are well loved by people in this state!

And what's not to love about them? Each aspen stands tall with its own uniqueness—the patterns on its bark, the branching at its crown, the lichens and scars that mark its life. Each aspen stands tall in a group that is actually all the same organism, all the same tree with many different trunks. Each aspen is rooted in place with a common root system that is shared by the entire grove.

And when older aspen dies off, fresh new growth is generated and the aspen grove lives on and on and on and on... Each aspen does its part to nourish the whole. Its leaves create food that nourishes the roots so the community holds strong.

You are aspens!! This proud and amazing Unitarian Universalist congregation is a stand of strong and beautiful aspens, all growing together with a foundation of strong interdependent intertwined roots.

Yes, you are an interesting collection of individuals, each with your own gifts, your own looks, your own life experiences, your own scars. But you have joined this intentional spiritual community whose roots go all the way back to the beginnings of Christianity, and here in this town, all the way back to the vision of your founders who saw the great need and potential for a liberal religious presence in this area. Those roots are strong and deep and well mingled, forming a firm foundation for you to live into your promise as a congregation. You stand tall together, offering each other sustenance of the heart. You are the embodiment of faith rooted in community.

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And you each have leaves of generosity to offer, leaves that nourish and strengthen the roots so that the community can be solidly supported. As Unitarian Universalist theologian, Tom Owen-Towle, once said, “Generosity involves openheartedness, the cardinal ability to give lavishly of yourself to others, to the world around you, to the divine communal Spirit in which we live, move and have our beings.”

He goes on to say this “generosity undergirds and underwrites all other values. Without generosity, one loves sparingly, if not stingily; without generosity, our acts of justice happen rarely; without generosity, we hoard our precious gifts of time and soul and other resources.”

Ever notice how trees sprout their leaves lavishly. Trees are not stingy. The aspens know deep in their being that the welfare of one is bound up in the welfare of others. Their lush greenery bursts with generosity and life affirming, life giving energy. Let this congregation burst forth its leaves of generosity to strengthen our roots and grow Beloved Community among us.

For the time has never been more important to do so. I don't know about you, but I feel more unsettled about our nation than I ever have in my entire life. The rise of uncivil, deliberately divisive politics; blatant hate speech uttered by Presidential candidates and intolerant crowds all speak of a new level of anxiety, unrest and dangerous times ahead of us. Callous disregard for the air, water and land leaves me deeply concerned for the long-term health and viability of this beautiful state. Civil liberties are under attack with racism, sexism and homophobia running rampant. These are the times that try our souls.

And that's exactly why the strength and health of this congregation is absolutely critical to your life, to my life and the lives past our walls out into the world. In times such as these, we need a place where we strive toward Beloved Community, a counter-cultural place that strengthens us for what lies ahead. We need a place of grounding when our spirits are weary. We need a place where our family and all families are accepted, loved and honored.

We need a place to practice being our best selves, for if we can tackle misunderstandings among us and learn the ways of love even better, we can take these vital skills out into a hurting world to create justice and peace. We need a place where we can take some risks and be vulnerable to learning things like white privilege and what Islam is really about.

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We need a place where the young and those well-seasoned by life can enrich and teach each other instead of the siloed existences of our schools and senior living centers. We need a place where it's not just okay to ask questions but it's a virtue to have a questioning mind that seeks truth and meaning. We need a place where we can nurture our souls and gain the strength, wisdom and courage to help heal the world.

That place is right here, right now. That place is your beloved congregation.

And you can make it even stronger through your generous giving of yourselves—your talents, your creativity and energy, and your money. After the service, you'll be hearing details about a solid plan to strengthen this community, particularly by adding a part-time Director of Religious Exploration to your already outstanding staff.

You will be asked to step up as you never have before to make this a reality. For a vital and meaningful Religious Exploration program can offer even more and deeper opportunities to do all the things I just mentioned, and do them even better. With a person professionally trained and dedicated to these tasks, your spirits will be even more nourished, your minds more enlightened, your hearts ever growing in compassion and love, and your hands ready for the tasks at hand.

And I note that another aspect of aspens speaks of their resilience and ultimate success over millennia together. When one part of their vital root system is damaged by fire, avalanche or insect damage, that's the time they send up new shoots to create more trees. They know that a time of challenge is a time for growth.

This congregation certainly is not facing any challenge of avalanche proportion, but you did step back together a year ago to develop some Developmental Ministry goals together, in recognition of some challenges that you wanted to tackle in an intentional manner. One of those goals revitalizing Religious Exploration to provide meaningful spiritual development for people of all ages and support for families.

Think of this year's stewardship campaign as your opportunity to help those new shoots of green vital growth pop up here, ensuring the ultimate health of the congregation.

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Each of you is an aspen. Together you are an aspen community, growing tall together. May your leaves flourish abundantly that your roots be ever stronger and your lives even more beautiful and soulful than ever before. May those of all ages among us be nurtured well in the ways of love, prepared for whatever comes next. May this congregation flourish in the time to come and fully live into its promise as a force for good in this community and beyond. The world is counting on you. May it be so. Blessed be.