

## Telling Our Stories

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Raleigh, NC, Chris Abbate, October and November 2017

### Chalice Lighting & Opening Thought:

I believe our identities are formed by stories told to us, about us, and around us. We are living texts, formed by multiple, interweaving, competing, and, sometimes, conflicting stories that we receive from our culture via our parents, other adults, our peers, the media, and congregational life. Stories about race, gender, theology, generational differences, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and class work consciously and unconsciously to form our identity. Stories also teach us values, ethics, and meaning. Stories help us know who we are and who we are not; they create boundaries, or borders, for us. Identity development can be thought of as the process of refining, editing (redacting), and authoring one's own story in conversation with others. We find our identity in particular contexts - home, school, the marketplace, or church, to name a few. We can think of each of those contexts as a holding environment. Whereas the first holding environment is the mother's womb, we continue to develop in holding environments all along our adolescence and throughout adulthood. Individual and group identities are formed in holding environments, or containers.

from *The Power of Stories*, by Jacqueline J. Lewis

**Check-In:** Talk about one thing you have learned or a significant feeling or thought you have had since our last meeting.

### Quotes:

"The world is not made of atoms. It is made of stories." - *Muriel Rukeyser*

"A story is a way to say something that can't be said any other way." - *Flannery O'Connor*

"Telling someone about your experience breathes new life into it, moving it out of the inchoate swirl of unconsciousness into reality. It takes on form and allows us to examine it from all angles." - *Mandy Aftel*

"The most important question anyone can ask is: What myth am I living?" - *Carl Jung*

"Those who do not have the power over the story that dominates their lives, the power to retell it, rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it, and change it as times change, truly are powerless, because they cannot think new thoughts." - *Salman Rushdie*

"Inside each of us is a natural born storyteller just waiting to be released." - *Robin Moore*

"A lost coin is found by means of a candle; the deepest truth is found by means of a simple story." - *Anthony De Mello*

"We need to look hard at the stories we create, and wrestle with them. Retell and retell them, and work with them like clay. It is in the retelling and returning that they give us their wisdom." - *Marni Gillard*

"Although setbacks of all kinds may discourage us, the grand, old process of storytelling puts us in touch with strengths we may have forgotten, with wisdom that has faded or disappeared, and with hopes that have fallen into darkness." - *Nancy Mellon*

"In my life, the stories I have heard from my family, my friends, my community, and from willing strangers all over the world have been the true source of my education." - *Holly Near*

"The role of the storyteller is to awaken the storyteller in others." - *Jack Zipes*

"Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. The friends who listen to us are the ones we move toward, and we want to sit in their radius. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand." - *Karl Menninger*

"The real difference between telling what happened and telling a story about what happened is that instead of being a victim of our past, we become master of it." - *Donald Davis*

### **Questions for Discussion:**

What are the stories you grew up with, both real (told by or passed down from family and friends), and fictional (books, movies, TV)?

How have these stories influenced you? Which stories have stayed with you? Why have they persisted?

Are there any stories from childhood or from your past that are painful, or that you feel you have outgrown, or you feel the need to refashion or put away?

What are the stories, either yours or others, either real or fictional, you come back to the most?

How does it feel to tell your story to someone else? How does it feel to listen to someone else's story?

Do you feel you have more stories, or new stories, to tell or pass along? What are they and to whom would you like to tell them?

Why is it important to tell our stories?

In what ways does the telling and hearing of stories help us to live richer, fuller lives?

### **Closing Thought:**

"Stories show us how to bear the unbearable, approach the unapproachable, conceive the inconceivable. Stories provide meaning, texture, layers and layers of truth... So it seems to me that one of the most vital things we can teach our children is how to be storytellers. How to tell stories that are rigorously, insistently, beautifully true. And how to believe them." ~ *Melanie Tem*