

What happens when we look deeply at our second principle Justice, equity and compassion in human relations; and ponder what it means for how we treat each other. Last week I talked about the platinum rule - treating others as they need or want to be treated. But what happens if who I am or what I am or what I have bumps up against what you need and what you want. How do we deal with a situation where our intent is honorable but our impact is less than ideal. I really do believe that our UU faith calls us to have an impact on this world that makes it a better place, a place where there is more love, more respect, less violence.

We cannot assume that we are all the same and if we just are nice to one another it will all work out. Being kind and nice is essential but it is not sufficient. Because simply being kind and nice does not factor in privilege. All of us because of where we live, the United States, and because of who we are have privilege. In this instance I am speaking of privilege as being a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group of people. Sometimes our privilege is obvious. Being white or able bodied are two obvious kinds of privilege. Heterosexual folks have had the privilege of marriage for many years and only recently has that started to change. In this sermon I will be speaking on heterosexual privilege but what I am saying applies to gender privilege, racial privilege, educational privilege, class privilege, beauty privilege, able bodied privilege, age privilege, and the list could go on.

We all have privilege. Some more than others. But we all have it. Sometimes we don't own that we have it. Then privilege is like an invisible backpack full of assets that we didn't earn but we get to use. So take heterosexist privilege and think about it. A few years ago my husband got ill and had to go into the emergency room and there was a lot of privilege in that interaction. First we had health insurance which is a financial privilege and he had been on my insurance for many many years because we are married. A privilege only recently granted to same gender couples. When I showed my insurance card to the ER they did not question that my husband was on the

policy. I know this because I actually lost the card that had his name on it as a beneficiary so I gave them my card and no one questioned it. No one asks to see our marriage license they assume that when we say we are married that we are telling the truth. And I know that I will be counted as his next of kin whatever state we are in no questions asked.

I am a cisgender female meaning that my self-identity conforms with the gender that corresponds to my biological sex. As a cisgender female I can use any public women's restroom I want and my only major worry is how clean it will be and how long the line will be. I know many transgender and gender non-conforming folk who must for their own safety gauge each and every time they need to use a public restroom how safe it will be for them. They must each and every time weigh their safety against how much they need to use that restroom. One transgender woman was arrested in Houston for using the women's room. The issues were complex and some of them were misrepresented in the media but one thing that I think folks miss is this. If you are in the process of transitioning from one gender to another say from male to female you may look female and act female, and identify female, but your birth certificate and identification may still say you are male. And so if there is an ordinance that says only females can use the women's room and only males can use the men's room and female and male is determined by your birth certificate then there can be problems. And if that were not enough there is also the issue of whether or not you will be safe in a public restroom. Every trans person either has been or knows someone who has been harassed, physically attacked or killed simply for being trans. Going to the bathroom should not be that complicated. Nobody ever asks me for ID.

Privilege is not necessarily bad or good. What one does with it that is what is really the good or the bad thing. I am an intelligent well-educated white person. There is privilege in that. I can use my privilege to move justice forward and that is a way of being an ally.

I found this definition of a social justice ally

"A person of one social identity group who stands up in support of members of another group; typically a member of a dominant group standing beside member(s) of a group being discriminated against or treated

unjustly" <http://wmpeople.wm.edu/asset/index/safezone/whatisanally>

William and Mary College put out a document on being an ally and in part it said this:

"Being an ally is more than being sympathetic towards those who experience discrimination. It is more than simply believing in equality. Being an ally means being willing to act with and for others in pursuit of ending oppression and creating equality. Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, said, " It is not enough to be compassionate. You must act.' <http://wmpeople.wm.edu/asset/index/safezone/whatisanally>

I don't know about you but I am a sucker for those articles that are entitled "10 things to [fill in the blank]". Somehow those articles hold out hope that there are easy steps to a world where I am more energetic, more organized, healthier a better parent. I found an article "10 things Allies need to know". This article is based on the work of Mia McKenzie. <http://everydayfeminism.com/2013/11/things-allies-need-to-know/>

Here is the list:

"1. Being an Ally is About Listening"

We cannot really know anything outside of ourselves until we stop listening to that little voice inside our heads for long enough to listen to the folks around us. And when we are trying to bridge a cultural, class or ethnic gap we have to try extra-hard to listen. So first thing put on your listening ears and put away that little judge-y voice.

"2. Stop Thinking of 'Ally' as a Noun"

A wise person I know once said, "Buying vegetables does not make me a healthy person." Meaning you actually have to change your eating habits to be more healthy. A corollary to this is we have to do more than listen we must find ways to act. Thinking alone is not enough to be an Ally. We need to act as allies.

"3. 'Ally' is Not a Self-Proclaimed Identity"

I can do some good reading and some good research. But I don't get to proclaim myself an ally. It is not a unilateral proclamation. To do that would misuse my white cisgender privilege. I need to first earn the trust of the folk I am allying with and they get to call me an ally. I can say I would like to be an ally. I am working to be an ally.

"4. Allies Don't Take Breaks"

Part of my privilege is that I can choose when to act and when not to act. My son Toby is a transgender male. He is trans all the time. He does not get to choose to be trans one day and not the next. Granted there are many days when no one questions his gender but for him he knows that at any moment it could be a question, at any moment he could be harassed, physically assaulted, or simply asked weird intrusive questions. And this one is hard for me. There are days when I am tired and it has been a long day and I really do need to retreat and so I don't address somebody who makes a homophobic joke, a racist joke or a violent joke. And I know there are moments when I am wrapped up in my own work and lists of tasks and I just don't notice the homophobic remark, or I don't realize that I have just made one myself.

"5. Allies Educate Themselves Constantly"

The body of knowledge changes constantly and so we must keep on re-educating ourselves. Someone may first identify as transsexual, and then transgender, and then gender queer, not to confuse me but rather because their understanding of themselves

may be changing. It is up to me the ally to keep up to date. It is not the responsibility of the group I am allying myself with to educate me. It might be nice when that happens but that is just frosting on the cake.

"6. You Can't Be an Ally in Isolation"

Solidarity in total isolation lacks one vital thing: accountability. If we are to be good allies we must be accountable. As allies we cannot be speaking for the group that we are allying with. I can say my son is transgender. I can say as his mother, as an ally, I have seen him be discriminated against. But I don't think it is legitimate for me to say my son is transgender and I know all about transgender stuff and so I know that transgender folks are always XY or Z. Because then I sound like I am in connection with my son but really I am speaking in isolation and I am talking for him instead of talking about my experience as an ally.

"7. Allies Don't Need to Be in the Spotlight"

Being an ally is not about me. I don't get to accumulate UU brownie points because I act as an ally. Sometimes people have said to me something along the lines of "Your son is so lucky to have you as a mom. You are such a good mom, you and your son have such a good relationship." On my best days I reply thank you, but he is the one who taught me. I am lucky to have him as a son.

"8. Allies Focus on Those Who Share Their Identity"

As a cisgender female it is not being an ally if I hang out with a bunch of LGBTQ folk and then pat my self on my back and say see I am really cool. I need to hang out with other cisgender folk and stand up to homophobia. For instance if I hear someone say "that is so gay" as a derogatory statement then I need to say to them saying "that is so gay" that way is not cool. When I hear cisgender folk saying untrue things about transgender folk I need to standup - I need to educate.

"9. When Criticized or Called Out, Allies Listen, Apologize, Act Accountably, and Act Differently Going Forward"

Allies are going to make mistakes. And when we get called out simply accept learn change and go forward. This is not about the ally this is about moving justice forward

"10. Allies Never Monopolize the Emotional Energy"

to quote Mia McKenzie

“[T]he people who experience racism, misogyny, ableism, queerphobia, transphobia, classism, etc. are exhausted.”

The last thing they need is our monopolizing of the emotional energy to only further their exhaustion. Surely allies need emotional support, but it must come from other allies. This may sound cold or unfeeling but it is not. Folks who are marginalized are spending a lot of their time trying to survive. Asking them to assuage my guilt or shame is just the wrong move. I need to do my own work of healing, growing and moving on.

So what can you or I do to be a better ally? November 20, this Thursday, is the National transgender day of remembrance, it is a day to memorialize those who have been killed as a result of transphobia, and acts to bring attention to the endured violence endured by the [transgender](#) community. That is the sad part about this so many of our trans youth are at risk of being assaulted or killed. But it does not need to be that way. We can make a better world for them and for us. So I invite you this week to find ways to be an ally. Listen, learn, own your own stuff, be relentless, speak up, act up, use your power. Perhaps like Laurel in the Story “10,000 Dresses” you could simply accept someone as they are.

I used the reading Mourning Toward Justice because it speaks to the fact that even when there are setbacks we need also to remember that there has been movement forward. There is so much more work to be done but much has been achieved already. It is important to not lose heart in the face of fear and even death.

We can make a difference. We can be allies, we can change this world.

Amen and Blessed Be.