

It seems that I went to seminary a long time ago. It is a little odd to me to realize that this much time has passed 30 years. many things have changed and somethings have not. When I was that young somewhat naive seminarian I remember my fellow students laughing when I said "You know the next time God calls, I am letting it go to voicemail." OK technically I said I am letting the answering machine take the message, because voicemail had not yet been invented. As I said it was a long time ago.

When you are in seminary you are invited to struggle with big questions, who are you, what is your faith, what is your call, who calls you, what is your answer to that call. What does it mean to be called? You have to come face to face with what you think and feel and believe a call to be.

why do we use the word call instead of invite? We UUs are a people of invitation - we invite other people into this community, we invite each other to events all the time, we invite each other to be in covenant.

And yet call is something different.

Ministers are not the only people who sense a calling. I would bet that many of you have talked to folks who said they felt called into their occupation. A college friend of mine as she turned 50 not only worked her full time job in marketing but took on going to nursing school on the weekends. She worked that grueling schedule for 2 years. Eventually she got her nursing degree and she gave up her lucrative marketing job for a lower paying nursing job. She said she felt called that she could no longer resist. Like Ganem what she had to do to get there was monumental.

When you are called into something it is more compelling than an invitation. I've talked to ministers, and doctors, teachers and artists about this. A calling is something that you simply cannot not do. Sometimes it is a paid calling and sometimes it is not. How do you know something is your calling - I think it is that thing that makes your heart sing.

Ganem, from our story this morning, got the same invite Salem did but there was something about it that stirred Ganem's soul but not Salem's. Gannem took up the invite and it became a call when he had to swim the treacherous waters, and then carry the great statue and run all the way to the top of the mountain. He threw himself into it he gave himself over to it. Sometimes callings are hard, but when your heart is singing it is hard to stop.

This question of call is something that I have been honored to deal with pretty much all of my life since I had an understanding of my call from the age of 6. But - that's kind of odd. Generally I don't think that most people really consider this question. What is their calling? When we meet people we tend to ask them what do you do meaning what is your job. I wonder though what it would be like if at coffee hour if we asked each other "what is your calling - what makes your heart sing."

We Unitarian Universalists are in part descended from the Puritans. We do not always like to admit that because Puritans have a bad reputation, some of it well earned.

But there are parts of Puritan life and belief that I think are informative. The Puritans believed that all work was divine work. For them there was no distinction between the secular and the sacred. So one was called into ones work whether that was ordained ministry, government service, farming, family, or whatever. And their expectation was that whatever you did for work it would be done in a way that a divine calling deserved. Common understanding now is that Puritans were compulsively drawn to work as a way of working out their salvation but it was much more nuanced than that. Because If what you do is a divine calling then you do it with a passion not found when you take a job just to pay the bills, or because it was the first job offered.

I think that there is a part of our UU beliefs that resonate with this part of

our Puritan heritage. Because we are each valuable, our first principle, and because we are part of a valuable interdependent existence, our 7th principle, I think there is a way in which this world both the physical world and our world of relationships is sacred. The work that we do, paid or unpaid, is sacred because it is part of that.

I invite you to think about what makes your heart sing, what is it that you love to read about, or think about, what is that you look forward to doing? What is it that you cannot not do? Maybe you are lucky enough to already be doing that. Maybe you don't yet have an answer to this question. Sometimes it takes time to figure out, to discern what you calling is.

It is not just individuals who can have a calling. A community can have a calling. What is the calling of this community.? We have a mission statement "Justice with Love and Joy, open to Awe!" But what makes our collective heart sing? What is it that we just cannot not do? I have a

minister colleague who is pastor to a very small church in a rural area. A while back they had some really bad flooding in their area and many people were without housing and staying in makeshift community shelters. Her church wanted to do something but didn't know what. They were small and didn't have many resources and what did they know to do after all? As it happened one of the things they do is make pies, usually as a fundraiser, but this time the folks from the congregation got together and made pies for the folks who were staying at the shelters. Sometimes a calling is not a grandiose thing.

What is it that makes the heart of this community sing? I'd like us to consider that question, in our coffee hour conversations, in our team meetings, in chalice circles at Board meetings and finance meetings

I don't have the answer to that question what makes our collective heart sing. And that is a good thing. The answer and our understanding of it needs to grow organically from within our community. I think being

welcoming is part of the answer. Or maybe that is just what makes my heart sing. I was at my village's farmers market yesterday and I was wearing my t shirt with the Rainbow colored UUA logo on it. The man I was buying vegetables from noted how pretty the logo was and asked what was that shape anyway. I said, "It is the logo for my church." "You must be a group who welcomes everybody," he said. I said, "Yes, yes we are."

Maybe our calling is a social justice issue, environmental justice, or black lives matter, or gender inclusivity, maybe our calling is being a community where you are welcome where we welcome all. I don't know what the answer is

But here is what I do know when who you are and what you do are in line with one another then you are living out your most authentic self, then you are living your call. And before you know it 30 years flies by.

