

190224 Swimming to the other side - Rev. Jennifer Hamlin-Navias

I am alone and I am searching
hungering for answers in my time

How many of you like to swim? How many of you like to hang out near water, especially on a hot July afternoon? Water is something that we are blessed with here in Central NY. Syracuse has several community pools open to the public, there are parks such as Green Lakes or Jamesville Beach where you can hang out.

Me I like to hang out near water but not so much in water. My family knows that if I get in the water to swim it's not hot its REALLY hot. For years and years I told myself that I liked water but I didn't love it and that is why i did not swim. Swimming - I could take it or leave it. 10 or so years ago I entered a mini and I mean mini triathlon. This required that I swim 800 yards in a part of Oneida lake that is so shallow for so long that really I walked 400 yards of it. I prepared to this event. I ran and biked in preparation and I had to swim. I really wanted there to be a biathlon where you could just bike and run. Because you know water is not my thing. But swimming was part of it. I signed up for swim lessons at the Y and I learned something about myself. It was not that I dislike swimming I was in fact terrified of it. For the first lesson in the lap pool I realized 1 ½ laps in that I was panicking. You see I had two near drowning incidents as

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a child the kind where my dad kicked off his shoes and dove in fully clothed to save me. Ruined two wrist watches that way. Thank heavens he was a great athlete. I learned not to trust myself in the water and instead of really owning up to that I simply came to believe that I liked water but did not love water. As I approached this competition I worried a lot about the swimming part. I watched some films of people running into lakes as they began the swim part of a Iron man or iron woman triathlon. They were brutal. The competitors pushed each other out of the way, dove over each other, swam over each other. The race was to begin with the swim portion - how could i even start the race? I was already scared of swimming how would I be able to fend off my competitors? Well as I said this was a mini triathlon called the iron girl. 800 yards of swimming, 5 kilometers of running and 18 kilometers of biking. What I found when I got there was almost everyone was really a beginner. There were a few highly trained and highly competitive women and the rest of us just let them go first. Then I decided to hang back let most everyone else in first. Those of us who were bringing up the rear we were in it together. We made sure no one got hurt, no one drowned, and it was just fine if you doggy paddled. I have poor vision and swimming without glasses is hard for me - I can't see where I am going. But folks around me let me know when I was getting off course and no one minded if I just followed them so as not to get lost. That portion of the race was easier for me than I expected because I had people to help me with it.

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We are swimming in the stream together some in power and some in pain
We can worship this ground we walk on cherishing the beings that we live beside
Loving spirits will live forever we're all swimming to the other side

In Marty's sermon that he gave here two Sundays ago he used the metaphor of being in the river together or swimming together as a metaphor for community. And that it is a creative act this being in community and in that creativity God or the Divine or The Good is created and strengthened. To quote Marty "Good or God or growth or spiritual ecstasy or whatever term works for you to represent that which is greater than yourself which you can surrender yourself to, exists *in* creativity, *in* creative interaction."

Being in community is not simply about being friendly and kind, its not simply about caring for one another, bringing food when there has been an illness or death, celebrating with you when there is a win to be celebrated. Being in community is the way we enact or create that which is bigger than ourselves.

To quote Marty again "We can trust in the river. We can enter the lives of others with the understanding that we can learn and grow from knowing them, even when we

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don't like them, but only to the extent that we also allow them to enter our lives.

Proximity matters. Authentic spiritual interaction means snuggling up close enough to smell the other person's theological odor. Some interactions will be unpleasant. Some will be unsettling. Some will be sad. Others will be exhilarating, some breathtaking, and some transformative. We don't get to pick and choose because they all happen in the same river."

This is what we are doing here - we are getting close enough to each other to smell the theological odor. We get close enough to each other to buoy one another up to create more buoyancy ... In community the whole is greater than the sum of the parts."

Marty spoke a little about process theology and a theologian Henry Wieman

I found this quote by him:

Inevitably in our lives we commit ourselves to something, whether worthy or not. The direction and intensity of our loyalties give shape and meaning to our lives. Loyalties, commitments, covenants, the promises we make to one another: These are the things [that] tell us to what we belong. By doing so they tell us who we are.

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Henry Nelson Wieman

Making a pledge to First UU is making a commitment to First UU we are asking you to make a commitment. We want you to be part of the us, we want you to shape us just as we want to have some impact on you too.

I heard this story about a woman on a subway train in New York City. "The station's crowded, and as she leaves the train, she realizes she is holding only one of her gloves. She looks back into the car and sees the matching one on the seat, but it's too late to rush back and retrieve it. Suddenly, as the doors begin to close, she flings out her arm, and tosses the remaining glove on to the seat alongside its mate. The doors shut, and the train pulls away." [Phyllis O'Connell, quoted in Quest, CLF, 11/97]

If you were that woman who could see the glove she left behind but could not retrieve it what would go through your mind at that minute? If it were me there would be some choice swear words said under my breath or in my head. I would probably think it wasn't fixable and go on my way trying to keep the ungloved hand in my pocket for warmth. That is not a very generous reaction on my part - pretty understandable but not too generous. The woman in the story understood at a very deep level that sometimes clingy to things does not necessarily get you more things. Some one

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taught her such generosity that she knew it was better to toss the one glove in her hand onto the seat alongside its mate. She, in an instant, understood that someone finding one glove is most likely going to ignore it. In an instant she understood that for someone to find two gloves - THAT MATCHED that would be a gift. She could not give her self that gift in that moment but she could give that gift to someone else. And she did not even know who that someone would be. What an act of trust what a belief in the goodness of the universe.

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We have something phenomenal here in this congregation. Our welcome is wide and deep. We held the Beyond the Binary conference on the 9th. One of the attendees gave us this feedback "You're amazing. ... I so appreciate all the work staff and ministers and lay volunteers did to make this a hospitable, welcoming, powerful event." Or this feedback "I love this conference. There is such a warm feeling" or simply "You rock."

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Two things make that conference amazing first it's not normal - most churches don't open their doors freely to trans and queer people. In this case I think us doing something not normal is great. And most importantly we approached the planning and hosting the conference with the question, "How do we make folks feel welcome?". Because this congregation is really good at welcoming. We need to get a little better at inviting but we are really good at welcoming.

We want this church to grow because we know we have something great here and we don't want to cling onto it like one glove. We want to be ridiculous in our generosity, exuberant in our generosity, irrepressible in our generosity.

And I need your help. I need you to look into your heart, I want you to feel all the feels about this place this community as you think about your pledge. I'm going to ask 2 things of you first when you think about your pledge don't give from the margin from what is left over give from the heart from your heart.

Second I want you to seriously consider upping your support to first UU by 10%. I know that is a serious ask. And I know that some of you can do 50% because that has already happened. And I know that some of you cannot. Some in this congregation are on fixed incomes where expenses are not fixed. But remember my first ask - first I

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want you to consider that whatever you pledge it comes from the heart not from the margin. I am asking you this because the process of seriously considering this will change you and change your relationship to this congregation.

I am asking for a percentage not an amount because we all pledge at a different level. Some folks pledge \$20.00 a year could you give 2 dollars more a year, some folks pledge 500 a year could you pledge \$50 a year. some folks pledge \$1500 a year could you pledge 150 more year. Some pledge \$5000 a year could you give 500 a year. 10% is a large increase a ridiculously generous increase. But spread over a year that's a little different. I want you to seriously consider it. I am asking you to think if it is possible, feel if it is possible. I am asking you this because I love this place and I want to see it thrive. AND and there is something about the practice being generous - IT. WILL. CHANGE. YOU. When you give more you feel like you have more. Because to be generous you have to be able to trust. I know for some of you it is not possible to increase your gifts to us by 10% but it is possible for each and everyone of you to think about it. And if you haven't pledged before or haven't in a long time I ask you to start this year.

If, as I believe, and as Marty preached about, that God is in and created in our interactions with one another then "the more we move, the more we jostle one

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another, the more we stumble and catch each other, the more we talk and pray and sing and dance together, the more we surrender to the current and swim in the creativity that is God, the more we experience salvation in the process of being and growing in community, the more [divine] we become.” That is what happens when we all swim together to the other side.

Let me tell you that I have upped my pledge by 10 percent. This past week I have been canvassing some of our top givers. And I have asked them the same thing can you up your pledge by 10 percent? I have not been able to reach them all (I will) but so far we have an increase in pledges of 4510. Our pledges last year were about 105,000 dollars. A 10% increase is just about 10,500. We are almost halfway there. And we need all of us. We cannot depend on only a few we need all of swimming to the other side. I know that is a large number and I know for some that is a stretch. But for the moment don't think about the number think about what could be done with that money. I do not have the last say in how our budget is spent but I have some influence. If we make that 10% goal and raise an extra 10,500 I am going to ask our finance team and Board to consider putting before the congregation a budget that includes a \$4,000 in support of local efforts to better syracuse. \$4,000 that could support we rise above the streets, or OGs against gun violence or a student run organization that is trying to improve syracuse. Right now I don't know where that money would go but I do know if I am

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asking you to be generous then we must ask ourselves as the collective whole to be generous. If you don't get to cling to that one glove then we cannot cling to that one glove.

We are all swimming to the other side. Let's choose to do it together in creative collaboration creating the divine along the way.

In a world without end may this be so.