

REFLECTIONS

PROMISE

Theme Based Ministry Newsletter of the Unitarian Church of Calgary
Volume 1, Issue 11 • September 2015

What Does It Mean to Be a People of Promise?

“Say Yes. Whatever it is, say yes with your whole heart & simple as it sounds that’s all the excuse life needs to grab you by the hands and start to dance.”

-Brian Andreas

There is power in a promise. Maybe the greatest power of all. This is arguably the most foundational claim of our faith.

It is common for Unitarian Universalists to say we were born inherently good and powerful, rather than inherently weak and depraved. What is less common is remembering this capacity for strength and goodness is rooted in our ability to make promises. Whereas other religious traditions focus on confession or right belief, we've always placed our hope in the act of making and keeping commitments. This is what is at stake in proclaiming that we are covenantal rather than creedal faith. If a new day is to come, it will arrive not when we all think alike, but when we all follow through on our commitments to love our neighbours as ourselves. If “salvation” is possible on this planet, it will be realized not from us noticing our need to be cleansed, but from waking up to our need to be connected. If divinity is real, we will know it not in the form of a supernatural moment, but in those everyday miracle moments when we look into each other’s eyes and say, “You can count on me to...” Grace is not a reward for good behaviour; it is the sacred and creative power that arises when two or more people entwine their lives in mutual commitment. There is incredible power in a promise.

September Services: Sunday 10:30

**September 6th
Labour Day**

**September 13th
Every Drop a Promise**

**September 20th
Promise: The Foundation of
Our Faith**

**September 27th
A Promise to the Community**

And what about the promise that life itself makes to us? This too is central to our faith. From our beginnings, we have declared life to be full of promise and potential, even when hardship seems to dominate our days. So we commit to keeping our eyes open. Trust in life and others, and life and others will prove themselves trustworthy. Shift your gaze from what you *want* to what you *have*, and suddenly life is generous rather than a threat. To paraphrase Brian Andreas, say yes and life will start to dance.

So who needs a promise from you this month? What commitment is it time for you to renew? What power is waiting to be released by the simple phrase, “You can count on me to...”? And maybe most important of all, are you ready to say “yes” and watch life dance? Better still are you willing to promise to be life’s dance partner?

Namaste,
Debra

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Upcoming Services

All services are Sunday mornings at 10:30am

September 6th

Labour Day

Traditional labour songs tell the story of the longing for equitable, secure and safe work environments. This was the promise of the labour movement.

Presenters: Muriel Turner-Wilkinson

Service Leader: Rev. Debra Faulk

Music: Jane Perry, Music Director

September 13th

Every Drop a Promise

The annual ingathering water service invites everyone to bring water representing summer experiences, travels or a backyard puddle, the ocean or local pool. We mingle all of our water to signify flowing back into community. We are each a drop in this congregation coming together to offer the promise of quenching our deep thirsts.

Presenters: Rev Debra Faulk and Shannon Mang

Music: Jane Perry, Music Director

September 20th

Promise: The Foundation of Our Faith

Whereas other religious traditions focus on confession or right belief, we've always placed our hope in the act of making and keeping commitments. This is what is at stake in proclaiming that we are covenantal rather than creedal faith.

Presenter: Rev Debra Faulk

Service Leader: Danielle Webber, Intern Minister

Music: Jane Perry, Music Director

September 27th

A Promise to the Community

Welcome and Deepen Relationship – Grow in Wisdom - Act for a Just and Sustainable World
In our mission statement we have declared a way that we want to be in the world. The way that we want to live and be in community together. But what does that mean for the community around us. How will we welcome and deepen new relationships from our neighbourhood. In what ways are we act for a just and sustainable Tuxedo, Crescent Heights and Mount Pleasant Neighbourhoods. This morning we will look at the promise that we made in our mission statement and how we will expanded it to our neighbours over the next year.

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Presenter: Danielle Webber, Intern Minister

Service Leader: Rev Debra Faulk

Music: Jane Perry, Music Director

September's Spiritual Exercise

Keep A Promise... To Yourself!

It's the promise we most often forget, or maybe it's better to say, it's the promise we most often sacrifice. We can be so good at keeping our commitments to others and yet fall flat on our face when it comes to the commitments we make to ourselves. And if we can't keep our promises to ourselves, how will we ever keep our promises to each other? The commitments we make to ourselves serve as the foundation for the pledges we make to those around us. If we break our commitments to personal physical health, we sacrifice the strength to support others. If we cheat on our promises to personal spiritual health, we lose our ability to see and serve needs greater than our own. Those who can't promise kindness and forgiveness to themselves are rarely able to extend kindness and forgiveness to others.

Our spiritual exercise this month honors this sacred interdependence between staying true to oneself and staying true to those around us. Here is your challenge:

Read these two articles:

<http://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/11-promises-you-should-make-yourself.html>

AND

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/30/promises-to-yourself_n_5628259.html

- Identify one of the promises mentioned that most resonates with you. Which promise calls to you the most? Which promise is your heart most hungering for? Which promise have you wanted to keep to yourself, but regularly break?
- Find a way to keep that promise front and centre. Print it out and tape it to your office desk. Put it in your wallet or your purse. Write it in lipstick on your bathroom mirror.
- Spend the month keeping it! Give yourself the gift of finally following through.
- Come to your group ready to share your experience, what you learned about yourself, and how the month was different because you remained true to your promise.

Questions to Live With

As has become our practice, be sure to engage these questions in advance of your group meeting and find the one that “hooks” you most. Then let it take you on an adventure. Live with it for the entire month. Allow it to break into—and break open—your ordinary thoughts. And then come to your Journey Group meeting prepared to share that experience with your group.

1. If someone secretly monitored your life for a month, what would they conclude is your most sacred vow?
2. It's been said our very humanity lies in the way we carry out our promises. How have you made yourself more human through a promise? What promise is asking you to renew your humanity right now?
3. What promises have you made to your spiritual life? We keep our commitment each day to work and earning money, why do the promises to our soul and spirit often take second seat?
4. What promise in your life needs to be broken? Are you keeping a commitment that is keeping you in a cage?
5. Do you still need to forgive yourself for breaking a promise?
6. When promises are broken, how good are you at "beginning again in love"? Has your ability to trust survived all those promises that went unfulfilled?
7. It's been said that we promise according to our hopes, and perform according to our fears. Is there a fear in your life right now that is getting in the way of a promise you want to make?
8. Do you over-promise? When you offer others your commitment, do they take it with a grain of salt? Are you ready to do something to change that? Do you even know why you do it?
9. Has time and age changed how you think about making promises? Are you slower or quicker to make commitments? Have your commitments grown narrower or more broad?
10. When was the last time you said “Yes!” and then watched the world take your hand and dance?

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For Inspiration

As always, the following texts are not “required reading.” We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our groups. They are simply meant to spark your reflections—and maybe open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to

Promise is a big word. It either makes something or breaks everything. - anonymous

In the frank expression of conflicting opinions lies the greatest promise of wisdom in governmental action. - Louis D. Brandeis

... We promise according to our hopes, and perform according to our fears.
François VI de la Rochefoucault

The one who promises everything is sure to fulfill nothing. - Carl Jung

When promises are broken, “we forgive ourselves and each other. We begin again in Love.” - *Singing the Living Tradition*, #637

Your ordinary acts of love and hope point to the extraordinary promise that every human life is of inestimable value. - Desmond Tutu

A covenant might be implicit, expressed by silent consent as people walk together and show concern for one another. But an explicit covenant is far better ... for reminding the members of their mutual duty and stirring them up to it. ... there is something to be said for the word *covenant*,... It emphasizes that the church is a community of mutual obligation, which involves a sense of commitment. Even the freest of free churches needs that much discipline if it is to last long enough to accomplish anything of value in this world.
Conrad Wright, Unitarian historian

Politicians are the same all over. They promise to build bridges even when there are no rivers. - Nikita Khrushchev

Those that are most slow in making a promise are the most faithful in the performance of it. - Jean Jacques Rousseau

What is a vow... but the mouth repeating what the heart has already promised?
- Jane Yolen, *Sister Light, Sister Dark*

When did the future switch from being a promise to being a threat? Chuck Palahniuk

Human beings are at our best when we make solemn promises to one another and try hard to keep them. We are the only animal that makes promises: we are promise-making, promise-keeping, promise-breaking, promise-renewing creatures. Our very humanity lies in the way we carry out our promises to our families, our co-workers, our neighbours, and our fellow members of the human family... To be genuine, a covenant must be a covenant of being. It's not just about good words, but about *actions*.
Dennis McCarty on James Luther Adams

We must find ways to access knowledge that is in danger of being lost. ... We're living in an age when our daily life is dominated by the [dullness of the] marketplace. ... The awareness that our intimate relationships are filled with meaning, that we are connected to and depend on the earth, that we have interests transcending our own personal lives – these dimensions are not factored into the values of the marketplace. ... We must remember...that we have received abundantly in our lives and that our presence matters. We must remember that we are a blessing—that we are full of promise.”
- Rev. Rebecca Parker

Unless commitment is made, there are only hopes; but no plans. - Peter F. Drucker

What can anyone give you greater than now, starting here, right in this room, when you turn around? - William Stafford

“You Reading This, Be Ready”
Starting here, what do you want to remember?
How sunlight creeps along a shining floor?
What scent of old wood hovers, what softened sound from outside fills the air?

Will you ever bring a better gift for the world than the breathing respect that you carry wherever you go right now? Are you waiting for time to show you some better thoughts?

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When you turn around, starting here, lift this new glimpse that you found; carry into evening all that you want from this day. This interval you spent reading or hearing this, keep it for life –

“Wheat”

Let a stalk of wheat
be your witness
to every difficult day.
Since it was a flame
before it was a plant,
since it was courage
before it was grain,
since it was determination
before it was growth,
and, above all, since it was prayer
before it was fruition,
it has nothing to point to but the sky.
Remember the incredibly gentle wheat stalk
which holds its countless arrows fixed
to shoot from the bowstring –
you, standing in the same position
where the wind holds it.- Ishihara Yoshiro, translated by
N. Koriyama and E. Lueders,

Extra Resources

Books on Promise

Active Hope: How to Face the Mess Where in without Going Crazy by Joanna Macy
A celebration of promise and hope over powerlessness.

Soul of a Citizen: Living with Conviction in Challenging Times by Paul Rogat Loeb
Another celebration of promise and hope over powerlessness.

The Four Agreements: A Toltec Wisdom Book by Don Miguel Ruiz
Four promises that can transform how we live our lives.

Articles on Promise

“Bound in Covenant,” Rev. Victoria Safford
Our history of covenant and one example of its modern practice in congregational life
<http://www.uuworld.org/ideas/articles/285904.shtml>

“We Are Already in Paradise,” Rev. Rebecca Parker
There is no land promised to any of us than the land already given, the world already here.
<http://www.uuworld.org/spirit/articles/162500.shtml>

How to Make and Keep a Promise to Yourself
<http://www.theartfullifeblog.com/how-to-make-and-keep-a-promise-to-yourself/>

Anne Lamott finds hope while participating in a peace march.
<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/excerpts.php?id=14601>

Videos on Promise

Love Reaches Out

From Unitarian Universalist Sanctuaries, Washington, DC Video:
The promise of love reaching us as we reach out to each other.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvIPa28cVfA>

From *The Pursuit of Happiness* (sic)

Movie clip on protecting the promise and potential within: Will Smith, with the best advice a dad can give to his own son. Don` t ever let somebody tell you, “you can` t do something...”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dPEdwaLQLag>

What Country Does the Most Good?

The promise of a better world perhaps lies with the “Good Country Index” that Policy advisor Simon Anholt developed. Check out this talk about national behaviours and how we measure the good we do for the promise of a better collective future.
http://www.ted.com/talks/simon_anholt_which_country_does_the_most_good_for_the_world

Your Notes:

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Children learn all about **Promise Making** and **Promise Keeping** from all of the important adults in their lives, particularly the adults they live with. Pay close attention to how you use the words “I promise”. Do not use these words casually, if you are not absolutely sure that you can keep your promise—don’t promise! The following comes from the website www.imom.com – it offers some down to earth wisdom about how our children learn from us. – Shannon Mang DRE

1. Keeping promises teaches your kids they can trust you.

We want our children to take us at our word about all sorts of important things: faith, values, relationships, etc. If they can’t trust us in the little things, how can they trust us in the big things? Following through on the day-to-day promises teaches that when mom says it, you can bank on it.

2. Keeping promises to your kids models personal integrity.

Want your kids to be the kind of people who keep their promises? Don’t just talk about it—model it for them. The more your children observe you keeping your word to them and others, even when it’s not easy, the more likely they will be to do the same.

3. Keeping promises to your kids tells them they are important.

Your child will notice if you keep your word to others, but not to them. How you prioritize your time and, therefore, your life is not lost on them. If you have time for all of your hobbies and favorite TV shows but no “time” to take them to the park as promised, it telegraphs to them that they are less important than those other things you chose to do with your day. Feeling valued is fundamental to any relationship. If you want a strong relationship with your child, keep your promises. So start with these 10 Ways to Love Your Child.

4. Keeping promises to your kids builds respect.

How many times have you heard a parent lament that their children just don’t respect them? It’s not always the case, but sometimes that respect has been eroded because the child sees a lack of integrity in the parent. Integrity is a key ingredient in respect. When you keep your promises to your children and others, you show them that you are deserving of their respect.

5. Keeping promises to your kids teaches them how to have good relationships.

Relationships are built on trust: in the home, in the workplace, in all sorts of contexts. By modeling promise keeping with your children, you’re equipping them to be better spouses, better employers and employees, and better friends. Training your child to treat people well will result in better relationships for him throughout life and a better life as a result!

Feel like you’ve dropped the ball in this area with your kids? You’re not alone; most of us have at one time or another. The key is to keep it from becoming a habit because our habits are ultimately who we are. You can get back on track by offering your child a sincere apology and working on keeping your promises, big and small, going forward.

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Looking Ahead

Themes for 2015-2016

September - **Promise**

October - **Grace**

November - **Integrity**

December - **Wonder**

January - **Resilience**

February - **Reconciliation**

March - **Renewal**

April - **Revelation**

May - **Tradition**

June - **Revelry**

Theme Based Listening Circles (TLCs)

You are invited to deepen your experience of the monthly theme by participating in a facilitated small group. These groups meet once a month, usually in the later part of the month to allow time to be with the theme, at various times and places in the city. If you are interested in a group, either as a facilitator or participant, please send an inquiry tlc@unitarianscalgary.org

Current times and places include:

3rd Tuesday - 7:00 - 9:00

3rd Wednesday - 1:00 - 3:00

4th Friday - 10:00 - noon - Unitarian Church

4th Sunday noon - 2:00 - Unitarian Church of Calgary

The content for these packets is a group effort. We welcome submissions of your ideas of readings, stories, videos, visual images, questions, and spiritual exercises for each month's topic. While not everything will make it into this collection, it is useful for our worship team and our group facilitators. You can send submissions for any theme anytime - for October's theme of "Grace" by September 15th, to debra@unitarianscalgary.org.

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