

Williamsburg Unitarian Universalists
From The Heart
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When David Hamilton asked me to provide a from-the-heart for today's service, my immediate response was a mental, "Why?" But then as I thought about it, my life has been nothing but change and through adapting to change in my physical and personal life I learned to adapt to change in my spiritual life. I also discovered the stability in my spiritual life to make the constant change tolerable and sometimes enjoyable.

During my childhood, I was an Air Force brat, we moved roughly every two years. New location, new school, new friends. As I got older, with each move came the responsibility for eliminating what I no longer wanted and packing, what I did want. I learned to let go of possessions with ease. I learned to keep what was of value to me. As a teen I went to three different high schools and after the first wrenching move I also learned not to invest much of myself in friendships. Later I realized that the choices we make during change can make the difference between what is life enhancing and what is life limiting.

Change was the subtext of my adult life and though I did live in northern California for 33 years, change happened. Initially I wanted to be a writer, but I got interested in religion, and so I spent several years in seminary and working in the Episcopal Church. I married a divorced man and, on a technicality, was excommunicated from that Church. My husband worked in construction and we moved into new or different apartments or homes five times during our 17 year marriage. Change continued in my career as I moved from computer technician, to manager, to statewide director, and from airframe maintenance, to banking, to health insurance and finally to college lecturer and lab manager. Change continued in my personal life from wife, to divorcee, to a committed Lesbian relationship. In our 16 years together, Loretta and I moved four times, and I held IT consulting jobs with

three different companies. Through all of this I continued to let go of possessions with ease and not to invest much of myself in friendships, but I also learned to embrace change as an adventure, a way to grow, and to enjoy the variety that life was providing me.

It wasn't always that way. I spent most of my childhood wishing that I could live in one place forever. I longed for the value of sameness, of knowing your neighbors far and wide, and of being really known by a community of people. When I was in my last year of high school, I discovered a relationship that has given me stability through all of my life's changes. I discovered the radical itinerate teacher, Jesus. I read the New Testament Gospels. I decided I liked this man and I began the long process of hacking my way through the jungle of Catholic, Protestant, and Fundamentalist orthodoxies, dogma, and politics to the person and what he stood for.

It helped that I went into this expecting to find something real and reasonable and therefore believable. As a Religion major in a Methodist college I wrote a term paper arguing, based on the latest Biblical scholarship, that the man never did claim to be divine; the implication being that there was no point in our believing in his divinity. I was labeled an iconoclast. Like possessions no longer needed, I let go of ideas that made no sense to me with ease. Over time I have let go of Jesus' divinity; his virgin birth, as well as the birth stories; the trinity; the claim that only Jesus is a son of God; the idea that Jesus died to save me from my sins; bodily resurrection; and the authority of ecclesiastical succession, that is, the authority of any agent of any organized religion over my spiritual life. I have found evidence in the life and teachings of Jesus, the man, that encourage me in walking away from dogma toward meaningful spiritual experience.

What are some of the things about Jesus that I decided to keep?

1. Jesus had relationship with a God who let His rain fall on the just and unjust, who treated everyone equally. Jesus demonstrated this same radical

inclusiveness. He practiced non-violent resistance to a politics and culture that stratified individuals; that exploited the lowest and discarded outcast.

2. Jesus taught the great commandment; love God, love self, love others. I learned to define love as the respectful desire for the well being of the self or other. This, I think, is what Jesus demonstrated in his life. The Buddhists call this compassion.

3. Jesus' practice of withdrawal and meditation. Jesus had a mystical and experiential relationship with God fed by his practice of prayer and meditation. How did he meditate, what did he do? I decided to look into other religions to find answers to my questions about meditation. I read the Tao Te Ching, and the writings of Hindu and Buddhist authors. I learned meditation and experienced the fruits of meditation.

The stability I had longed for as a child has been realized in my ongoing search for the human Jesus. This has been a life long spiritual journey. Earlier I said that the choices we make in the midst of change can be either empowering or limiting. That early learning, not to invest much of myself in friendships, lasted a very long while. It lasted until I moved to Virginia over five years ago. It lasted until I joined a unique and loving community at the MCC NOVA church in Fairfax. Finally I am developing friendships that I enjoy cultivating, that I want to last forever. Yes, I did move once more, I moved here, not too far away. I go back about once a month for a weekend with those friends and they come here to visit. In the interim we keep in touch by phone and email. I came to this church thinking that, with my progressive form of Christianity, I could best fit in here. I am learning that I can also find a similar sense of community and friendship.

Perhaps all the changes in my life were the current of a river carrying me to the spiritual shore where I now live. In the midst of the change I had no idea where I was headed. Even now I don't know if there will be more changes that will carry me further along. I only know the journey has been worth it. May we all find blessings in the changes in our lives.