

Homily for Mother's Day
Delivered by Debra Garfinkel, Ministerial Intern
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At All Souls Unitarian Church, Tulsa, OK

“MAKING YOURSELF AT HOME”

Moms – we all have them. I've been thinking a lot about mothers – what makes someone a mother, for instance. Because you know that there are people – men, women, and even children – who function as mothers. Mothering isn't just about making “womb” for somebody. The most important part of being a mother is making a home.

Everyone needs a sense of belonging – a place to call home. Home is a feeling that can be tied to a place. Home is also safety, comfort, commitment, and trust. Home is sacred space. Home is sacred time. Home is sacred relating.

Home is such an important concept that many folk tales and stories are about home. Some people might even go so far as to say that every story – no matter how silly, or sad, or frightening – is about home.

There's the story of the Three Little Pigs. That's all about making a home.

There's the story of Dorothy and the Wizard of Oz. Finding home – being home.

Of course, there are the now classic Home Alone movies. I'm sure you can think of many others.

In stories considered to be sacred from cultures all over the world, we learn about searching for home, finding a home, and making a home. In the stories about Jesus, we are meant to be surprised by his definition of home and family. Everywhere is home, he says. Everyone is family. How can that be? People have been working on this for a very long time.

Fifteen hundred years ago, in the sixth century, the Catholic priest known as St. Benedict believed deeply in home making as a spiritual practice. He believed it so much that he wrote what is called “The Rule of Benedict.” This was a set of rules for a group of men who dedicated themselves to living their faith in the life and teachings of Jesus. St. Benedict's rule was hospitality.

Every person who wanted to live in the monastery had to promise to stay there. He couldn't leave because he didn't like the food. He couldn't leave because he had to keep his room clean. He couldn't leave because he was expected to take his turn at digging in the garden and pulling weeds. In other words, entering the monastery meant a life of manual labor as well as reading, studying, and praying. It meant being obedient. It meant making a life-long commitment.

Fifteen hundred years later, men and women in religious communities the world over continue to make the commitment and follow the Rule of Benedict. It is a model for hospitality. People who choose to learn from it grow to understand better the nature of this authority and this obedience.

Now, for many of us, authority and obedience are suspect and to be questioned. Consider this explanation of the Benedictine Rule:

The exercise of authority in the Rule points more to mercy than to justice, more to understanding of human weakness than strict accountability, more to love than zeal.

What defines the leader of a Benedictine community is not being head of an institution but being in relationship with all the members.

(The Rule of St. Benedict,
available online <http://www.thedome.org/sisters/rule.html>)

St. Benedict knew that everything is connected so it is important to pay attention to all relationships – not only the human ones. He felt that in this relating, one's life should be balanced. Therefore, there is equal time for every part of life. There is to be a balance of prayer, study, physical labor, eating, drinking, sleeping, and recreation. When one part is neglected over preference for another, all the relationships suffer.

Being in relationship as a community is the most important part. St. Benedict knew that it is very easy to see the imperfections in others, especially when you work side-by-side with them, day in and day out. In keeping the commitment to live with these people who could be very annoying and irritating, Benedict understood that gradually people would come to a place of acceptance and love.

Of course, we think of hospitality as how we greet and treat guests in our homes or other spaces that we claim. We tend to think of home as a house: "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home." Dorothy learned in her adventure in the Land of Oz that no matter where you travel, as long as you carry home in your heart, home is never far away. That's why there is no *place* like home: home is not a place. Home is a matter of the heart.

When I worked in a homeless shelter, I noticed right away that people created a sense of home and family, with clear boundaries and rules. When I worked in a women's medium security prison, the same thing was true. Nursing homes and retirement centers are, indeed, people's homes. Hospitals are homes. Schools are homes. Motorcycles are homes. Boxes are homes. *Churches are homes.*

Home is sacred space. Home is sacred time. Home is sacred relating.

Every person needs to feel loved and accepted *exactly as he or she is.*

This is sacred work. Unitarian Universalist churches belong to a sacred covenant. We belong to a community of congregations. We are *committed* to be in relationship – whether or not we like each other, whether or not we find it convenient, whether or not we find it entertaining, or illuminating. How we are in the larger community reflects our relationship to ourselves.

Making yourself at home starts within your sacred heart. I invite you to prepare your heart to be open and hospitable. I invite you to let go of old burdens. Perhaps you need to forgive someone or forgive yourself. You know what you need to do.

Remember that we are all in this together. "Love is the spirit of this church and service is its law. This is our great covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love and to help one another."

Welcome home.

Happy Mother's Day.