

Nov 17: Covenant Renewal Sunday, Rev. Linda

The word covenant gets tossed around a lot. It is one of those buzz words that we say so much it hardly has any meaning left to it. Let's put some meaning back into that word, that act, that way of being in the world.

Covenants date back to Judaism when god made a covenant with the Jewish people to love and keep them and the Jewish people made a covenant with god to be faithful, loyal and steadfast in their faith.

Covenants came to us through the Puritans who committed to living in a certain kind of religious space, one that listened, that gave authority to the collective rather than to the hierarchy, one that understood that when people gather with the intention of being more than they can be apart, then more than our egos are present. They called this more God. I call this more the Voice of Love.

Covenants are not contracts, and they are not just promises. A covenant is a commitment to live in a certain way and not another, and to do it with others, tripping all the way over our egos, our needs to be seen, our need not disappear.

As Unitarian Universalist minister Rev. Victoria Safford writes in her article, "Bond in Covenant:"

"We are bound by covenant, each to each and each to all, by..." "freely chosen and life-sustaining interdependence." The central question for us is not, "What do we believe?" but more, "What do we believe in? To what larger love, to what people, principles, values, and dreams shall we be committed? To whom, to what, are we accountable?"¹

What do we believe in? To what larger love, to what people, principles, values, and dreams (will) we be committed? To whom, to what, are we accountable?"²

The answer to this question lives in the way we live. Covenants, though remembered through words, are kept in the way we show up, the way we reach out, the way we see ourselves as bound by interdependence. Bound by interdependence.

I do not love the word bound. I rarely use it. But bound to interdependence, that is an image I cannot get out of my head.

When I imagine dancing this for you, which would demonstrate this up so much better than words, my back straightens, my heart, I can see my beating heart lifting up and my hands open out and if I had the help of some of you techno wizards, silk thread would emerge

¹ Victoria Safford, "Bound in Covenant," Summer 2013, <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/bound-in-covenant>

² Ibid.

from my hands as I open them to you and as you opened your hands in response, the same thread would leap from your hands and we would become bound, held ever so gently in this silk web that cannot be unspun while we keep reaching, keep opening.

Even when one of us dies, the web keeps spinning, the breath and love and commitment and forgiving and loving and forgetting of this person still woven into this network, still here, still here.

We are, not who we say we are, but how we live, and navigate love, pain and disappointment.

Would I know your commitments to this life in the way you live, how you speak, worry, receive, reject, allow and punish?

I am not suggesting that we need to be only the light. I know we are and must have the darkness too. I am saying that how we move in this world, with darkness and light, is our covenant to ourselves and to one another. And this community, this community right here and now, just as it is, this space of seeking and hoping and restoration and tearing open, this is where we can give, see and work through not only what we care about, but how we care.

Our covenant, the one we reaffirm today, is the answer to the question: “ ‘How do I decide which beautiful, clumsy, and imperfect (communities) will carry and hold...my “name, hand, and heart?’ ”³

Our name, hand and heart...this is personal, this is down to the bone, this is the BYOA version of covenant, the bring your own archives, your own story, your own truth and triggers and past and present and dreams and be accountable to who you are as you open it all, bound by it all.

Ethicist and theologian Margaret Farley makes this observation in [*Personal Commitments: Beginning, Keeping, Changing*](#):

“Civilization’s history tends to be written in terms of human discoveries and inventions, wars, artistic creations, laws, forms of government, customs, the cultivation of the land. . . .

³ Ibid.

At the heart of this history, however, lies a sometimes hidden narrative of promises, pledges, oaths, compacts, committed beliefs, and projected visions. At the heart of any individual's story, too, lies the tale of her or his commitments."⁴

Our covenant is a commitment to walk together, no matter how you walk or if you wheel or are carried, we agree to go on, to risk another season, to recognize the web we are always spinning, the places we love and the places we could do without, to recognize the web we are spinning and that is holding us. Because we are bound by the interdependence of covenant.

Such a commitment does not predict the future or set it in stone. It makes a certain kind of future possible. Such a commitment does not predict the future or set it in stone. It makes a certain kind of future possible.

As a congregant said, "Covenant is a promise I keep to myself, about the kind of person I want to be, the kind of life I mean to have, together with other people, and with all other living things."⁵

We will be here when you give birth, we will be here when your children succeed and struggle, we will be here when you question and when you celebrate. We will be here when you mourn. We will be here when you are living and dying too.

As UU minister Rev. David Pyle says, "The life of the spirit is solitary, but our answers to these questions call us to speak, call us to live, in the plural."⁶

Call us to live in the plural. We are bound by interdependence.

Covenants are the work of intimacy, meaning making and are ultimately about justice making.

Thank you for being here, that you for renewing your covenant knowing that renewal is a pledge to keep changing, loving, letting go and hold on. It is indeed what shapes us while we shape it.

We will always be bound to one another, you and I.

Amen

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <https://celestiallands.org/wayside/?p=900>