

Coming of Age
A Sermon by
The Reverend Bill Clark & The COA Youth
November 12, 2017

The mystic poet, Khalil Gibran once wrote; “It has been said that next to

hunger and thirst, our most basic human need is for storytelling.” For us Unitarian-Universalist stories are often what I call our sacred scriptures – for it is through our story telling where the take on some of lives deeper and most important questions are revealed; Who am I? What am I here for? What is the meaning of life?

This becomes even more relevant if we look into our denominations Coming of Age programs. Today is an historical day as we gather with three of our youth who have participated in our first Coming of Age curriculums. For those unfamiliar with this idea of coming of age, it is for our high school students, who through a mentoring program and other activities when our teens are asked to articulate there ethical and religious identity as best they can – for some they call this their credo statement.

Now growing up in the Catholic tradition we had what is called a Confirmation Class. This was the point in our faith development, as a teenager, where we became what was referred to as “Soldiers for Christ”.

Rather than us writing a statement of our values and beliefs, we had to memorize answers to questions the Bishop or Archbishop would be asking us – plus we got to choose a confirmation name – a name of a saint to add to our own name. I initially choose Bartholomew only because I wanted my initials to be WLBC – it was the name of my favorite radio station at the time WLBC – rock 103! My mother said no. Thus I became Andrew – William Loydon Andrew Clark – I have never used the name Andrew again.

In the Jewish tradition young girls and boys have what is called a Ba’ Mitzvahs or Bat’ Mitzvahs for girls. In whatever form these traditions and ceremonies emerge they are to celebrate and acknowledge the passing from boy to manhood – and girl to womanhood.

Now to be asked to write about our belief system is never an easy task – be it as an adult or teenager. Yet, most of what you will here today are voices from youth – be it our own youth or the youth of years past.

“I don’t think it is fair for someone to ask me what I believe,” wrote Hadley Kyle, in 2005. “I don’t think a lot of people know what they believe, anyway. I am only certain of one thing, however. I believe that you have only one life, and you should spend your life being you, and being what you want to be.”

“I do put great faith in paying it forward,” writes Kenny Johnson. “Paying it forward is based on the idea that it is important to be kind to everyone whether that person is your best friend, your worst enemy or a complete stranger. Paying it forward is also important because you never know where you will be in the future. People go from having everything to having nothing and from having nothing to having everything. It is like the classic Aerosmith song; Sing with me, just for today, never tomorrow, the good lord will take you away.”

“My beliefs are extremely vague,” writes then high schooler, Nick Page.” “And that’s the way I’d like it to stay. I feel that if I were to believe in god in any shape or form, I would be guessing. I’m not even completely sure god exists. But if I just believe that there may be something out there than I’ll have satisfied my questions to a point I’m comfortable with”

And from a then teenager to now a UU minister, Bethany Lowe, wrote: “I accept those around me for who they are. I do not hate them for being homophobic, racist or even a Yankees fan. I believe that everyone is entitled to their own opinions and the only thing I can do is tell them what I believe and hope that they at least consider my opinion as just that an opinion. I believe that every person I meet on the road of life has something to contribute to the map of my own life. No one goes un-noticed.”

So now in keeping with this ideal that no one goes unnoticed we have the voices of our own youth of today; Sam Aldrich- Moodie and Jacob Maccaferri, (Michael Noel)

Sam speaks

Jacob Speaks

An added yet important element to this day of celebration is the voices of our mentors: Tad Crawford, Michael Savoy

Tad Speaks.

Now we come to the part of our service as we with ritual and intent welcome these boys to men. Ritual is an important element to worship as it adds symbolism and mystery. **The intention of this ceremony this morning is for these young men to know that they are loved and affirmed by each of us gathered here and The Unitarian Universalist Society of Martha's Vineyard is a safe place where they can find their voice and speak their truth with love. This is our intention.**

Our ritual this morning has four stages. It begins with drumming – the call of the elders, prophets and sages into this space. Next as your name is called to come forward with a parent to light a candle – a symbol of the divine light found in all of us. Next your parent will hand you a letter written to you by them to be read in your own time. Third I will present to you a rose: one of my spiritual mentors said the rose is the smile of god; I give this to you as a symbol of this community's love and care for each of you. Next a gift bag of gifts with some tools to help you for practical purposes and the other for spiritual purposes. Finally a blessing of water to send you out into the world with grace and gratitude for being you.

Let us begin.

