



Meeting the Stranger

Covenant Group Session

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship - Greenville, South Carolina

Revised September 2020 by Denise Frick

Welcome, Chalice Lighting: *Here we are, together in this space. By our love and by our covenant, we make this a holy place. We light the chalice of Unitarian Universalism in honor of the light that lives in each of us, the light that shines among us, and the light we bring into the world.*

Opening Words

Who are you meeting? Yourself. Everywhere yourself.

~Jon Kabbat Zinn

Personal Check In: Briefly share something from your life since we last met and how you are feeling now.

Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. How do you usually “feel” when you interact with a stranger? What do you do?
2. We know this can be a dangerous world, and not everyone is friendly or good. How does one balance caution, good manners, and compassion when making connections with unfamiliar people?
3. What do difficult people have to teach us? What are some compassionate/connected ways of dealing with people who are rude or who treat you badly?
4. What personal experiences have you had of meaningful interactions with strangers?

Readings – see below

Sharing - Please share your thinking about one or more of the questions. During this time everyone has the opportunity to speak without interruption while others listen deeply. Everyone gets to speak once before anyone speaks twice. Deep listening means we are being entirely attentive. We don't interrupt or give advice. There is no need to fix or save or set someone straight. We are simply making and holding a safe place where we are allowed to show up.

(This is usually a good time to take a brief break)

Open Discussion - This is a time for active conversations when we may respond to something another person said about the topic, or relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared their thoughts. Continue to practice deep listening.

Closing reading:

They asked him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or saw you naked and gave you clothes?” And the King said to them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did this for one of the least of these who are members of the human family, you have done it for me.”

~Matthew 25:38

Announcements/Plans

Check out: As we close today, how are you feeling now?

Extinguish the Chalice

Readings

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some have entertained angels unawares.
~Hebrews 13:2

Fear makes strangers of people who would be friends. Shirley MacLaine

You never know why you have met someone. In every interaction, there is hidden purpose and potential. Pay attention. Stay open. Good things happen when you meet strangers. ~Yo-Yo Ma

Great perils and tragedies have this beauty: they bring to light the fraternity of strangers.
~Victor Hugo

It's an amazing thing—magnetic attraction. It never fails. The room will fill with strangers, all coming from different places and circumstances, for different reasons, and the right people find their way to each other, the right people sit together, every time. ~Caroline Myss

When you change your vision of why you are surrounded by specific people and events, you change also the quality of your attention to the energy around you. When you begin to understand that everything has purpose and must be just as it is, you realize that every circumstance, every person you meet is your teacher, and the energy of antagonism is turned into joy. ~Tantra Yoga teaching

So somebody comes along and gets to me. They get me angry or uptight or they awaken some desire in me, and wow! I am delighted. They got me. And that's my work on myself. If I am angry with you because your behavior doesn't fit my model of how you should be, that's my problem for having models. If I have no expectations, I don't feel upset. If you are a liar and a cheat, that's your Karma. If I'm cheated, that's mine.
~Ram Dass

Stranger, if you passing meet me and desire to speak to me, why should you not speak to me?
And why should I not speak to you? ~Walt Whitman

Men always talk about the most important things to perfect strangers. In a perfect stranger we may perceive humanity itself; the image of the Divine is not disguised by resemblances to an uncle or doubts about the wisdom of a mustache. ~Gilbert K. Chesterton

It's funny, but talking to people on the bus has been life changing for me. It's as if I've had angels in disguise waiting at strategic locations to help me at key moments of my life.
~Melissa Lamb

Have you not learned great lessons from those who braced themselves against you and disputed passage with you? ~Walt Whitman

Nothing has changed my world view, and my life, more than taking the risk of saying "Hi" to people I don't know on a regular basis. Whether I'm walking down a busy shopping street, longboarding in the park, or out at a nightclub, I see every moment that I'm out in the world as a chance to meet new people. ~Brad Bollenbach

Behind all of it, behind everything apparent, is the ONE. Everyone is your "soul-mate." Everyone is your teacher. There's only one of us here. ~Ram Dass

While walking his dog in the park a man met a stranger. She walked up to him, petted his dog and said, "I am new in the area. How are the people in this city?" The man responded, "Well, how were the people in the city you came from?" She smiled and said, "Very sweet, generous and all-around very good people" The man said, "That's about how it is here." The next day while walking his dog another stranger asked the same question. "Well" said the man "What were the people like where you lived before?" He snorted and rolled his eyes, "They were the most selfish, rude people I have ever met." The man smiled and said, "Yeah that's pretty much what you'll find here. ~from Wayne Dyer

My own life has been touched often by unexpected meaning, so much so that now I get on an airplane expecting the passenger in the next seat to be surprisingly important to me, either just the voice I need to hear to solve a problem or a missing link in a transaction that needs to come together. Maybe such meetings are coincidence, but I believe that all coincidences are messages from the unmanifest –like angels without wings, so to speak, sudden interruptions of life by something on a deeper level.
~Deepak Chopra

Be kinder than necessary, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.
~J. M. Barrie (also attributed to Plato)

Strangers...are just family you have yet to know. ... There are no random acts. We are all connected, and you can no more separate one life from another than you can separate a breeze from the wind.
~Mitch Albom, from *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*

Boundaries define and give identity to all kinds of systems, including people and communities. They are both tangible and intangible. Without a boundary, whether property line, or storyline, or skin, we cannot have anything we can point to or name. Unless we draw a line, a boundary, and say that something lies outside its domain, then we can speak about nothing that lies inside with real meaning.....Boundaries and hospitality go together. They are in a necessary tension with each other. Without boundaries, there is no system into which anyone can be invited; without hospitality, the system will dry up, turn in on itself, and die.
~From a sermon given at The UU Church of Roanoke, VA, no name listed