Begin with the End in Mind
A Sermon in Two Parts
Paint Branch Unitarian Universalist Church
May 15, 2011

Part One: Oh, the Places We’ve Been! By Rev. Diane Teichert

You might have recognized the theme for this service, which is printed at the top of your Order of Service, to be Habit 2 in Stephen Covey’s book The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People: “Begin with the end in mind.”

You may also have noticed that the quote at the top of your Order of Service seems to be only obliquely related to the theme and that the theme is not repeated in our sermon titles as it is on most Sundays.

Well, the quote is from a poem, and the poem IS about the theme.

My eyes already touch the sunny hill
Going far ahead of the road that I have begun.
So we are grasped by what we cannot grasp;
It has its inner light, even from a distance -
And changes us, even if we do not reach it, into something else, which, hardly sensing, we already are; a gesture waves us on, answering our own wave…
but what we feel is the wind in our faces.

Translated from the German by the American poet Robert Bly, this poem by Rainer Maria Rilke is about beginning with the end in mind – seeing the sunny hill ahead - and how just walking on the road to get there changes us without our even knowing; and even though gestures, signs, things happen along the way to tell us we are getting there, we usually feel most acutely the challenges we face, like the wind in our faces, rather than the wind at our backs moving us in the direction we wish to go.

I find the poem to be true in my life. What about you?

It can be true in congregational life as well. It’s not as simple as having a goal or knowing your destination, though. It’s also about the quality of the journey, how well we discern the route and adjust our aims as we go along, allowing ourselves to be changed.

Now we are coming to the end of the first leg of the Religious Exploration for children and youth journey in my tenure as your minister. Our Interim Director of Religious Exploration will be with us for only less than two more months, and so today we taking a look at where we’ve come and where we might be going.
While Karen has the visionary task this morning in her sermon, “Oh, the Places You’ll Go!” which is a take-off on the Dr. Seuss book by that name, I have the historical task. I get to describe the “places we’ve been.”

Oh, the places we’ve been! We – your minister and your professional religious educator - began serving you here at Paint Branch Unitarian Universalist Church at the same time, August 2009. Together, we learned on the job, trying to figure out how this place worked, and why, and who you had been in the past, were at the moment and wanted to become.

In the beginning, in our weekly meetings, it felt like the blind leading the blind. Together, we felt our way through the awkwardness of being new, tested out our hypotheses on each other and you, learned from our mistakes and successes, and started shaping a sense of where we hoped to be when her time here came to a close, which would be less than two years after we started.

I was fortunate in that you decided to bring in an interim DRE rather than hire a new DRE right away. Instead, I joined forces with a peer, an experienced religious educator, who is trained in the specialty of Interim work and is a committed Unitarian Universalist. How lucky is that? She found in me a minister who is not just supportive of a strong religious education program, but cares deeply about the children, youth and families as well.

Oh, the places we’ve been! We started with:
Dedicated teachers, eager children, involved parents.
But also an RE office in some disarray, and an RE Committee seeking clarity of purpose and role.
And, classrooms crowded with furniture, materials and displays belonging to the church’s long-time tenant, the Paint Branch Montessori School, and Restrictions and tensions arising out of that tenancy relationship.

Oh, the places we’ve been! We started with:
A supportive, if somewhat distant, adult congregation.
A confusing Sunday morning schedule in which parents didn’t know whether to deliver their children to the Meetinghouse, the Kelley Room OR their classroom,
And not much music, dance or arts involvement for children.

Oh, the places we’ve been! We started with:
An incredibly beautiful woodland setting, perfect for direct involvement with the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.
A dedicated space for high school youth in Room 1.
A fenced outdoor play ground.
Sufficient level of staffing, enough space, and adequate budget for the number of children and youth...showing the congregation’s financial commitment to RE.
but also: Challenges finding enough volunteers to ensure a teacher and an assistant in each classroom as our Safety Policy requires.
Oh, the places we've been! We also started with:
A significant drop-out rate between middle and high school, despite having a strong tradition of middle-school programming: Our Whole Lives (the interactive, values-based sex-education program often called OWL), Coming of Age with mentors and a trip to see UU sights in Boston, and Neighboring Faiths in which they study other religions and then visit their houses of worship.
And Penney, our RE Assistant, was nearing her resignation date.

And, oh, wow, the places we've been since we began!
Our new RE Assistant, Kweli, is no longer new.
The RE Building is all our own, clean and fresh, with new interior signage, taking shape as a space for Unitarian Universalist spiritual growth for all ages.
The younger children (and sometimes the middle or high school youth) begin in the Meetinghouse every Sunday morning, and those minutes they are with us are usually sufficiently stimulating to hold their interest.
And, since winter, we've been known to have as many as twelve infants and toddlers on a Sunday!

And, oh, wow, the places we've been since we began!
The nursery is bright, well equipped, and attractive with experienced caregivers.
There’s a raised-bed vegetable garden outdoors, created and maintained by families and adult volunteers, and three compost silos.
Teaching teams have been meeting to plan and schedule.
The RE supply room is organized, as is the DRE’s office, and the Hospitality Room is becoming teacher-central on Sunday morning.

And, oh, wow, the places we've been since we began!
The RE Committee is engaged and leading, helping to answer the larger questions: how can the program be what our families need, how can we best support teachers and parents, and what do our children most need to learn and experience here?
And, All Ages Sundays, when the children and sometimes youth remain in the meetinghouse for the full worship hour, have become more reliably fun and interesting for everyone.
Plus, the Chalice Dancers incorporate children into their dances.

Oh, the places we've been! They are taking us to the places we'll go, like the sunny hill far ahead of the road we have begun. They have their inner light, even from a distance - And change us, into something else, which, hardly sensing, we already are.

The experts say that people today are looking for vital, creative, responsible and caring approaches to including children in the life of the church and to teaching them values and important lessons in memorable ways. And, they say, busy parents are looking for ways to spend meaningful time with their children that will spur them to further sharing and conversation in the car and at home.
http://www.uuintergenerational.org/why_intergenerational.htm
Oh, the places we've been, on the road to the places we'll go!

(pause)
Karen is now going to lead us in singing the song introduced during our Ingathering Music, written by Pat Humphries who lives in nearby Mt. Rainer. The words are printed in the bulletin and we especially invite you to sing at least the refrains. We will sing the first two verses now and the third and fourth verses later.

Part Two: Oh, the Places You’ll Go! By Karen Lee Scrivo, Interim Director of Religious Exploration

Introduction: Pat Humphries’ wonderful song, Common Thread celebrates both the diversity of our many colored fabrics and the common thread we share. And reminds us that we will rise all together.

And indeed we have, when it comes to Religious Exploration these past two years as Diane has so richly shared in the first part of today’s sermon, Oh the Places We’ve Been! It’s been my honor and privilege to have been part of that “we” as your interim D-R-E. But at the end of June, our shared journey will draw to a close, and this August you will be welcoming your new settled D-R-E – Erica Shadowsong.

But in the meantime, I’d like to share what I see ahead for you. I planned to use parts of the famous Dr. Seuss book – Oh the Places You’ll Go! But then thought, why not just write a few lines of my own in the Dr. Seuss style. Well, one verse led to another, and before you knew it I got carried away and had a whole poem!

So with apologies to Dr. Seuss… here is

Oh, the R-E Places You'll Go!

Congratulations!
Today is your day for R-E.
You're off to Great Places!
You just wait and see!

Two years of reflecting
and trying new things
And listening and learning
What great knowledge this brings.
You’re coming into your own. And know what you know.
And YOU are the folks who'll decide where R-E will go.

With a revived-up R-E Committee, and minister too
Who want kids of all ages to be part of all that you do
You'll be moving ahead with wisdom and care
As you warmly welcome your new D-R-E with a flair.

And together you’ll be part of a fantastic great team
That gives roots and wings your new R-E dream
A church full of babies, kids, teens, adults and wise ones
Enjoying worship, R-E, Social Action, the Arts and great Fun
Sometimes together, and sometimes apart
But always a part of one big Paint Branch U-U heart.

Remember the R-E things that worked well these past years
Recall the times you succeeded in spite of your fears
And the times you worked together and times you worked smart
And the times everyone gave with all of their heart

I’m here to remind you of the great things you’ve done
When you stepped up and stepped out and tried something new
Or decided to get rid of something no longer working for you
And watched with great pride as babies, kids and teens grew.

As you head to new places and things start to happen
Don’t worry, don’t sweat and please don’t stew
Just jump in with both feet and go right along
And soon you’ll find that you’ll be happening too!

OH! THE PLACES YOU’LL GO!

You'll be on your way to an R-E program that’s first rate
Seeing sights of all ages making R-E really quite great
People of all colors and countries and views will feel welcome
To share the journey with you, whether L-G-B-T or straight

Children and teens will bring joy to each Sunday service
With stories and music, and drama and dance
And Coming of Age and Child Dedication
And the Youth leading worship, what a wonderful chance

All ages will hear of our U-U history and heroes
Of Neighboring Faiths and wise people who dare
The harmony of nature, the sacred circle of life
The discoveries of science and the wonder we share

Your classrooms will grow young questioning U-U’s
Who know all are important and kind in all they do
Where they’re free to learn together and search for what is true
And know all people need a voice in the things that they do.
They’ll work for a peaceful, fair world and take care of the earth
Your church will be a place that’s welcoming to all  
Helping those who are homeless and those with no voice  
Making sure everyone is free to love and to marry  
And working that all have the freedom of choice

Volunteers will line up to help with R-E  
Be they parents or singles, young adults, teens or seniors  
Some will teach in the classrooms, some will organize fun  
Some will serve on committees, and some will serve tea  
Because R-E is part of the reason for your church to be

The R-E program will offer just what kids need  
With love and support for all ages who lead  
And within J-P-D, you’ll be seen as the best of the best  
Folks will keep coming cause you top all the rest.

Except those for times when you don't.  
Because, there will be times when you won't.

   It’s sad but it’s true, I’m sorry to say  
There will be days when things don’t work out well  
Though try as you may, and try as you might  
There will be times when nothing seems to go right  
Even for folks like you who are so smart and so swell

Some days in R-E Land, the way isn’t clear  
And some days you may find are short of good cheer  
Should you turn left, or should you turn right  
Stand still or go back or maybe not quite

In times such as these, it’s important to know  
You just have to keep going and pull up your socks  
Don’t lose your vision and don’t lose your faith  
And know you’ll find a way ‘round the stumbling blocks

   When things don’t go well or things fall apart  
Stop, look and listen but don’t give up heart  
Just be patient as you look for the not-working part  
And always remember to put the horse before the cart

And before you know it, you’ll back in the game  
Ready for anything coming your way  
With great places to go and such fun to be done  
It will once again be your lucky day.
So keep in the mind what Dr. Seuss said
“Step with care and great tact
and remember Life’s
a Great Balancing Act
Just never forget to be dexterous and deft.
And never mix up your right foot with your left  "

And will you succeed?
I’m sure you will, Yes indeed!
   (98 and 3/4 percent guaranteed.)

OH! THE PLACES YOU’LL GO!

So hats off to Search Committee and Minister too
For finding a new D-R-E who’s just right for you!

It’s Hip-Hip Horray!
Today is your R-E day!
   You're off to Great Places!
So Good Luck, and Get On Your Way!

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