

The Winds of Change
A Sermon by Rev. Frieda Gillespie
9/8/19

I'd like to start with a story. Once upon a time in some western town, maybe Germany or France or Italy, there was a monastery that had fallen upon hard times. It used to be a place that families would go on the weekends and walk on the trails next to a river. Children would run and play on the grass and once in a while, a young person would stop and come in to inquire about joining the monks there. Gradually, fewer and fewer people came out on the weekends, the children no longer played in the grass, and no one stopped to inquire about joining the monastery. They lost some of their monks to old age, and some to other pursuits, some leaving the church altogether. The monks began to feel that they didn't have anything to offer young people any longer.

The Abbot was a wise monk, but he didn't know what to do to fix this situation. He decided to go to visit a Rabbi that lived in the woods a few miles from the monastery. He had sought the Rabbi's council many times in the past and she was always helpful. So the Abbot hiked into the woods and came to the Rabbi's house. The Rabbi was very happy to see him and invited him in for a meal and some wine. They talked as old friends do, reminiscing about earlier times when young people wanted to join them in creating a place for prayer and study. Too soon it was getting late and the Abbot knew he had to start back. Before he left however, he asked the Rabbi, "What can you tell us to help us renew our monastery?" The Rabbi said, "I don't know what you should do, but I can tell you this: One of you is the Messiah. And with that startling statement, the Rabbi, bade him a safe journey."

All the way back to the monastery, the Abbot pondered what the Rabbi said, but could make no sense of it. When he returned, the monks wanted to know what wisdom the Rabbi had for them. The Abbot said, "She couldn't tell me how to fix our community but she said something quite puzzling before I left. She said that one of us is the messiah."

The monks were astounded. During their prayers and daily work, they wondered about who the messiah could be. They thought about each of their fellow monks. Brother Edgar could be the one, he is very kind, or Sister Greta could be, she is so smart and learned. Brother Alphonse is able to grow almost anything, he could be the one. And so on through the entire community, they thought sincerely about the qualities of each monk and the possibility that they could be the One. Some of them ventured the thought, 'could it be me'? Surely not, I'm not good enough, strong enough, wise enough. And yet, every monk thought about every other monk with a kind of reverence just in case they might be living with the Messiah.

This attitude of appreciation began to change the way the monks related to each other. As this continued, a joyful, new energy pervaded the monastery and people from the town began to notice how the monks treated each other and how much they loved each other. This spilled over into the way the monks greeted the townspeople and welcomed them so that they felt invited to enter and learn about

the monastery. It wasn't long before young people began again to inquire about membership in the religious order and it once again began to thrive.

We have been enjoying the changes in temperatures, the cooler mornings and sunny afternoons that are the harbingers of Fall.

Winds always feel like change to me. They lift my spirits and give me a sense of adventure. I hope that is what we'll have together this year. You have much to look forward to: most especially the calling of a settled minister. For those of you who may not know, I am the Interim Minister here and this year is the year that the church will seek and find a new settled minister. The Search Committee will be asking you questions and initiating discussions about what you want in a minister. What do you look forward to in a new minister? Wisdom, humor, creativity, ethical integrity, lots of experience, new perspectives, so many possibilities and I'm sure you want everything—why not? Except it is rare that a minister can embody all of these qualities. If a minister is creative they may not be able to be traditional, or if a minister works great with children, they may not work as well with adults. These are things the Search Committee will give you a chance to think about.

Some of you may not be able to be joyfully anticipating a new minister. Some of you have had such painful experiences with your previous minister or ministers that you feel more fear and anxiety than excitement. We have another whole year to look at that together and do what we can to heal those memories. It's hard to look forward when what is behind us still oppresses us. The good news is that we aren't dependent on anyone else to change this. We are going to offer some additional healing/listening circles starting in October. In these circles of trust, you have the chance to share openly about what has harmed you and to name what you want for your future. Underneath every negative thought is a positive one, a thought that affirms what you really want.

Does anyone want to share now what you want for your future or the church's future?

There are some things that I want for you: I want you to feel open to a new minister and their gifts, open to the fact that they are probably quite different than you expected. But also that you could feel excited about the differences. I want you to anticipate good things from them. Also, I want you to feel confident in your own discernment. If there are red flags that appear, I want you to be able to speak about them directly. For example, if they were to say, I don't do...xyz, I want you to be able to stay in the conversation and tell the candidate why it x,y or z is important to you and perhaps to the life of the congregation.

This summer we had a Worship Council retreat attended by new and old members of the council. We each pondered an experience of worship we found transformative. I enjoyed the sharings so much; we don't often have the opportunity to share about these things, It is good that you were able to make time for it. Each year we could ask ourselves, "what has been the most powerful experience for me in worship this year?"

Above all else, I want you to see each other as I see you; talented in many ways, dedicated, open to learning and willing to act on your faith. Each of you is precious and needed by the community. As UU's

we are not waiting for a messiah, but using this allegorical story, we could acknowledge that any one of you could be the UU messiah if there were such a thing and therefore every one of you is worthy of our love and respect.