

I will be teaching an Adult Enrichment class beginning next Sunday called "Process Theology in Plurality." It's a course in what is called process theology. Process theology re-conceptualizes "God" away from being a pre-existent being, personality or entity toward the idea of God as an ongoing creative power or force. God, possibly, as an ongoing, continuous, creative, evolving interdependent web of existence.

In the first module of the course, there is a short essay by theologian Paul Tillich, who says that, "being religious means asking passionately the question of the meaning of our existence and being willing to receive answers, even if the answers hurt....it is the state of being concerned about one's own being and being universally (Paul Tillich, "The Lost Dimension of Religion")."

In this essay he then argues that the "dimension of depth," a dimension of the heart, a dimension of ultimacy, has been lost in our society; lost due to industrialization, the seemingly endless desire for bigger and better, disconnection with the natural world, etc.you know, the usual suspects. And this is in 1958! This is before the dominance of TV, the internet, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tik Toc, etc.! We've gotten to the point that this dimension of depth is, unbeknownst to us, hidden from us such that everything we do is now, including most religious practice, done in a horizontal dimension, a dimension of surfaces, appearances, facades. The results are appalling. This lack of depth has resulted in feelings of disconnection, isolation, estrangement, anxiety and despair. Sound familiar?

The artists, musicians, poets, writers are the ones who call us back, the ones who try to show us this dimension of depth that we've lost. They point the way and call upon us to return there.

...and we must return there too. As people of faith, as Unitarian Universalists, as a congregation, as members of this congregation.

It can't be denied that throughout history many religious movements/denominations have done considerable harm to their faithful (and their cultures); leaving pain and wreckage in their wake. We've had crusades, holy wars, missionary work as a front for imperialism, clerical misconduct; and, unfortunately, that's just the beginning.

This harming has alienated many from organized religion; and many today have never experienced organized religion in any way. Yet the yearning for meaning persists.

A religion that returns to, and delves into, the lost dimension of depth is what is necessary to satisfy what we truly thirst for. Tillich believes...

The revival of religious interest would be a creative power in our culture if it would develop into a movement of search for the lost dimension of depth....If the resurgence of religion would produce a new understanding of...the past and

[its] relevance for our [present] situation... it would become a creative factor...and a saving factor for many who live in estrangement, anxiety and despair (Ibid).

In this rediscovery of this dimension of depth and the warding off of estrangement, anxiety and despair, I believe that religion, despite its imperfections, has a role to play. I believe that a non-creedal, non-dogmatic, non-horizontal religion can be lifesaving to those experiencing estrangement, anxiety and despair. I believe that Unitarian Universalism can be that religion; and as a Unitarian Universalist congregation, I believe that this place, UUMAN, can be a lifesaving vehicle (synonym?) of salvation in the here and now.

So, do we want to grow?

There are people who are not here, but who are out there facing lives of estrangement, anxiety and despair. Not wanting to grow is saying that we're ok with the people who are not here, not ever being here?

There are families who are not here, but who are out there facing lives of estrangement, anxiety and despair. Not wanting to grow is saying that we're ok with those families who are not here, not ever being here?

There are LGBT folx who are not here, but who are out there facing lives of estrangement, anxiety and despair. Not wanting to grow is saying that we're ok with those LGBT folx who are not here, not ever being here?

There is a whole beautiful diversity of people who are not here, but who are out there facing lives of estrangement, anxiety and despair. Not wanting to grow is saying that we're ok with that beautiful diversity that is not here, not ever being here?

Growing has absolutely nothing to do with numbers. Growing has absolutely nothing to do with "bigger is better." Growing has everything to do with the salvation, in the here and now, of people, who are out there facing estrangement, anxiety and despair in the here and now. That's what our mission and vision are really about.

So, we are welcoming some new members today. Speaking for myself, and on behalf of our membership team, our new membership coordinator and our congregational membership, we are so glad you found us. And we are so glad you're here. May you discover, participate in and with us co-create, a burgeoning dimension of depth here at UUMAN.