

“Each and Every One of Us”

October 21, 2018

The Rev. Heather Janules

One thing my father and I have in common is we like to take photographs. Sometimes my father will get up before dawn to visit a distant bog to try to capture migrating butterflies. I like to take photos in nature too but I also really like to take pictures of interesting buildings.

This summer, my father and I both shared some of our photographs at an art fair. There is one photograph that many people asked about at my booth. Someone even pointed at it from far away and then marched towards it as if she were in a spell.

Where is it? They would ask. I would tell visitors over and over that this is a special temple far away, the Dohany Street Synagogue in Budapest, the largest synagogue in Europe. The people who visited my booth were from many religions – some Catholic, some Jewish, even some Unitarian Universalist and some people who are not part of any faith tradition. But I was amazed at how much this place – well, a photograph of this place – grabbed people’s attention. There is something about Holy Ground that speaks to people of all walks of life.

I tell this story as it reminds us how people experience sacred space, places where we do not shop for groceries like the store or study like school but come to laugh together, to cry together, to heal one another, to work together to make the world a better place. In sanctuaries like where we gather today, we celebrate the birth of children and new families created through weddings. We remember people we love when they die. And we eat good food together, right? The chili cook off is an important holiday in this place.

But there is something missing in this photograph, something that really makes this place sacred. Since the ceiling of the temple is so high, I had to turn my camera up to capture the whole room. And when I turned the camera, all the people in the synagogue became out of the frame. It is not just what we do in sanctuaries but the people who do these things that make these places holy ground.

We just sang about “this little light of mine.” Each one of us has a light inside. We can “let it shine” or we can hide it from the world.

And we just kindled a light, our chalice. And one reason we lit this chalice was for the light in each person. “For each and every one of us.” We lit the chalice for everyone. We lit the chalice for Sam. We lit the chalice for Rick. We lit the chalice for Zara. And we lit the chalice for people we know and love who are not here today – Dan and Ellie. And we lit the chalice for people we don’t even know, people who could use some reminding about the light inside of them. We make this place sacred when we bring our light here and we make it sacred by seeing and honoring the light in all people.

There is a famous story about “each and every one of us,” about holy ground.

There was a monastery, a place where monks live and work and pray together. The monastery was once full of energy but had fallen on hard times. There were very few monks left and the building was starting to fall apart, even the beautiful little chapel where they prayed. The leader of the monastery, the abbot, went to see his friend in town, the Rabbi, for advice.

The two men sat and talked together. The abbot felt good, talking to his old friend. But, as their conversation ended, the abbot was disappointed when the Rabbi said. “I have no advice to give you but there is something you should know. The Holy One lives among you.”

The abbot returned to the monastery where the monks met him at the door, excited. “What did the Rabbi tell us to do?” they asked. They, too, wanted to bring the monastery back to life.

The abbot hung his head. “He had no advice for us, just that the Holy One dwells here.”

The Holy One? They all thought. Who could it be? It certainly isn’t me. Or is it? It was all very confusing.

No one could figure out who was the Holy One. Which monk was it? Or was it the Abbot?

But one thing they did know was that if the Holy One was among them, they could no longer let the monastery be in such bad shape. So, without even talking about it, they each got to work, bringing the building back to life. As they worked, they treated each other with such respect and care because the Holy One was with them. When they prayed together, this respect – and the chapel roof that no longer leaked and the colorful light that shone through the clean windows – inspired them to pray with a joy and a reverence they hadn't felt in years.

Occasionally, people in the village would visit the monastery. Some of the visitors came away with incredible stories, about how love and light seemed to fill the place. So more people came to visit. And some of these people stayed to also become monks. With more monks, they could bring even more life to their order. In time, the monastery was restored to its former glory, the building solid with care, the garden overflowing with vegetables, the community bright with kindness. All because they imagined that each and every one of them was Holy. And the monastery came back to life because, in a way, each and every one of them *was* holy.

“Creating Holy Ground Everywhere We Go”

Marianne DiBlasi

In Rev. Heather's first reflection, she talked about how we make this place – our Church – sacred by bringing our light to church. We make it sacred by honoring and seeing the light in all people. On Sunday morning, and every time we gather together, whenever we let our light shine, we make this place Holy Ground. No wonder we get up on Sunday mornings, get dressed and come to church. We come to a place where we help each other to let our light shine bigger and brighter by seeing and affirming the light in each other.

On Sunday mornings, we often greet each other by saying, “Good Morning! It's great to see you! Oh, your light is shining so bright this morning! I'm so glad you are here!” Other times, we come to church when we've had a hard week at school or work or home. We might be feeling sad or tired and our heart-flame is very small.

On these weeks, someone might greet us by saying, “Good Morning! It’s great to see you! It looks like you’ve had a really hard week. Would you like a hug and to sit with other people who will share their light with you? I’m so glad you came to church today!” Whoever you are and no matter how bright your light is, you are welcome here.

When we share our light with someone else, we are creating Holy Ground. One way to shine your light is to smile at someone. When you see someone walking down the street and you catch their gaze, if you smile at them, you are shining your light and helping their light to shine a little brighter. I know when someone smiles at me, it makes my heart happy. Maybe it does for you too. Do you want to try it? Do you want to see what happens when you smile at someone?

Okay, turn to a person near you and smile at them. Excellent! I’m seeing lots of smiling faces! Okay, now turn to another person and smile at them. Great! Did you feel it? Did you feel your heart getting happier and your light shining a little brighter? From where I am, I saw it! The whole room got brighter! We just created Holy Ground together! The light of Holy Ground is in the heart of each and every one of us....

Church is a place where we get to practice creating Holy Ground and letting our light shine more brightly. We practice here at church, so when we leave church and go back to school or to work, we have more light to spread far and wide to other people and other places – Everywhere you go, Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Who did you shine your light with this week? Raise your hand if you helped someone at school or work or home this week. Raise your hand if you played with friends this week? If you gave money to someone? If you spent time with someone who was sad or scared? If you made somebody laugh? Look at all the people whose lives were made a little brighter because of You! Because you let your light shine everywhere you went. By shining your light, you created Holy Ground in the heart of every person you met.

As Unitarian Universalists, we believe that each and every one of us is part of Creation. All the trees, the plants, animals, people, the sky, water and earth are

all connected because they're all part of Creation. Since everything is connected every time you touch the ground your light, your love, your heart-flame is seeping through the floor and deep into the earth. Every time you walk, crawl, dance, roll, climb, skip or lay down on the ground you are creating Holy Ground because you are adding your own unique energy of light and love to the earth.

And when we add our light and love to the earth, what do you think happens the next time someone you don't know comes by and stands in the exact place where you've been? Since everything is connected, do you think maybe a little bit of your light rises up through the ground to help that person's light shine a little brighter? I Do. I believe every time we touch the ground, we leave a light bit of our light there for someone else to find who needs it when they are feeling sad or lonely or mad or scared and need an extra boost of light.

That's how we all create Holy Ground together – if your light is extra bright, you leave some of it for someone else to find. And, when another person's light is extra bright, they leave some of it for you to find. Try this and see what happens....The next time the light in your heart is feeling small – for any reason – close your eyes and touch the ground. See if you can feel someone else's light rising up through the Holy Ground, helping your light to shine brighter. We all help each other to shine. No one is alone. There's enough light for all of us to share.

Where did you shine your light and create Holy Ground this week? Raise your hand if you shined your light at daycare or at school? Raise your hand if you shined your light at the library? What about at the store? Or outdoors in nature? And, who shined their light in the playground? Look at all the places that you made into Holy Ground, just because you let your light shine everywhere you went.

Just like every single picture you are drawing of yourself on the Paper Hearts is completely unique – Every single person in this room has their own special, unique light that is theirs to shine in the world. The world needs you and your unique light exactly as you are – with your particular Helping Hands and your particular Loving Heart. By being exactly who you are and letting your own unique light shine bright, each one of us is creating Holy Ground everywhere we go.

It matters that you come to the church of the Helping Hands and Loving Heart. It matters that you come to church to share your light with other people so everyone's light can shine brighter. It matters that we take our light out into the world and create Holy Ground everywhere we go and with every person we meet by letting our own unique light shine Big, and Bold, and Bright. Your light matters. So, Let it shine, Let it shine, Let it shine!