

Creative Interchange: Is That a Song or a Sermon?

Unitarian Universalist Church of Vancouver

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Eat Your Kale© by Stuart Campbell

Don't you moan, don't you complain, won't hear your whining voice again
This stuff has antioxidants, Quercetin and Kaempferol
I think you know what I'm talking about, growing from the ground, all around...
Eat your kale

Beta-carotene, vitamin C, stop you aging and cures disease
Green and floppy, cooked with garlic, and sesame seed
You've heard it all before, I think you have, and it tastes a whole lot like carpet grass
Eat your kale

Chorus:
Kale is a food, fit for a king, make you wanna dance and make you wanna sing
If-you-can get it down it'll' do you good, do what your mama said you should....
Eat your kale

Flavonoids and vitamin K, what the hell are those anyway
Curbs you bleeding, no heart disease, fight away colds that make you sneeze
Stopping cancer every day, make you want to jump around and say
Eat your kale

So I hope my lesson has come on home, I know you've got your kale all sown
Your living high, and living strong, eating that green stuff all day long
Kale in your kitchen, kale in your bed, coming out the ears on the side of your head
Eat your kale

Reflection on the Theme by John Hennessy

In 1969, I was at sea, serving in the Marine Corps. It was a clear night on the South China sea, and, while on board the landing ship the USS Washtenaw County, me and my buddies were at the rail looking over, mesmerized by the bright, turquoise ribbons of phosphorescent light, (caused by tiny sea creatures as they were disturbed) streaming off the bow of the ship: We used to call it Angel Dust.

Initially, when I grabbed the top steel railing, I had failed to notice that the middle rail was actually missing! Just then, the ship hit a fairly large wave and the deck unexpectedly dropped from under my feet. My legs slid over the bottom rail; and there I was, dangling overboard: . . . I was hanging on for dear life!

As I hung over the side, time froze, and I recalled the words of the captain in the beginning of our Flotilla
“...if you fall off of my ship at night, my recommendation is that you recite your favorite prayer.”

So, let's talk about the importance of paying attention shall we?

Paying attention keeps us engaged in our world, and keeps us living in the Now. If we fail to pay attention, we might miss something important! Think about it.

What do we miss, every day, simply because we weren't paying attention?

I pride myself on being able to pay attention to details. As a journeyman carpenter, my specialty was finish work. My job often included a "punch" list for correcting the mistakes and omissions of the other workers. And it was my dear mother who taught me that so well. It was often said of her that "she never missed a trick." She seemed to notice everything she saw, touched and heard, and was very verbal about her observations. She noticed each bird in the back yard and what color and kind it was; she knew what phase the moon was in and pointed it out to us. Riding on an Amtrak trip back in the '50's, mom woke us up at 2 in the morning to see the full moon rising above Mt. Rainier, an amazing memory I will always cherish. As she was a former piano teacher, she would often yell out from the kitchen as I practiced, "That's a C!" (She had perfect pitch): Mom missed nothing.

But sometimes we are just too occupied to effectively pay attention.

Fortunately, for me that night, my two friends were paying attention. Those few seconds, hanging over the side of the ship seemed like an eternity before my big buddies locked on to my wrists and hoisted me up as I heard, "Where 'you going, John?" Had it not been for them, paying attention, I would not be standing here talking to you right now.

Sometimes we just have to tell our brain to pay attention! Like, listening to music. You can listen "at" it, or "to" it. Listening at it, it becomes only background sounds. Listening to it and you experience every note, every nuance.

Like these recent illegal, and immoral political imperatives. They are real! If we do not listen, really listen, integrate them, internalize them, we will allow them to proliferate.

As in babysitting a toddler who grabs a pair of scissors. Are you going to pay attention? Are you going to react?

One of the most important duties for the citizens of democracy is vigilance, just paying attention.

As Wendell Phillips, a famous abolitionist, said in 1852: "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty; power is forever stealing from the many to the few. And the hand entrusted with power becomes ... the enemy of the people. Only by continual oversight can the (person) in office be prevented from hardening into a despot: Only by ... Agitation can a people be kept sufficiently awake to principle not to let liberty be smothered in material prosperity."

These words still ring very true today. WE must choose to pay attention! Choose to feel and to react! Our own Democracy and sometimes our very lives, depend on it.

Sunsets© by Stuart Campbell

I've seen sunsets over Austin, sunsets in Sequim, Sunsets on the Rio Grande, where the waters run thin
There were sunsets over Aberdeen, sunsets near Hays, sunsets in the Rockies, that set aspens ablaze
Sunsets in Antigua, sunsets in Tegus, that's were I fell in love
Watching sunsets with you

There's a sunset from the window, of this big old grey bus
 Yes, I'm chasing the sun, and thinking of us
 I'm chasing the sunset to see you again, heading back west into the arms of my friend

 I'm taking the long road, enjoying the ride, chasing the sun to get back by your side
 Some were like a fireball, some like the lamb, some helped me figure out, just who I am
 Like paintings by Monet, colors and hues, we watched them together, from high mountain views

 So here I am rolling on, with the wind in my hair, gazing out the window, on my way back out there
 I'm chasing the sunset to see you again, heading back west where the sunsets never end
 I'm taking the long road, enjoying the ride, thinking of sunsets, with tears in my eyes

 We'll have many more sunsets to carry us away, that's why I'm coming home to stay
 Break out the bubbly, sit on a rock, hold my hand, no need for talk

 We saw sunsets over mountains, sunsets in rain, sunsets into oceans, Blue, green and gray
 I remember them all, like old friends now gone, well see new ones together it won't be long
 Driving into the sunset to see you my friend, feeling my toes in pacific sand
 We will walk through the surf holding hands again, while the sun celebrates another day's end

Is That a Song or a Sermon? © by Rev. Kathryn A. Bert

Sunsets. I love that song. I love the listing of places I know. Aberdeen has dual meaning, at least for me. Could be Scotland we visited on my first sabbatical, could be in Washington where we'll drive through on Wednesday on our way to the family reunion. The mention of Teguc. Stuart and I met in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. He remembers our first argument having taken place in a little neighborhood park in Tegucigalpa. I remember it driving along the hill country of Texas. We agree what it was about, but remember differently where and when it took place. I told him that I thought "one day I might like to become a Unitarian Universalist minister." He asked me "why on earth would I want to spend my time telling other people what to do?"

I guess we worked it out. He eventually figured out what Unitarian Universalism was. Stuart had tried visiting a UU church before he ever met me, but was offended that the kids were kicked out of the service – his language - I guess it wasn't explained in that service that they had their own programming. Or he was picking up on a very real vibe some of our congregations have this 'this is adult worship and serious and children and fun should not be allowed.'

By the time I went to seminary, eight or nine years after that first argument, depending on when it actually took place, Stuart was such an enthusiastic Unitarian Universalist that the members of the Cascade Unitarian Fellowship in Wenatchee, Washington, where we were members, wondered if he'd be attending seminary as well. And he sort of did. (This was back in the day when one moved across the country to go to theological school. Now all our seminaries have online programs that allow you to take classes mostly from home, with occasional trips to campus.)

Stuart and I packed up a U-Haul truck with our 5 year-old-son so that I could begin at Meadville Lombard Theological School at the University of Chicago and Theo could begin kindergarten at Ray Elementary

School in Hyde Park. We lived in an apartment owned by Meadville Lombard on 57th and Woodlawn. Mircea Eliade, Romanian historian of religion, fiction writer, philosopher, and professor at the University of Chicago, had lived in our apartment before us. Sometimes we'd get visitors on pilgrimage just wanting to see where he had lived. Our bathroom would at times mysteriously smell of cigar smoke which we attributed it to Eliade's ghost – most photographs of him feature a cigar in his mouth.

Most of my classes were two doors down. So, in effect, all three of us attended seminary. Only two of us got degrees. I got a Master of Divinity and Theo got an honorary degree for being the seminary kid in our class – having spent kindergarten through third grade with us. There are UU ministers all over the country who still ask me about Theo. Jen Crow, who was interviewed on MSNBC during the ICE occupation of Minneapolis used to babysit him.

I didn't start writing sermons until I attended seminary and had them as class assignments and then preached them while an intern at Countryside Church in Palatine, IL. Stuart, however, had been writing songs long before he and I met. Not many. He didn't become a prolific songwriter until – actually, I'd say until he moved here. He wrote a lot of songs in Michigan, but it was after this move – after he retired here in Vancouver, that he wrote a lot of songs, including all the ones performed in this service (save, Bob Marley's song from the story for all ages).

But I remember early in our marriage, our first year together up in Chelan, Washington, where he was the city planner and I was teaching in the public schools, when we would make up headlines for the local newspaper: *City Planner arrested for Jaywalking* or *Local Teacher abandons her students on field trip*. Though he did jaywalk Stuart was never arrested, and I did not abandon my students, though was known to consider it from time to time. That began a lifetime together of paying attention to the ordinary things of life that can be turned into a song or a sermon: creative interchange.

'Creative Interchange' is the term used by Henry Nelson Wieman, from this morning's reading. Wieman proposed that God is the creative impulse and the essence of creativity within human experiences and relationships.

And of course I'm interested in this creative impulse, given my career writing sermons and my spouse's passion for writing songs. But it's more than that, more than the fact that we spend much of our time beckoning creativity. The creative event – the interchange - makes meaning, integrates meaning, improves the world and deepens community connections. That is Carol Wayne Whites interpretation of Wieman, because his own language is so very dense.

In Wieman's view, creativity is not limited to artistic expression but is fundamental to all aspects of life. It nurtures human freedom and ethical development. God, according to Wieman, is the ultimate source of creativity, existing within the natural world rather than as a transcendent being or sovereign ruler. Human struggles and interactions are opportunities for growth. He emphasized that meaningful relationships are essential for fostering creative community and overcoming feelings of isolation. Wieman asserted that divine revelation is found in the creative processes of life rather than in supernatural occurrences, and therefore challenged traditional theological views. His vision advocates for a commitment to creativity as a means to enhance human freedom and promote solidarity, care, and justice within communities.

Creative interchange, according to Wieman, occurs when the individual finds one or more persons with whom she can engage in that kind of interchange which creates in each an awareness of the original experience of the other person and at the same time a recognition of the exceeding preciousness of this original experience, which lies beyond the judgements of good and bad. This creative interchange is grounded in an authentic experience of ourselves and others that doesn't idealize or conceal or conform.

Creative interchange is about taking that risk, of exposing our true selves, and not only letting others accept us as we are, but – and perhaps this is the most important part – accepting ourselves for who we are, all of the good and bad mixed in. No false idealism.

We've made mistakes, we've hurt those we love, we've hurt ourselves, but through this creative interchange – this authentic relationship with others and the world, we can come to terms with human nature in all of its complexities.

I ask with Wieman "What can transform us in such a way as to save us from the depths of evil and bring us to the greatest good which human life can ever attain?"

Creative interchange.... Representing ourselves to others as we really are, not how we'd like to be or wish we were, or how it might be most politically expedient, but who we are, and seeking awareness of the original experience of the other in all with the good and the bad and all the between stuff.

Creative, because nothing stifles creativity more than deciding the outcome before you've started.... Now, I'm no expert on drawing, but I took this class once –based on the materials that come with the book *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain* – perhaps you've seen this book? The principle is – and those of you who draw among us will see this as basic – but it is important that you understand the rest of us have to be taught this principle – is that if we have the completed picture in mind before we draw – that is, we take in the whole of the bicycle we are about to draw, then we might begin with wheels and a seat and handlebars as we think they are proportioned, and fail to notice the *actual* relationship between the parts. It's about paying attention to the angles and curves and real dimensions as they are. One method for teaching this way of noticing – which those of you who draw don't need to do, but that helps those of us who don't think of ourselves as artists see the world as you do intuitively – is to turn the object you are drawing upside down, so that the completed image isn't in your mind, but you are forced to focus on the actual lines and angles as they are, rather than as we have learned to see them. This is providing an awareness of the original experience even though it includes all of what we might label as beauty and ugly, the well-proportioned and ill-proportioned mixed up together.

Creativity has to do with relationality – proportion and relation - and sensing – seeing, touching, hearing, tasting, smelling: feelings that start as sensations in the body.

Creative interchanges is about the creative transformation of the individual to bring about the greatest good – through our relationships, recognizing our interdependence with each other and the world – to build healthy relationships, work on your relationships - and deep attention to the sensible world in which we find ourselves, noticing what is, not what we'd like to see, but what actually is.

God, for me, is the creative, sustaining and transforming power which can save us from the depths of evil and bring us to the greatest good. I call this process God because it is a mystery. It is something beyond me, that I don't control, that I can tap into sometimes, but I don't create alone.

Wieman is considered a religious naturalist, if you recall that term from Jacob Tennesen's sermon a couple of weeks ago. Some religious naturalists, like Jacob, are also atheists. Others, like Wieman, and I suppose myself, embrace the "radical naturalization of God" – that is, see God in Nature. The *radical naturalization of God* is language from the Rev. Dr. Jerome Stone in a paper on religious naturalism. As Jacob preached recently, "The empirical world, the world revealed to us by our senses and by science, is as awe-inspiring as any epic myth out of ancient religious texts. The dust is ablaze with marvels. We should all be amazed all the time. This is a skill we can practice."

By paying attention to the ordinary things of life that can be turned into a song or a sermon, Stuart and I have become partners in this creative interchange, and the process has made us better people – at least I think we're better for it: Better or more free, promoting solidarity, care, and justice with communities.

It was my idea that we celebrate Stuart's role in this community this morning because in many ways, he has had the harder one. Being the spouse of the minister of a congregation is definitely a role, but not one that is formal or compensated, or even always understood. We learned early on in my first ministry that there were certain things the spouse shouldn't do in a congregation – leading a chalice circle is one, because people kept thinking they were sharing things with him that he would share with me, which was not true. And he's stayed out of leadership, for the most part. He helped out facilities here, after a long discussion with the Board, when we were in desperate need to get a group going that could be self-sustaining, the group the Phil Geisy, Dave Irwin, and Brett Raunig currently lead. But mostly, his role has been supportive of me, and musical, for you. I also wanted to celebrate his role in this community as a way of underscoring that he will be leaving this community as I retire, so that Rev. Doug and his spouse, Jim, can become known among you and to you. It's important to give the new minister and his family space.

But mostly I wanted to celebrate his role because our creative interchange has been central to my ministry. I can't tell you how many times I've read Stuart a sermon before I've shared it with you, including this one, and he's always improved it. He wanted me to talk less about him, but I told him that was the point. And we do have a shared way of noticing the world and engaging it in a kind of interchange that creates in each of us an awareness of the original experience.

Creative interchange is about taking that risk, of exposing our true selves, and not only letting others accept us as we are, but accepting ourselves for who we are. Not everyone gets the great joy of having a partner of - it will be 35 years later this month – not everyone gets to have such a long partnership with another human being, but everyone can tap into that process Wieman and I are calling God, that creative impulse, the creative, sustaining and transforming power that can save us from the depths of evil and bring us to a greater good. May it be so.

Rather than a closing hymn, I've asked Stuart to play the song he wrote for the Lansing congregation to explain why we were leaving Michigan and returning to Washington state. He and Dave sang it at my installation here, 8 years ago – well, actually, it was at the Pearson Air Museum, we couldn't all fit here, a problem we've returned to this morning. You're invited to sing along on the chorus. The song title is "She's Heading Home." I'll ask you to remain seated for this hymn, so that you can enjoy the performance as well as sing along.

She's Headin' Home© by Stuart Campbell

From gleaming towers and noisy streets, to the heart of Michigan
The road with bumps and turns along the way
She helped some people grow and change and build community
Now the ancient forest is calling out her name

She's heading home, where the mountains stand so tall, and the cascade waterfalls
Take your breath away...She's heading home, where Columbia rolls on, and
the ocean sings her song to the whales, She's heading home

She's not running away she never ran from anything,
She's pulled by forces strong as the rivers flow
To family, to mountains, to the roots that hold us tall,
for every coming someone has to go...

She's asked me to go with her to join up in the dream,
To see if I might find brand new way
They say these opportunities, like a rainbows come and go,
So I think I'll jump this train all the same

We're heading home, where the mountains stand so tall, and the cascade waterfalls
Take your breath away, We're heading home, where Columbia rolls on, and
the ocean sings her song To the whales...We're heading home

And now we're home together with St. Helens bathed in snow,
this lovely town Vancouver in the sun And every day we find our hearts are filled a little more,
our roots are growing stronger fed by love

We made it home, where the mountains stand so tall,
And the cascade waterfalls take your breath away
Were finally home, where Columbia rolls on,
And the ocean sings her song to the whales...
We're Really home.

Little Sprout© by Stuart Campbell

I put a seed in the ground a while ago, nothing is happening yet I'm trying to be patient,
I'm trying to be cool, wishing that that sprout would sprout up soon, I'm not getting any younger

How many gardens do I have left, how many patches of earth can I bless
What do I do when my body gives out, when the last sun sets in the west
I'm looking forward to seeing that, I'm not getting any younger

A seed in the ground, does not make a sound, as it rises to meet the sun I want to be like that little seed,
when my time on earth is done: Roots go down, leaves seek the light, I'm not getting any younger
All things will change, undo and rearrange, ashes to ashes, earth to earth again

Down on my knees, eyes on a bug, wondering can he fly every little creature,
every little soul will someday die. Bow to the mystery, we're not getting any younger
All things will change, undo and rearrange, ashes to ashes, earth to earth again

I put a seed in the ground a while ago, nothing is happening yet I'm trying to be patient,
I'm trying to be cool, wishing that that sprout, would sprout up soon, I'm not getting any younger