

I am the one whose praise echoes on high.
I adorn all the earth.
I am the breeze that nurtures all things green.
I encourage blossoms to flourish with ripening fruits.
I am led by the spirit to feed the purest streams.
I am the rain coming from the dew
That causes the grasses to laugh with the joy of life.
I call forth tears, the aroma of holy work.
I am the yearning for good.
Hildegard of Bingen

In every great city there is always the need for a great free and forward-thinking church, a voice that rises above the cacophony of days, that calls us to resist the forces, ever present, which would diminish the humanity of those around us, the forces that would call us to worship only at the altar of power for power's sake, without its grounding in the life of the spirit.

There is a need for a liberal and liberating faith, a faith that calls us again and again to remember that love is the spirit and service is the law, a church that calls us to not just seek the truth, but to do so in love, and to help one another.

As you no doubt learned, Kim, during your time in seminary, it has been the great tradition of our faith for 400 years to remember that the church exists before the minister, that the church is where 3 or 4 are gathered in love and covenant to be reminded of the call of the holy, the most high, by which we might orient our days.

And yet, since those earliest days our churches have known, too, that though they might exist without a minister, and even in these days there may be times in between ministers, that the reason we have ministers, no, not have ministers, the reason we call ministers to lead us is because we know that there are places and times in all of our lives when we are called to lead, and places and times when we are called to follow.

We cannot all be experts at everything, and we need one another, the gifts and talents that help build the world we dream about, and none of us is big enough to contain all that is needed.

We need ministers because we need someone to be with us in our hour of sorrow and loss who knows better than to think that always something must be said, no matter how it might land. We need ministers because we need someone who has read the works of the great thinkers, not just past, but present, and listened for the voices that most need to be heard in our days. We need ministers because we need someone who has studied the life of the spirit, and come back with something to share. We need ministers because the world is full of voices that would turn us away from the path of truth, and justice, and love in favor of baubles and isolation and grasping at castles made of sand.

Kim, we at Jefferson Unitarian Church are so proud of you, and all that you have already done and all that we know you will go on to do. Wendy & I knew that we, and the church we serve, would be blessed by you before you had even darkened our doors. You came to us already a leader. Already a person who had served and forged our faith. Not every church is so lucky. You came to us to serve and learn, and to lead. And having surprised absolutely no one by passing the checkpoints along the way, you now find yourself here, in this place, called by these people, to be their minister, to be their spiritual leader.

Look out at them.

Look out at them.

See them for who they are, and who they hope to become. There are people here who need you, and your faithful leadership. Salesmen and mail carriers. Lawyers and teachers. Scientists and artists. Stay at home parents and retirees. Activists and community builders. Therapists and musicians. People struggling with addiction and mental health. People who are unemployed and people in the midst of a divorce. People that are pregnant with new life, and people who wish that they could be. People are in these pews, sacred and worthy, and filled with all the complexities of work and family and health and hopes and dreams and sorrows and losses.

Their lives are full. But not filled up. That's why they come to church. They come to church to be filled and sustained for the work that lies beyond these walls. They come to church to be challenged to grow beyond what they are, and to become the people they hope to be. They come to church because they need to sing the songs, to hear the words, to feel one another's hands and to be reminded that we are all part of one human family.

No, they don't need a minister to be connected to the spirit, we've been plenty clear about the priesthood and prophethood of all believers for a very long time. But they need someone who pays more attention to it to remind them of what they know, and to teach them new ways that guide us in these days, in this place, in this time.

And that, my friend, is where you stand. In the gap between the mundane and the holy. Always there will be a tension to the mundane, the pull of meetings to be planned, of community events to attend, of visits to be made, of staff to be supervised, of emails, oh, so many emails, to be answered. They will always be there, as they are for these people who have called you to serve and lead in this church.

But my charge to you is this. Remember that there is more. Remember that there is also always the holy to be tended to. The cries of the spirit waiting for you to answer it, and to point to it for all you serve, inside these walls and those far beyond them.

It was Hildegard of Bingen who named that ineffable, that unnamable, that holiness present on high, and also in the very fact of life, this way-
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You were not called to ministry to be a really good program manager for a religious services organization. You were called to ministry to be a steward of the spirit, an attendant of the holy, and not just for your own personal benefit, but for the people in these chairs, in these pews, who know that they need a guide, a companion, along the way.

You cannot be everything to everyone, and you should not try. But what you must be is the one who listens for the singer and the song, the one who stands in the gap between what is and what not only can be, but must be. The one who says
“Stop, be still, and listen for that stirring that is deeper than self, and only then rise to meet the day.”

This work is powerful, and powerfully lonely at times, if you let it be. You are surrounded this day not just by members of this church, but by colleagues and friends and family. You need them, and they need you, and we all need the greatness beyond ourselves and our own concerns.

This church, this city, this time, they all need it. But do not do the work alone. And don't do it without making time for the work of the spirit. Yearn for the spirit of life and of love, wander by the river, let the rain fall down upon your days, and the grass and trees rise up, ripening the fruit of goodness in all of the ways. And then share that with these people, share it with them, and with all the world, that we might yet one day BE the world we have dreamed about for so long.

So may it be.
and may you make it so.
Amen.

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