

For More Exploration

Books

- *The Truth About Stories*, by Thomas King
- *The World is Made of Stories*, by David R. Loy
- *Kitchen Table Wisdom and My Grandfather's Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge, and Belonging*, by Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D.

Movies

- *Boyhood* (R), 2014
- *Monumental Myths*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQIMrw8gSVQ>
- *Race: The Power of an Illusion* http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm
- *The Untold History of the United States*
http://www.watchseries.ac/serie/The_Untold_History_of_the_United_States
- *Big Fish* (PG-13), 2003

Videos

- The Danger of a Single Story — TED Talk by Chimamanda Adichie
- Check out stories on The Moth & StoryCorp

Children's Books

- *UU & Me! Collected Stories*, edited by Betsy Hill Williams
- *A Lamp in Every Corner: Our Unitarian Universalist Storybook*, by Janeen K. Grohsmeyer

November Theme

Story: The Practice of Meaning Making

November 2016

There are no true stories; we are making up every one of them. ~ **Pema Chodron**

There are only true stories. We are discovering the truth in them. ~ **Christina Baldwin**

Stories are told as spells for binding the world together. ~ **John Rouse**

Think about every memorial service you've attended. When they read the eulogy about the person's life and accomplishment that is just the "what" of their life. The thing people want to hear at a memorial service, the thing that brings comfort, stirs memories, invites tears and laughter, are the stories. The novelist Edmund White says "when a person dies a library is burned." The stories become the "how" of a life, and that is how, over time, we remember the person who is gone. ~ **Liz Hill, Soul Matters minister**

The truth about stories is that that is all we are. ~ **Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories***

Those who tell the stories, rule the world. ~ **Hopi Proverb**

Storytelling is dangerous to those who profit from the way things are because it has the power to show that the way things are is not permanent, not universal, not necessary. Having that real though limited power to put established institutions into question, imaginative literature has also the responsibility of power. The storyteller is the truth-teller. ... We will not know

our own injustice if we cannot imagine justice. We will not be free if we do not imagine freedom. We cannot demand that anyone try to attain justice and freedom who has not had a chance to imagine them as attainable. ~ **Ursula K. Le Guin**

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you. ~ **Maya Angelou**

Hidden in all stories is the One story. The more we listen, the clearer that [universal] Story becomes. Our true identity, who we are, why we are here, what sustains us, is in this story. The stories at every kitchen table are about the same things, stories of owning, having and losing, stories of sex, of power, of pain, of wounding, of courage, hope and healing, of loneliness and the end of loneliness. Stories about God. In telling them, we are telling each other the human story. ~ **Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom***

What's your story?



Listening is soul work. It can help the living find the meaning to go on in the midst of trying circumstances, and it can help the dying accept the brevity of their lives. Without listening, there can be no story. And without stories, we cannot complete the unfinished work of healing. ~ **Richard Stone, *The Healing Art of Storytelling***



What Does It Mean To Be A Community of Story?

Our lives are not just made up of stories; they are also *made by* stories. This might be the most important reminder of this month. Indeed, who of us hasn't felt controlled by a story? Stuck in a story? Hopeless about the way our story will end up? Simply put, stories write us as much as we write them.

For instance, who can't relate to the friend that tells us that her family "clings to the story about how I'm the clumsy one." We've never seen our friend trip, not once. Or drop a thing, ever. And yet, somehow, when she goes to her parents' home or back to a family reunion, she spills coffee on at least one outfit, stubs at least one toe and stumbles down at least one step. There it is: the power of story!

Or think about our current struggles with economic or racial justice. The incredible income gap is described as "natural" or "the result of complex global dynamics over which we have little control." Similarly, the story of race in our country is told with an "entrenched" story arc. Talk about a debilitating way of telling the story.

So let's tell a new story! This is the message of our faith: We have a choice. Our stories are not predetermined. Remember that old theological debate our UU fore-fathers and mothers gave their lives for? Some said that God had predestined not just the big story of humanity, but our individual stories too. Some of us were slotted for heaven and others for hell. And God had written the list in ink. Nothing any of us could do about it.

"Well," said our spiritual ancestors, "that's a bit harsh, don't you think!" Forget this extreme fate-driven story, they said. Freedom has a much bigger role than we're giving it credit for. God is not so much the author of the story as she is the magical muse that needles and nags us to put our own stamp on the narratives before us. In other words, we come from a long-line of spiritual relatives who agreed with Shakespeare that "All the world's a stage," but then went on to clarify that it's an improv show to which we've all been invited.

So fate and freedom? This month is much more about the tension between these two than one might have thought, leaving us with questions like: Are you an actor conforming to the scripts handed to you? Or have you found your own way of becoming a director, a screenwriter, an author? How are you struggling right now to regain control of the storyline of your life? How are you and your friends working to regain control of the storyline of our community? Our country?

Or maybe control is not your work. Maybe your spiritual work is about finding a new storyline. Maybe retirement, divorce, illness or the empty-nest has closed the book on one story and is inviting you to leap into a whole new narrative. Does that leave you excited about what's to come? Scared? A bit of both?

Whatever it is. Wherever you are. Don't give the storyline away. That's the message of our faith. And hopefully the gift of this month.

~ *From the Soul Matters Sharing Circle. Author not cited.*

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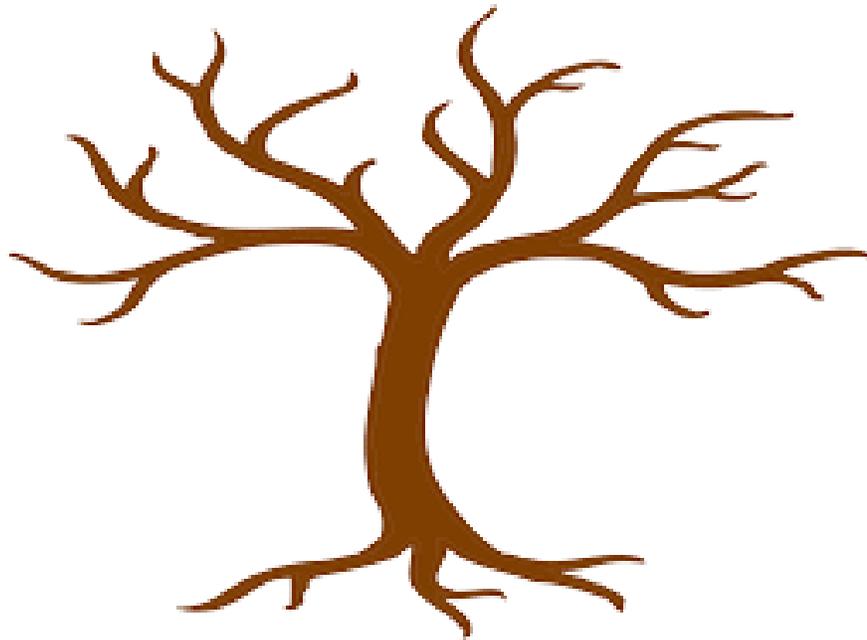
Recognize that whether you are worthy or not is all a made-up 'story'...Nothing has meaning except for the meaning we give it...There's no one who comes around and stamps you 'worthy' or 'unworthy'. You do that. You make it up. You decide it...If you say you're worthy, you are. If you say you're not worthy, you're not. Either way you will live into your story.

T Harv Eker

Quote365.com

Kids' Corner

This month, we celebrate Thanksgiving. This is a great opportunity to think about what we're grateful for. Maybe we can start a new practice of thinking about what we're grateful for every day, instead of just once a year. Start by drawing leaves onto this gratitude tree, putting one thing you're grateful for on each leaf.



Your Six-Word Faith Story

Six-word stories are a common exercise in writers' groups because they vividly display the power of brevity and encapsulation. Think of Caesar's famous quote: "I came. I saw. I conquered." (And it was only three words in its original Latin: *Veni, vidi, vici*.) Check out Twitter for Six-Word Faith Stories for inspiration. You can also find U.U. ones by searching in Google images.

This month, you are invited to apply the power of pithiness to your spiritual journey:

Describe your personal religious journey/story in six words!

Here's some inspiration found from all over the internet:

"Born Jewish. Discovered bacon... still Jewish."

"I've fallen and finally got up."

"Fairytale. Thought. Deliberation. Reason. Awakening. Atheist"

"Prayed every night; no one answered."

"I pray. She answers. Each time."

"Brainwashed, manipulated, guilty, awoke, objected, rejected."

"Realized Reality; Expressed Reality, Connected Others"

"Filled the emptiness; Emptied the fullness."

If you feel limited, write more than one and see which one most speaks to you now. Find someone else who wrote a six-word spiritual journey and share with each other.



Personal Reflection

Don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Pick the one question that "hooks" you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal of these questions is not to help you analyze what story means in the abstract, but to figure out what a deeper awareness of story means for your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work"?



What genre is your current life's story? Are you living a mystery? Adventure story? Romance? Thriller? Are you worried that your story is not interesting enough to be published? Is it a half-finished manuscript stuck in writer's block? Are you in the midst of going back and re-writing the ending?

What stories did your "elders" pass down to you? Have you cared for them and passed them on as they hoped?

What story does your family of origin tell about you? Does that telling leave you feeling seen or misunderstood? Celebrated or unfairly characterized? If mischaracterized, what are your plans to get them to reshape their telling of you? Or is your true story better served by just letting go of trying to change their unfair one?

Who do you tell your secret stories to? If the answer is "no one," might it be time to find someone?

When has re-telling or re-writing your story healed or saved you? How might re-examining or re-telling a part of your story offer you healing right now?

What current cultural or political "story" strikes you as dangerous? How might you step up your commitment and efforts to challenge that dangerously false story? Or double down on making sure that the true story is known?

How do you use story? When you tell stories, what is most often the purpose? To connect? To entertain? To heal? To conceal? To remember? To pass on? To teach? To gain power? To say thanks? Were you surprised by your answer?

Are you hiding part of your story from the person you say you "trust the most"?

Are you faking a story right now? Are you following a storyline that isn't really you? Does anyone else notice? Do you want them to? What's your plan for bringing this false story to an end?

What story did you walk away from? All of us think about that other life — that other story — that we turned down for the one we have now. Whether you regret your past choice or not, that road not taken doesn't ever really go away. It continues to be part of our story. Does that old road want you to return to it and give it another look?

Are there parts of your "old" story you need to reclaim or notice, before moving on? Many of our elders told us, "You don't know where you are going unless you know where you come from." When was the last time you made some room for remembering your roots?

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Justice Corner

What's your justice story?

What is the legacy of justice that you will leave? What stories will people tell?

Healing divides between individuals and groups of people can be an important step toward creating greater social justice within the world. In the wake of this contentious election which is sure to leave divisions within our society regardless of the results, what can you do to help to heal the rifts? How can you model sharing pieces of your story as a means by which to create bridges?

In this month of Thanksgiving, one of the stories we can help to rewrite toward healing divides is that of the story of this holiday. Look up accurate information about what happened when the Pilgrims came to the United States. Make a point to challenge the misconceptions about the happy story we tell. Start a discussion about the lasting impact that has on Native Americans in this country — and how it relates to what is happening at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota today.

Let's write new stories of healing that build bridges between us!

