

BE WHO YOU ARE

This talk is about the mantra of the Reverend Forrest Church about whom most of you are acquainted through my talks at this Church or Theological classes I have offered. I have already presented “Want what you have”. Forrest believed that “wanting what we have mutes the pangs of desire, which visits from an imaginary future to cast a shadow on the present, which is real . “

Today we will be looking at “BE WHO YOU ARE”!

At first glance this seems relatively easy or obvious, be who you are. Isn't everything I do ME? But, wait a minute. Is it the real you or an image you have created that hides the real you? What is the real you? You have changed many times in your life span. Run down memory lane and what do you see? You as a baby, as an infant learning to creep then to walking and taking your first steps, the youth in elementary school, the teenager, young adult, brand new proud father or mother, maturing person, retirement age, senior, aging senior. Which one is the real you? Was there anything that remained constant in this plethora of images?

Also, what did this phrase mean to Forrest Church?

I will tell you what I have found in my research and then you can tell me what you think it means.

That great philosopher, Dr. Seuss wrote : Today you are YOU, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is TRUER than YOU”

R.E. Cummings wrote: “It takes great courage to grow up and become who you Really are.”

Erich Fromm wrote: “You will only live a short time. Who are you and what is it you really want?”

Eleanor Roosevelt said: “It's not only your right to be yourself, it's also your duty.”

Anonymous explained: "To find the real you, listen to your SELF".

I believe that Anonymous should have added "and be aware of what your emotions are telling you."

All of you have done or said something in a group that you did not really believe but you didn't want to not fit in and you wanted the group's approval. Later you didn't feel good about doing that. In fact you probably felt guilty about your actions. Every time we make small decisions to fit in, whether as a child or as an adult, we are burying a little part of ourselves down deep. This is really serious business, this denying of who we are. But at times, it takes real courage to be who you really are. The opportunities for adults to deny their truth in favour of approval are endless, and choices can feel complicated whether it be stating an honest, but unpopular position or leaving a lucrative career for more meaningful work. But the good news is: Just like denying ourselves can bury who we are, small decisions by you can have a cumulative impact too. The more often that we are brave enough to express who we are, the easier it gets.

It is so easy to fall into the trap of acting the way we think we should or how others want us to, but once we have the confidence to go with that inner voice telling us to be who we really are, that's when the magic happens. Everyday we are given opportunities to explore what makes us the happiest and when we become more aware and alert about what ignites our soul, the more we lessen the importance of other people's approval or validation. As a result we are more self-assured with our choices, appearances, and perception of who we are to others.

What is this inner voice? Well, that is a great question. There are many explanations. For example, Freud explained it with his Superego theory and I am sure there is a bit of truth in all of them. I am sure there are many different ideas in this

congregation. I am also sure that those ideas have changed as you have travelled along your road of life. That leads me into a story I must tell.

One of our great Unitarian preachers and philosophers was Emerson. One Sunday, he was well into his sermon when he suddenly stopped. Stared at his sermon, then out into the congregation and said, "I don't believe that anymore!" That to me illustrates how wonderful it is to be an Unitarian. You can change your mind.

That inner voice is called by many names: Spirit of Life, God, Creator, Source Energy. To me it's LOVE and when you act with love you will feel good. That's the emotion that guides you in your behaviour and is the real YOU. Forrest Church believed that being who we are helps us reject the fool's gold of self-delusion. It also demands integrity - being straight with ourselves and one another.

I have just finished reading Forrest Church's book "Love & Death, My Journey Through The Valley of the Shadow". This book was written after he had been given the diagnosis that he had terminal cancer. It is an inspiring book and indeed I had tears in my eyes many times while reading it. I did find references to his mantra and this is what I want to read to you now.

Page 41; Meaning doesn't emerge from longing for what we lack, things we have lost or will likely never find. We should wish to think instead for things closer at hand, like the sun's kiss good morning when it breaks through the blinds to inaugurate another miracle, another day.

It takes courage to laugh, especially when the things we are struggling with are no laughing matter. The most healing aspect about the courage to laugh is that it keeps us from attaching additional strings to our troubles, no matter how serious they are. The journalist Linda Ellerbee memorably attests to laughter's healing power when she describes enduring the trial of a double mastectomy by calling laughter "the mother of courage".

Whether leavened by humor, lifted by contemplation, or lightened and expanded by neighbourly concern, the moment we stop defining (and restricting) life on our own narrow terms, life opens up. Once we understand the secret to it all --- that "it's not about me" -- we no longer cast fear's shadow.

How liberating this is. Rising out of our self-pity, we shake off the temptation to whine, "Woe is me!" and "Why do these things always happen to me!" Rather than wondering why we don't have what she has and can't do what he does and can't be who they are, we take the opposite tack. We do what we can, want what we have, and embrace who we are

Remember my friends:

Life is a gift, not a given.
One day we will go to sleep and not wake up again.
Every day is a miracle.
So live it to its full.

