

Empathy—BBUUC Journey Circle— November 2024

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings, but connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe, to this community and to each other.

Check-in: What is most on your mind today?

Opening Reading

A farmer had some puppies he needed to sell. As he was driving the last nail of his sign into a post, he felt a tug on his overalls. He looked down into the eyes of a little boy. "Mister," he said, "I want to buy one of the puppies." "Well," said the farmer, "These puppies come from fine parents and cost a good deal of money."

The boy dropped his head for a moment. Then reaching deep into his pocket, he pulled out a handful of change and held it up to the farmer. "I've got thirty-nine cents. Is that enough to take a look? Sure, said the farmer. And with that he let out a whistle. "Here, Dolly!" he called. Out from the doghouse ran Dolly followed by four little balls of fur. The boy's eyes danced with delight. Just then, he noticed something else stirring just inside the dog house. Slowly another little ball appeared, this one noticeably smaller. Down the ramp it slid. Then in a somewhat awkward manner, the littlest pup began hobbling toward the others, doing its best to catch up...

"I want that one," the little boy said, pointing to the runt. The farmer knelt down at the boy's side and said, "Son, you don't want that puppy. He will never be able to run and play with you like these other dogs would." With that the little boy stepped back from the fence, reached down, and began rolling up one leg of his trousers. In doing so, he revealed a steel brace running down both sides of his leg attaching itself to a specially-made shoe. Looking back up at the farmer, he said, "You see sir, I don't run too well myself, and he will need someone who understands." (*Psychology Today.com*)

Topic Exploration

In order to feel true empathy, we must first become aware of the other person's feelings. If we are caught up in our own attitudes, emotions, or reactions, we blind ourselves from paying attention to what is happening with the other person. Once we acknowledge that the person feels *something different* from us, we open ourselves to recognize what that difference is. For many of us, it is easy to get caught up in in our

own reacting, which can prevent us from staying with the other emotionally. If we can do that, we will be able to shift our own mindset and feelings to match the other, and express it. This step demonstrates the difference between sympathy and empathy: a *sympathetic* person offers feelings that do not match the other; an *empathic* person feels *with* the person.

Questions / Sharing

1. As we have seen in our Opening Reading, the concept of empathy can be a difficult one for many adults. What might be an example of demonstrating this quality to an elementary school-aged child?
2. In reviewing your past relationships, what emotional reactions can you identify that may have prevented you from showing greater empathy toward another?
3. Think of a time when you wanted someone close to you to understand a traumatic time you were experiencing. Describe one of their emotional barriers to giving you what you needed. How did this incident turn out for you?
4. Some people seem unable to express empathy. Do you know anyone like that? How have you coped with them? How has this deficiency affected your relationship with them?
5. Do you believe that most UUs value empathy? If so, how do we show it? If not, what challenges do we face that prevent us from being more empathic?

Closing Reading

“Resolve to be tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and the wrong. Sometime in life you will have been all of these.” (George Washington Carver, American agricultural scientist and inventor)

Check-out and reflections on today’s session: Please express any closing thoughts on the content or process of today’s session.

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.