

**“How Ministry is Like the Hokey Pokey:  
An Ordination Sermon”**

This sermon began for on the back deck of my house in Holliston,  
My children and the neighborhood children playing out in the warm air  
That has been this winter.

I had just come home from a full day here at church,  
I was going back in an hour or two for a night meeting,  
My smart phone was pinging me, saying “NATHAN, IMPORTANT EMAIL!  
NATHAN, IMPORTANT EMAIL!

And the sermon I had to deliver in two days was seeming less and less worthy  
The closer and closer I got to Sunday –  
ministers, ever have that happen to you? –  
In other words, I was feeling carved up, pulled in different directions,  
Compartmentalized, divided by all the different needs.

And there from the kitchen where I was standing I heard that old, familiar song –  
*“You put your right hand in, you take right hand out, (sing it with me)  
your put your hand in and you shake it all about,  
you do the Hokey Pokey and your turn yourself  
Around; that’s what it’s all about!*

And then they did the left hand, the left leg, the right leg, etc., etc.  
And then they got the end, the last verse. Remember what it is?  
*“You put your whole self in, you take your whole self out,  
You put your whole self in and you shake it all about.  
You do the Hokey Pokey and you turn yourself around,  
That’s what it’s all about!*

I may be the “preacher” by profession, but I find that the world and its people  
Are always preaching to me sermons I need to hear,  
And in this instance the sermon I was hearing from the choir  
Of children on the back porch was this:

*Nathan, are you feeling too divided?*

*Nathan, does it feel like you have your right hand in here,  
and the your left hand in over there,*

*And your left leg over there and your heart over there?*

*Nathan, what are the consequences of your trying to be everywhere and no where  
All at once?*

*Nathan, more than excellent multi-tasking, isn't what the world needs*

*Most of all are whole people, people who know how to put their WHOLE self in,  
People, in other words, who are integrated, people who have integrity?*

And I know what you're thinking, you're thinking:

*you got all that from Hokey Pokey?*

And I'm thinking: *this is what happens when you go to seminary and become a  
minister: it leads you to look for the meaning in...everything!*

*Jeez, Dad, says my son. It's just a song. And he's got a point.*

But here's the thing, Laura, (and now this sermon will start  
Sounding like an additional Charge to the Minister, because I can't help myself)  
But Laura, when speaking of being whole,  
When speaking of ministering to those of us who long for wholeness,  
who long to find integrity in ourselves and in the world,  
but who so often are broken into a thousand pieces for a thousand reasons,

when speaking of all this, and more,

I find myself thinking of the people and places we meet in our ministry

Who come to us divided:

I'm thinking, for example, of the middle-aged person who somehow lands in one of our congregations,

who maybe saw one of those yellow signs on someone's lawn that says

UU's Stand on the Side of Love,

and who is wondering here in the middle her of middle-management

Career that has now gone up in flames in this Great Recession:

*Well, she's asking in our pews: What now?*

*How do I maintain my integrity and stand on the side of love when I*

*I am so scared?*

*How will I provide for my family? Will I find work I love again?*

*Will I be whole again?*

And I'm also thinking, Laura, of the people you are so called to in ministry,

The people whose memories are fading, whose Alzheimer's is dividing

Them from their own stories and their own pasts,

They're questions spoken and unspoken

As you offer them your ministry of presence:

*What is happening to me? They ask.*

*Who am I if I don't have my memories?*

*What does wholeness look like for me?*

*What will it mean for me to live with integrity?*

And I'm thinking, Laura, in the season of election cycles,

Of these politicians who use religion to divide us,  
Who try to tell us there is a 'right' theology over here  
and a 'false' theology over there,  
and whose words in some cases deny women their wholeness,  
and deny sexual identity minorities their wholeness,  
and somehow get away with calling their views '*moral values.*'  
And I'm wondering,  
as I know every ordained and lay minister in this sanctuary is wondering:  
*How does one minister in a culture like this?*  
*How do we create healing and wholeness from the same Scriptures,*  
*And some of the same traditions, that others use to bully us and separate us?*  
*How do we ask people to trust the integrity of our words when*  
*Religious language and religious life cause so much damage?*

But it's not all division and more division, Laura.

*"Come on, Nathan!"* said my wife when I read here that last section,  
*This is supposed to be a happy day!"*

And so I'm thinking, Laura, of the people you have ministered to,  
Not just here in this congregation, but out in those countless  
Other sanctuaries of our faith that have no steeples and have no pews,  
Those small, easy to miss holy places

Where you have glimpsed someone being true to themselves,  
Or seen someone stand up for a cause they believed in,  
Or watched someone begin to emerge after an unspeakable loss,  
Or helped reunite someone to life's sometimes unspeakable joy,  
And you realize, Laura, that in being with them you are a witness  
To their journey toward wholeness,

And not only that,  
But how in witnessing them you are also a witness to something  
equally wondrous in yourself:  
Which is that you are becoming more whole, too.

Laura, it is into these moments, and next to these people,  
That you stand with all of us as ministers of this faith.  
Our good news, our Unitarian Universalist gospel  
Is that wholeness is possible,  
That at Forrest Church put it,  
*we need not wait for some other world or some other lifetime to  
be who we are, to love what we have, and do what can  
with this one wild, precious life we have been given.*

But in order for this gospel to have authenticity, Laura,  
We who teach it and preach it and represent it must strive  
To be whole ourselves.  
And so the question remains: how do we do that?  
What does a minister look like when we put our whole selves in,  
When we're integrated and not divided?  
A few examples, and then I will say 'amen.'

Laura, when you resist the temptation to think that that being  
A busy minister and a successful minister are synonyms  
You will glimpse wholeness.

When you make appointments with your anxiety

Rather than letting your anxiety make appointments with you  
You will glimpse some wholeness.

When you connect the places of brokenness and healing in your life  
To the brokenness and healing in other lives  
You will glimpse wholeness.

When you gather friends and family  
Who care not that much at all and love you just the same despite this new prefix  
that announces 'Rev' before your name  
You will glimpse wholeness.

When you remember that your job as minister is not to make people happy,  
But to help us nourish our spirits and align our values with our lives  
You will glimpse wholeness.

When you tell us what you believe,  
Even when it is uncomfortable for us to hear, and for you to speak,  
You will glimpse wholeness.

When you remember how often you were loving in your ministry,  
Long after you have forgotten how often you were right,  
You will glimpse wholeness.

When you erect strong, healthy boundaries between your ministry  
And the other parts and people of your life  
You will glimpse wholeness.

And finally, Laura, as you learn and learn again  
where you find your hope,  
And when you run, not walk, but run to those places and drink from  
That well as often as you can,  
You will glimpse wholeness.

Because Laura, more than anything else –  
More than great preaching, teaching, prophetic social witness,  
Empathic pastoral care, passion,  
More even than a deep sense of vocation,  
Or excellent time management skills, or the CEO ability to read a budget  
And manage a staff,  
More than all of that I believe what the world needs from our ministry  
and our faith  
Are whole people,  
people who are integrated and not separated,  
People who can help us see the hidden wholeness in ourselves.

And the good news is that you are already there, Laura,  
You are already one of our ministers.  
Today we just get to make it official.  
So Laura, Go.  
Go out into this ministry that is blessed to have you.  
Put in not just your hands or your heart and your head,

But put it your whole self...and as the song says...shake it all about. Amen.