

Don't Go It Alone

Rev. Heather Concannon

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A few years ago,
My friend Allison and I took a few days after a conference in California
To take a short vacation, driving up and down the Pacific coastline.
While the rest of New England
Was getting buried under those 8 feet of snow—remember that winter?
It was in my first year here with you all—
We were hiking in the redwoods in California.
I tried not to post TOO many pictures on Facebook.
And for some reason, still unbeknownst to me,
On one of these hikes these two type-A ministers
(A trait which, I will add as an aside, makes us fairly excellent travelling
companions)
We ended up at a trailhead without a map,
Without cell phone service,
And there was not even a map at the trailhead that these *millennial* ministers could
take a picture of.
At this point, we had two options:
Hike, or head home.
We chose the first option,
Promising each other that we would remember the landmarks when we made a turn
So that we could find our way back down.

“Well, it’s an adventure”, we said to each other, reassuring,
“And we have good company and enough snacks.”
And then, of course, because we are both ministers,
we were like “that’ll preach!”
Because, sermons are suddenly everywhere in our lives...
Including in good company and enough snacks.

So we spent this hike—a gorgeous few hours
Reassuring each other that we did indeed have enough snacks to make it until
dinnertime,
Each time we got to a split in the trail
Taking a moment to decide which way to go
Not really knowing where it is taking us, but trusting the path
And having nothing else to do that day, really.
And we finally reach an outlook
With the 70 degree air and the warm sun shining down on us.
We can see the Pacific Ocean from the rock, if we climb up a little bit.
And we, in awe, note quietly that we would not have seen this gorgeous view if we
played it safe

And went home.

Friends, I think of this experience
Of hiking without a map,
When I think about what I need to go on an adventure
Or, frankly, even leaving the house.
Because, to be really honest,
I'm a chronic over-packer
And I don't like to be unprepared.
Plus, I get cold easily.
So this week, as the election looms closer and closer
Unprecedented circumstances, in so many ways.
These days, I've been feeling like:
We are a people without a map
We are in uncharted territory.
And I am feeling wholly unprepared for the times I find our nation in.
With stark boundary lines trying to be drawn
Uncrossable borders
Between who is in and who is out
Who is good and who is evil
Where we see despair and where we see hope
We see people trying to draw those lines between us,
When in reality, the line between good and evil
Hope and despair:
That line exists inside all of us.
The only way to be in this time without a map
Is to pick a path
Pick good company
To pack enough snacks
Stick with it
And be willing to turn around should the conditions get too rough
Or if we realize that the path we are on is putting some of our traveling companions
in danger.
Because I'm definitely not saying that we should end up in one of the AMC quarterly
reviews of people who have to get emergency lifted off the side of the mountain,
But I do know that we cannot have all the answers before we do something.
And without faithful risk there is no path, there is no way forward,
there is only staying home.

And friends, this business of life and of faith is inherently risky,
if we are doing it right.
Which is why I, at least, feel most at need of religion in these times without a map.
Because religion—the root of the word meaning *re-ligios*
Or re-binding
Gives me a sense of orientation
Like a compass,

Points me toward home
If not the map to get me there.
And in this world that pulls us apart from one another
And distracts us, with shiny lights
And things to buy
And rhetoric,
And political ads on TV
And complex ballot questions that are reduced to sound bites
And tells us our worth is measure by how much we are paid
Or how many likes we get on Facebook
In the midst of all of this,
Our Unitarian Universalist faith calls us back to our deepest values
Church is a place that asks us to *be* counter to the culture of separation and competition
To *vote* counter to the culture of separation and competition
And *vote for* a world of compassion and interconnection.
And tells us instead that all are worthy, all are loved, inherently,
No matter if you don't make enough money or wear the right kind of clothes
In religion we re-bind ourselves to one another and to that Spirit, that Love, which is greater than ourselves:
And we cannot enter into this re-binding without risk:
Risking transformation
Risking vulnerability
Risking authenticity
Risking getting lost
Risking being wrong
Risking having our hearts broken open
Risking change to how things have always been
Risking comfort for the sake of justice.

This week we have such a decision before our country
Can I get an amen?
I've been noticing myself checking out while also getting a little anxious, Has that been true for any of you?
And I know that that anxiety, for me at least, has a piece of "I couldn't predict that such polarization would come out, and I can't predict what will happen next, either"
Can I get an amen?
And I don't know what will happen come Tuesday night
Though I have some hopes
But I do know that wherever I am Tuesday, I'll be with excellent companions and we'll bring enough snacks.

(have ushers begin handing out safety pins, ~10 to each person on the end of the row).

Many of you know that I live in a 12-person intentional community
Called the Lucy Stone Cooperative, in Boston.

And in my house, we share food and meals and decision-making and chores and we sing together,
And we also have a ritual that we do sometimes
Brought to us from our former housemate, Barbara
When someone has something big happening in their life.
We've done it when someone has moved out,
When some of us, myself included, have seen the Ministerial Fellowship Committee,
(Which Otto just saw, the committee that examines candidate's fitness for ministry.)
We've done it when people have traveled far away,
Gotten married,
Or gone home to have hard conversations with their parents
Even the night before friends of our house were going to the hospital to have their baby.
And the ritual that we do is very simple, and organic.
We gather everyone who is around, and someone pulls out a box, filled with safety pins.
And we say:
So-and-so, you are going on a grand adventure
And sometimes, on an adventure, you need a safety pin
Because safety pins are very practical,
if you need to hang on to something
Or if your clothes rip—
You never know what might happen.
But we also give you this safety pin
Because even though you are going off alone on this adventure
We want you to remember that you are not
holding everything together on your own.
That you have a whole community of people here at home
Who are loving and supporting you
And ready to help you hold it together should you need us.

And then, we pin the safety pin on the person who is being blessed
So that they can carry it with them
Should the need to pin something together
Or should they simply need a reminder that they aren't holding it together on their own.
And you know: the suit that I wore to see the Ministerial Fellowship Committee,
That I wear here often on Sunday mornings
I checked this morning: it still has a tiny safety pin pinned inside it.

So today, I would like us to do that for one another
Because we are all on a journey
Each and every week
As we leave this sanctuary and go our separate ways.
Can I get an amen?
And we could use the help and support of one another

And an occasional reminder that we do not need to hold it together all on our own
Amen?

So I'd like everyone to find a buddy, or two
And please make sure that any kids have at least one adult buddy in their group.
(wait)
And the last person in each pew should, at this point, have a handful of a few safety
pins.
I'd like everyone to pick out one safety pin (wait)
And turn to your buddy
And ask them where they would like you to put the pin—
Maybe on their sleeve, or a bag, or somewhere else.
(go ahead and ask each other)
And grown-ups, perhaps you can strategize about where a safe place to put the
safety pin might be for younger folks.

Now turn to your buddy, and say to each other:
You are going on a journey (you are going on a journey)
This week and in this lifetime (this week and in this lifetime)
And this is a reminder that you aren't holding it together all by yourself (and this is a
reminder that you aren't holding it together all by yourself)
And that you have a community of people behind you should you need us (And that
you have a community of people behind you should you need us).

And now go ahead and pin the safety pin on your buddy, wherever they asked you
to.

Friends,
As we go out in to the world this week
I'm feeling like I need a little bit of courage, how about you?
I'm feeling like it takes a lot of work and a lot of courage
To resist the temptation to draw boundaries between us and them
To not give in to worry or despair
To use my gifts—whatever they may be—to bless and not to curse.
And to remember that I'm not holding it together all by myself.
May it be so for each and every one of us
This week and all weeks.
Blessed be, and amen.

For our final hymn, I invite you to stand
And we are singing hymn #1007, There's a River Flowing in My Soul
But the words are very simple, they are "there's a river flowing in my soul, there's a
river flowing in my soul, and it's telling me that I'm somebody, there's a river
flowing in my soul".

And we'll replace "soul" with "mind" and "heart".
I'll call our the verses, and I invite you to try not opening your book
And instead sing to one another.