

Sermon
Shared at Shadow Rock UCC
April 25, 2010

To understand Shadow Rock it is important to know a few things about a foundational class called RS1 or Contemporary Theology. RS1 stands for Religious Studies One. A brief and incomplete working definition is in the bulletin. This class was a keystone for Shadow Rock and its founding pastor, Rev. Bill Smith.

I cannot give you a summary of the class and even if I could in 15-20 minutes it would not be a substitute for the experience of the event. It is about theological content but it is so much more as you share the experience with others over a weekend.

RS1 came out of a church renewal movement that has its roots in the 50's and 60's. It has its roots in the theological work of Joseph Matthews. A small but incredibly dedicated community committed their life's work to the sharing of these core ideas.

I understand that the Ecumenical Institute had a vision to revitalize the institutional Church; "For God's sake people be the people of God and make a difference in the world!" I see a new direction and emphasis emerging with Profound Journey Dialogue. The vision has grown beyond revitalizing the institution of the Church. The vision now is to call people to the most powerful and authentic lives possible for the sake of life itself. By necessity and inevitability this involves saving the planet.

It is at this point I want to affirm Rev. Gene's message from last Sunday. He rightly criticized the old cosmology, that is, the old human orientation to nature and the universe. The old cosmology was one of domination and the old cosmology gave a moral justification for abusing the planet to the point that we stand on the verge of burning ourselves up. Rev. Gene called us to live in a new relationship to the planet.

This idea reminds me of the short animated film I saw about twenty five years ago. The film opens up with all of these stick people on the planet yelling, "More!" It flashed to factories with raw materials streaming in one side, pumping out goods on a conveyor belt on the other side, waste dumping into streams, and smoke belching out the chimneys. The film then goes back to all the stick people on the planet and they shout out, "More!!" Flash to factories producing more goods. Back to people shouting "MORE!!" Back to factories, more raw materials, more goods, more waste, and more smoke beginning to cover the planet. Back to the people with an even more demanding shout, "MOOOORRRREEEE!!!!" The picture pans back for a few of the whole planet covered with smoke and stars in the background. A giant hand reaches out to the planet and takes us into its palm, squeezes us, snuffs us out, and you hear a voice that says, "No More."

You can draw your own conclusions about the "giant hand" but please do not let yourself get too distracted by the image. The main idea is that the insistence on "MORE" is the seed of our own destruction. The cartoon film is prophetic and prophecy is about an

acute awareness of what is going on around us. Prophecy is perceiving what God is doing in the midst of history.

We are called upon to live with a new awareness of our interconnectedness and thus, a new relationship with the earth. Our own covenant proclaims we are “to be that sensitive and responsive part of human society that perceives and responds to what God is doing in the midst of history”.

This idea of being aware,
being sensitive,
being responsive,
and being in a unique caring relationship with the world reflects the core values of RS1 and Profound Journey Dialog.

This is central for me and my vision for the future. The cultivation and nurturing of this kind of people, this kind of faith community, is our mission. There is only one thing better than one such faith community and that is two such faith communities; two, four, eight, and so forth. There is only one thing better than one Shadow Rock UCC and that is two Shadow Rock UCC s; two, four, eight, and so forth.

This is why Journey of the Spirit is important. It is a good experience in itself but it also helps us develop leadership for small groups.

This is why we are going to have Gathered and Scattered worship on Pentecost. It is a good experimental worship service in itself but it also reinforces the message that the church is not about what we do in here but how we engage the world out there.

This is why we need to reinstate programs like RS1. It is a program of sustained theological education and teacher training because we have a vision to share and deeds to perform.

The original vision was to cultivate and nurture a sensitive and responsive people who partner with God in the bending of history for peace and justice.

This idea of being aware,
being sensitive,
being responsive,
and being in a unique caring relationship with the world means we are involved in the issues that most effect people’s lives. This includes the political hot button issues of health care, education, war, poverty, immigration reform, and environmentalism. It also means that we are sensitive to all sides of the issues and we bring our values of inclusion and justice to every discussion.

The original vision to cultivate and nurture a sensitive and responsive people emphasized people coming to Shadow Rock and learning the vision. I propose taking the vision out to the people.

I do not expect a mirror image or duplicate twin of Shadow Rock. My vision allows a small group or a large group. It can meet in a gym, in a park, in a movie theater, in a private home or in a Starbucks. What ever size, what ever time, and wherever such a group meets I don't care. What I care about is their faith, vision, values, and mission. I want them to have the DNA of Shadow Rock UCC and an important way to pass on the DNA of who we are is through events like RS1 and Profound Journey Dialog.

I believe we have what people are hungry for.
Constitutions are not going to save us.
Borders are not going to save us.
Nations are not going to save us.
Education is not going to save us.
Bigger GNPs are not going to save us.

When we look to these things we are thinking too small and all we have done is tweak the same old tools.

None of these things are going to unite us and save us as human beings. The uniting of our species and the healing of our planet are guiding values...

*“...that believes Spirit is always already present
That sees creation is good
And evolution is always possible
That hears the planetary call
And knows deep down
That the quest is worth our lives
That we have all we need to care for all
That the one spirit movement is emerging
In which every individual longs to be a part of the great work of
Building the Earth.”
(Our Universal Spirit Journey, John Cock)*

Some of us need to rediscover this and some of us need to discover it for the first time. Either way we are together and we have already begun an adventure of a life time.