**11.0: Sermons & Sermon Excerpts**

**11.1:** *Degrees of Separation* by Rev. Gary Kowalski (source: <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/reflection/degrees-separation>) (637 words)

Is the world getting more connected or more fragmented? Facebook, in conjunction with the University of Milan, recently announced that there were only 4.74 “degrees of separation” among its 700 million users (representing 10% of the world’s population). That contrasts with the famous six degrees that Yale researcher Stanley Milgram found back in the 1960’s. Social media, we’re to believe, are bringing people closer together.

Of course, I have 336 “friends” on Facebook, most of whom I’ve never met outside a chat room. My son has 873. So, despite the ballyhoo from Facebook, I have doubts that computers are building the kind of relationships that count.

A study published in the *American Sociological Review* in 2004 found that a quarter all Americans say they have no one they can talk to about important matters, and that number more than doubled from an similar study done twenty years before. Imagine, not having a single confidante. It just confirms the thesis of Robert Putnam’s Bowling Alone, that we’re becoming more socially isolated, even as the world gets more wired.

In fact, the phrase “online community” may be an oxymoron, like “Amtrak schedule” or “airline food.” This past summer, researchers at the University of Wisconsin put teenage girls in stressful situations, like solving mental arithmetic problems, meanwhile measuring the girls’ levels of cortisol, a bio-marker for stress, and oxytocin, a hormone associated with feelings of well-being and trust. During the test, the teens were permitted either to text their mothers, or to call mom on the phone. It turned out that the phone conversation, and the soothing tone of mother’s voice, lowered stress levels in the girls. Texting had no such effect.

The study just confirms my own prejudices. Call me retro, but I still prefer chatting with a real live person on the telephone, rather than interacting with a voice-mail robot. The world has gained in efficiency and cost-savings, but lost a dimension that’s warm and comforting.

It appears that we need an actual human presence--the shelter of each other--to feel whole. There’s no digital substitute for a hug, a handshake or a smile. This is one role that religious institutions play in our culture, as well as civic organizations and bowling leagues. Of course, merely attending a church, mosque or synagogue doesn’t automatically mean you feel known and accepted. You still have to do the work of building caring bonds. But at least meaningful relationships are possible in congregations and similar affinity groups in a way that cyberspace just won’t allow.

How much of the vulgarity of American culture is due to the fact that we’ve become a nation of strangers? How much of the incivility in our politics can be traced to the breakdown of respectful person-to-person communication? The good news is that the cure for this malady is readily available. Through everyday acts of kindness, and by reaching out to others in a spirit of helpfulness and cooperation, we can begin to re-weave the fabric of community.

Indeed, the mathematical algorithms that measure “degrees of separation” across the planet show that when we reach outside our personal comfort zone, for example to encounter someone from a different race, a different religion, or a different political viewpoint, our actions have a multiplier effect. One person who breaks through ghettos of privilege and prejudice can lower the level of global estrangement, much more than you might predict.

But perhaps you didn’t need a university study or a mathematical analysis to tell you what the world’s religions have affirmed for centuries. The best way to bring our world closer together--to lower the degree of separation and strife--is the old-fashioned way, though charity and compassion, by practicing patience and tolerance and goodwill, turning strangers into friends and enemies into conversation partners, one by one by one.

# **11.2**: *Embrace* by Rev. David Ruffin (source: <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/reflection/embrace>) (554 words)

“So, what do you want to do with your life???”

There was a time when this question haunted me like an existential crisis. Some might call it being in my twenties, but I certainly didn’t feel that such pain was just “to be expected.”

I remember pouring over inspirational books. I found few answers, but I did find friends: Parker Palmer assured me that feelings of depression were not only normal but a gift that could lead me deeper and help “let my life speak.” Kahlil Gibran reframed my present pain as something that was carving space for future joy. Mary Oliver proclaimed her gospel: “You do not have to be good.” And Rainer Maria Rilke urged patience “with everything unresolved in (my) heart...to love the questions themselves.” Most importantly, I learned I had good company in struggling to find my way.

Encouraged by these connections, my creative energy began to return and soon I was on the move—zigging and zagging, to be sure, but following my heart. In time, I was New York City–bound, following my dream of legal temping...I mean, acting. But the legal temping, along with countless early mornings, shivering in lines for theater auditions (that were already cast), was living the dream. I was following my passion and, in time, I began finding work.

Still, was it my purpose?

I remember my deep recognition watching the musical “Avenue Q” as Princeton, the protagonist puppet, opened the drama with the question of questions: “What do you do with a B.A. in English?”

Princeton continues, “Everyone else has a purpose, so what’s mine? ...Gotta find out, don’t wanna wait. Got to make sure that my life will be great...Got to find me.”

Fast forward—I was on the Fiftieth Anniversary European Tour of West Side Story and I was Tony! It was the pinnacle of my career in a role that felt meant for me. But I was struggling. We were playing Vienna, with Paris around the corner, and I was dogged by a sinus infection, struggling with the famous high notes of “Maria,” and fearing the consequences. Soon they came: a ticket back home.

I was devastated. I’d overcome depression, followed my passion, and put in my time. I had practically felt the glow of my parents’ pride as I imagined them watching me on stage at Le Chatelet. But it wouldn’t be.

Instead ...  
I experienced love anyway.  
A dear friend who’d traveled to see me holding my hand,  
Cast mates’ tears transforming my own,  
Vienna’s autumn leaves enveloping me in a golden glow,  
My parents’ even greater pride in my courage, facing this loss . . . Words penned in a journal entry—”I am called to ministry.”

I used to think that finding my purpose meant finding a tiny intersection point between my passion and the world’s need. Then I took faith that the world needed passionate people as Howard Thurman says, “people who have come alive.”

But the greatest learning has come from feeling my fears, my losses, my dreams, and even my quest to “find me,” transformed through the experience of finding and feeling we. Discovering my identity as one who is loved and loves passionately—this has been to come alive.  
 What do I want to do with my life?... Embrace it.

# **11.3**: *Emotional Intelligence* by Rev. Peter Connolly (Excerpt, full text at <http://uubgky.org/2015/11/emotional-intelligence/>) (1,279 words)

How impoverished our lives would be without our emotions. How deeply unsatisfying our lives are when our emotions are out of control.

…Our emotions provide a way to understand others and to misunderstand others, to express ourselves and to misrepresent ourselves. With so much at stake, it’s essential that we understand our emotions better than we do.

Daniel Goleman’s book called *Emotional Intelligence* is the best recommendation that I can make as a place to begin.

…What are emotions? And, why? “All emotions are, in essence, impulses to act, the instant plans for handling life that evolution has instilled in us,” he says.

…Before there were people, there were other mammals, and before there were mammals, there were reptiles and amphibians. A long train of evolution runs backward from us to more primitive life forms such as these and backwards further to yet more primitive forms. The part of the brain where emotions live came into being a long time before the part of the brain that is responsible for our thinking, our cognitive capacity.

It took millions of years for the development of the neocortex, that part of the brain that allows us to think. The neocortex “contains the centers that put together and comprehend what the senses perceive. It adds to a feeling what we think about it.”

…Dr. Goleman refers to the section of the brain called the *amygdala* as the “seat of all passion.” “There are two amygdalae, one on each side of the brain, nestled toward the side of the head.” If you don’t have an amygdala, you are not capable of recognizing feelings, and you are not capable of having feelings about your feelings.

…The amygdala stores emotional memories, and emotional memories are what give significance to things. At the same time, passions can take over and run amok. “The amygdala can take control over what we do even as the thinking brain, the neocortex, is still coming to a decision. There’s an interplay between the amygdala and the neocortex that allows for both experiencing emotions and managing them.” This fact is at the heart of what “emotional intelligence” is.

We’re all familiar with the concept of IQ, the “intelligence quotient” that is used to measure intellectual capacity, based on the assessment of the results from a number of tests.

…IQ is an important indicator of some kinds of abilities, but is incomplete in and of itself, which, really, should come as no surprise. We are more than our intellects; our ability to form and maintain relationships is also an important factor in leading a successful life. If we cannot feel emotions, we won’t be able to achieve happiness. If we are unable to manage our emotions, likewise, we will not be able to lead a stable, well-integrated life.

…Citing the work of Yale psychologist Peter Salovey, these are the five domains that Dr. Goleman identifies:

1. Knowing one’s emotions
2. Managing emotions
3. Motivating oneself
4. Recognizing emotions in others
5. Handling relationships

Knowing your emotions (the first domain) means having self-awareness–recognizing a feeling as it happens. You might think that we all know our emotions as they occur. Not true. The amygdala can override our ability to think clearly. If we don’t recognize our emotions, they dictate our actions. Not good. Not good in forming and maintaining relationships, not good even for our own health.

The second domain here is “managing emotions.” Simply stated, this is handling emotions so that they are appropriate to the situation. If you can’t handle them–handle them as you would a concrete object–you will get worn out from battling them. You’ll be constantly battling depression or anger or irritability. There are ways to handle your emotions.

The third domain is “motivating yourself.” You organize your emotions in service to a goal. You delay gratification; you “stifle impulsiveness.”

The fourth domain is “recognizing emotions in others.” It’s amazing how difficult that is when you are completely caught up in your own emotions, your own disorganized emotions. You can’t have empathy towards someone else if you can’t escape your own emotional flux long enough to pay attention to the signs that others give you of their own emotional state.

The fifth domain, then, is “handling relationships.” In some way, this means handling the emotions of others, either by non-reactivity or empathy. Handling a relationship means helping someone else manage their emotions by not contributing to their emotional reactivity. But, it doesn’t mean that you take responsibility for the other person’s emotions.

Emotional intelligence can’t be measured the way we measure intellectual competence, with a test or a series of tests. Emotional intelligence is measured in a more subjective way, through your success in establishing and maintaining healthy relationships with others.

…The psychologist John Mayer says that people tend to fall into one of three styles “for attending to and dealing with their emotions.” The first style is “self-awareness.” You are aware of your moods as you have them. You don’t focus on a bad mood when it occurs; you don’t obsess about it. Your mindfulness helps you manage it.

The second style is being “engulfed.” You feel swamped by your emotions, you are mercurial, you don’t seem to be aware that your emotions are not identical to yourself. You feel that you have no control over your emotions. You feel “overwhelmed and out of control.”

The third style is “accepting.” You identify your emotions, you are clear about what they are, but you don’t attempt to change anything. People who are chronically depressed choose this style, if only by default.

Is there ever a time you are not thinking? If you are awake, you are thinking, almost always, even if the thoughts are in the background, what Dr. Goleman calls a “murmur of background thoughts.”

Is there ever a time you are not experiencing a feeling? That must be very rare. You are always in some kind of a mood. Your emotional life is ongoing as long as your life, itself, is ongoing.

The important question is, “Are you aware of that feeling?” Emotions are a reality. Pretending that they don’t exist or that they are not important is a distortion of reality. Once you commit yourself to living in a distorted reality, your ability to function well with other people also becomes distorted. Distorted is as distorted does. Ignoring your emotions can be as devastating as ignoring the signs of bodily distress that indicate you should be seeking medical treatment.

Our emotions can poison us. They can literally be toxic to our health. Research indicates that “People who experienced chronic anxiety, long periods of sadness and pessimism, unremitting tension or incessant hostility, relentless cynicism or suspiciousness, were found to have *double* the risk of disease–including asthma, arthritis, headaches, peptic ulcers, and heart disease.… This order of magnitude makes distressing emotions as toxic a risk factor as, say, smoking or high cholesterol are for heart disease–in other words, a major threat to health.”

If you are aware of your emotions as they develop and you learn to regulate those emotions, you can significantly alter your health for the better.

…You can strive to be healthy emotionally by practicing mindfulness in all the moments of your day.

Mindfulness is simply being attuned to what is going on inside you as well as around you. It is not suppressing thoughts or emotions that you have aversions to. It is not clinging to pleasurable states. It is adopting an attitude of curious observation, a kind of benign non-attachment, a relinquishing of the desire to control so much, especially the things that are out of your control.

**11.4:** *Power vs. Force and Emotional Intelligence* by Rev. John T. Crestwell, Jr. (Excerpt, full text no longer online) (1,357 words)

According to the latest research from the book *Emotional Intelligence 2.0,* 36% of people are “emotionally literate”, meaning nearly two-thirds of us do not know how to appropriately express our underlying feelings and needs without judgment or blame of someone. This tells me that – 1. Most of us are probably not where with think we are on the emotional scale of life. 2. Perhaps most of the world operates –NOT BY TRUE POWER -but by FORCE. I will explain in a moment… And 3, without a conscious and deliberate effort, we all fall prey to toxic emotional responses that damage ourselves and our relationships.

On Point #1 – What I’ve come to see is even in our UU circles, some think they are past the point of needing to examine their personal growth processes. Some think because they have retired or read lots of books that they are exempt from growing their souls. In fact I’m shocked at how many of us do not do personal growth/self-awareness work. Based on the scientific findings we all need to do work on how to respond when our emotions are heightened. So I think we are deceiving ourselves if we believe we are done learning how to be our best selves. That’s not a statement to draw guilt but rather a statement to make you think and reason.

And that’s why church is important. Here we get reminded of our highest aspirations. No matter your age and stage, you want to continue to be challenged to be more open and inclusive; and made sometimes uncomfortable—because you know that it is only when you are challenging yourself that you are growing, spiritually. As long as you are in your present human incarnation, you know deep down that you are here to learn lessons and explore possibilities about yourself and others. To close this process off is akin to death. Indeed some of the most vibrant people I have met, continue to keep their lives moist by engaging in topics, people, places and things that keep them in love with life’s mysteries. When we stop pursuing our personal best, we become dry and brittle, we lose our sense of excitement and we end up in anger and despair, bitterness and apathy more often than not. The people I know who are continually processing and trying to grow their souls are truly some of the most fulfilled people I know. They understand joy and know how to put things into their proper perspective. They are less judgmental, thoughtful in their responses—they’re just nice and easy to be around. They are powerful people that attract good and wholeness, vitality and peace.

On my second point, that most live by force and not by true power. True power is joy, love, peace and all of those good words the sages have taught. Most live by force. … I’m reading [a book] titled: *Power vs Force—the Hidden Dimensions of Human Behavior* by medical doctor and PhD author David R. Hawkins.

Dr. Hawkins studies Kinesiology which … is “the study of the mechanics of body movement”. Using a simple test with the arm, he could measure a “strong or powerful” response in subjects or a “weak or forceful” response. For example a good smelling food prompted a strong physical response with his arm test, and a bad smelling food prompted the arm to go weak. He tested things like Vitamin C vs. artificial sweetener. In individuals and even when whole groups were tested, the result was the same—the muscle goes weak with the thought of artificial sweetener and the muscle grows stronger when thinking of vitamin C. I guess my mom was right. She always says to me, *“Leave that fake stuff alone.”*

Dr. Hawkins’ simple test could (he died a while back) supposedly tell if someone is lying, if a book is accurate, whether religious or scientific. He tested hundreds of people, together and separate, and the results were the same—that somehow human anatomy individually and collectively knows through its five senses and collective human consciousness when something is helpful or harmful.

But the book gets really interesting when he rates the power of specific words. On his very complex scale calibrated through thousands of test subjects, he finds something even more interesting…. The scale goes from 1 to 1000. 1 being very weak and akin to death and 1000 being enlightenment…. The mid-point on his scale is 200, and so anything above 200 on his scale moves from force to true power. Force indicates negative means of energy usage and power indicates positive usage of energy output by humans.

At the lowest point of energy is shame at 20—Brené Brown’s work on shame is dead on at how toxic it truly is. Next is 30 – Guilt, 50 Apathy (or hopelessness); 75 Grief that is held on too long; 100 Fear (fear is negative but can create false forms of power that don’t last); 125 Desire—which leads to accumulation and greed; 150 Anger that is unharnessed or unchecked can feed the soul for some time but eventually turns on itself in the form of cancer or sickness; 175 Pride; and 200 Courage.

True power begins to emerge at 200 and above. His arm test calibration begins to show what he called “true power;” 250 – Neutrality (being able to move beyond dichotomies); 310 Willingness- to try fail and succeed; 350 Acceptance; 400 Reason- That is the ability to understand deep complexities and intricacies in relationships and in life, as well as the understanding of symbols and the scientific method as a way but not the absolute way.  500 Love –true love that gives without expectation; 540 Joy – real happiness is joy and bliss. 600 Peace (peace that surpasses understanding); 700-1000 Enlightenment (our sages who come to teach us).

Who knows if he purposely calibrated his test to work in his favor? For me it makes sense, intuitively. I want to believe this. I want to believe that when a church or individual or corporation or whatever focuses on the higher things, good growth, organic growth, transformational growth occurs. The kind of growth that can evolve us to Beloved Community!

When we get stuck in the things lower than 200 levels, we stagnate and create chaos, pain and trouble. So, our lesson is obvious. Physiologically we are built to manifest true power and when we don’t, we and all in our sphere of influence suffer.

So, when you think about your actions realize that some of them are absolutely creating physical toxicity in yourself and the world. When you decide not to choose the higher road of love and forgiveness and joy and peace you are getting in your own way. You are taking a weak position that is not healthy.

Based on this data, look at the weak position taken in our world. You have political candidates who use shame, guilt, fear and desire to proclaim our country’s power and greatness. When they’re really promoting our force and weakness. They are using the language of false power. They have not learned the lesson that true power gives and let’s go, and forgives, and sacrifices, and is gracious and leads to joyful living that is pluralistic and inclusive.

What about you? How are you living? Are you living in fear, guilt or shame? Are you being too prideful or greedy? Are you a consensus builder or trouble maker? Do you attract chaos or community? Do you want more joy? Do you want to spread love and not fear? Do you want more bliss? You can have it with a conscious, determined and deliberate effort. It’s right there for you. If you are ready, ask yourself more questions…. Do you live your life from a position of strength or weakness? Do you live a life of force or power? How can you make peace with your shame or guilt, your anger or sadness? What spiritual practices renew you? How can our congregation practice living at or above the 200 level? You can absolutely heal yourself and our world. It starts with YOU. Namaste!

**11.5:** *The Seed of Emotional Intelligence* byRev. Anthony Makar (Excerpt, full text no longer online) (770 words)

Emotional intelligence. What exactly is it? The phrase was originally coined by Yale psychologist Peter Salovey in the early 1990s to describe such things as awareness of one’s own feelings and the capacity to regulate them in a way that enhances living. Both give rise to yet a third important aspect of emotional intelligence: empathy for the feelings of others.

Take self-awareness. It’s about understanding how it is that, even as feelings are central to who we are, we can nevertheless be woefully unaware of them. Our emotions have Technicolor range and complexity, and yet so very often we experience them only in grays, or only greens and never reds. It’s a strange picture we get of our inner life. But why? Says Sam Keen, “No matter how wise and loving our parents, they could not have kept us innocent and spontaneous. Every child must explore, test limits, disobey in order to develop an independent personality.” And so we are forced out of the Garden of Eden forever. We grow up, the pain of growing up becomes unbearable, and we develop survival strategies to help us endure. We become experts in stopping the natural flow of emotion when we sense that it’s about to take us to a place that we’ve been taught is unlovable and unacceptable. We feel fear, which threatens to disrupt the “good soldier” survival strategy we’ve worked so hard to develop, and we stop the flow. We feel joy, which threatens to disrupt the “don’t expect too much out of life” survival strategy, the “get-with-the-life-is-miserable-and-then-you-die-game plan” strategy, and we stop the flow. That’s right—sometimes the beast we face is joy. Sometimes the beast is enthusiasm, playfulness, generosity, gentleness. And so we stop it. We snuff it out. Each of us has a unique way of doing this. Finding something else to worry about. Workaholism. Drinking.

…[W]hen others threaten to uncover our spiritual shame, we can take on a scornful tone with them. Make fun of them, to stop the flow. But through self-awareness, we develop a mindfulness discipline where we watch exactly how we do this, and exactly when. We become students of ourselves, students of our own experience.

Besides self-awareness, there is a self-management aspect to emotional intelligence. How we hold all that Technicolor in our hands. And this is significantly impacted by the kind of beliefs we have about our emotions. Fill in the following blanks: “I think of my grief or fear or despair as \_\_\_\_\_.” “What my grief or fear or despair says about me is \_\_\_\_\_.” “If I were to fully experience my grief or fear or despair, I would \_\_\_\_\_.” “What I’d most like to do with my grief or fear or despair is \_\_\_\_\_.”

Don’t know about you, but I find it easy to fill in the blanks with negative stuff. Negative beliefs, that make it so hard to relax into the flow of emotion, trust it, have faith that, ultimately, it’s going to be all right. “Dealing with any [unpleasant] emotion,” says Sam Keen, “is like running the rapids in the Grand Canyon. In the turbulent Colorado River, the greatest danger is getting thrown out of the boat and getting caught in a whirlpool or roller that sucks you down. If you struggle prematurely to get to the surface, you will likely drown. But if you go deeper, the action of the water will spit you out twenty feet downstream on the surface.” That’s what Sam Keen says. The only way out is through. And it’s so hard, since the emotions we’ve learned to stop have become truly scary. We’ve walled them off, and over time, they’ve become like poltergeists. What we repress festers. So easily they possess us, Exorcist-style. But to befriend such emotions, we’ve got to believe that friendship with them is both possible and desirable. In turn, belief paves the way for breathing into the unpleasant emotion, smiling at it with our hearts, building up tolerance so you can just hold it in your hand for a while, learn from it, allow the energy it represents to transform and become something different. Shame, turning into anger, anger turning into sadness and grief, sadness and grief turning into empathy for our parents and teachers and fellow congregants and others, empathy turning into compassion for a world in which Buddhism’s First Noble Truth is indisputable: how the suffering of birth, old age, sickness and death is unavoidable. Life, with all its changes, is suffering. And yet, through suffering, there is a path. There is a path running to enlightenment. Through the beast, beauty.

That’s emotional intelligence.