

Practicing Solidarity

A Homily by Molly Housh

First Parish in Needham

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Aren't our youth amazing?

(to youth) I am in awe of all of you, and if you don't mind, I'm going to share with the congregation a few of the things that I learned from you on our trip.

We did some good work in New Orleans. We made compost and planted seeds and sided and painted a house. We changed lightbulbs and painted a playground and built a baseball field. We worked on a church and handed out food. We made a youth group sized dent in the pile of work that still needs doing in New Orleans. But you know what I think is the most important thing that we did during that week? We let ourselves be changed by it.

We opened up our eyes and looked around at an entire community deprived of things we take for granted, like schools and grocery stores. We opened up our ears and heard people's stories of tragedy and heartbreak and hope. We opened up our arms and hugged wide-eyed kids and jaded old men because we came to care about them.

This is the kind of solidarity that lasts, the kind that we carry back with us to Needham.

The ability to be changed by an experience like our trip is the kind of openness that creates commitment.

I have a feeling that every single trip participant would be very willing hop back on a plane tomorrow to go back.

(to youth) Is that right?

And part of that is because of the bonds that you guys made with each other and the fun that you had together. And part of that is because the work was important and there is plenty more to be done. But I think the biggest part is that each and every one of you really came alive on that trip.

I watched it happen (and it was beautiful to see). You were using your whole selves-- bodies working, minds reflecting and processing, hearts feeling and caring, spirits making meaning of it all.

And that kind of wholeness, well, it's what we all want isn't it? It's part of what religion strives for, certainly, and why service, or rather practicing solidarity, is such an important part of what we do here.

And if wholeness is what we strive for, all the better, because that's what the people of New Orleans need from us: our whole selves joined with theirs. Isn't that true solidarity? And it's what people in communities closer by need from us too, and I hope we'll remember that.

I am reminded of some wise words from a modern day prophet, Howard Thurman. He said: "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

Thank you to our youth for helping me remember what it is to come alive. And to this entire community, I ask, let's keep reminding each other, because wholeness is found moment by moment. With curiosity, with commitment, and with the willingness to be transformed, let us practice solidarity, so that we may strive to be just what the world needs.