



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

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“Accepting Who We Are”

© by the Reverend Alison W. Eskildsen

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Centering Thoughts:

*I prefer to be true to myself, even at the hazard of incurring the ridicule of others,
rather than to be false, and to incur my own abhorrence.* Frederick Douglass

*To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else
is the greatest accomplishment.* Ralph Waldo Emerson

The opinion which other people have of you is their problem, not yours. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

*To be beautiful means to be yourself. You don't need to be accepted by others.
You need to accept yourself.* Thich Nhat Hanh

Story: A telling of Gerald McDermott's *Coyote*.

Sermon:

Does Coyote seem foolish to you? Did it make sense for him to try to fly?

Even though he's portrayed foolishly trying the impossible, I admire him. Not his desire to become the greatest coyote in the world, but because Coyote refused to accept the limitations set upon him by Nature which gifted him with four legs and fur, not two legs and feathers.

Do you think Coyote learned to accept his limitations by his failure to fly like the crows?

My guess is he'll probably try something equally foolish another time. Another reason I admire Coyote.

On its surface, Coyote's story is about learning one's limits. His crash and burn serves as a cautionary tale for our own lives if we're tempted to be something we're not. And, if you're at all like me, there's plenty to wish were different.

We may wish to be more beautiful than we are. We may wish to be smarter than we are. We may wish to be more talented, generous, loving, perfect, or more of whatever it is that we think we're not enough of. Other people readily tell us how to behave or who we ought to be.

To this point, the late Irish poet-priest, John O'Donohue, wisely said:

One of the sad things today is that so many people are frightened by the wonder of their own presence. They are dying to tie themselves into a system, a role, or to an image, or to a predetermined identity that other people have actually settled on for them. This identity may be totally at variance with the wild energies that are rising inside in their souls. Many of us get very afraid and we eventually compromise. We settle for something that is safe, rather than engaging the danger and the wildness that is in our own hearts.

Coyote connected to that wild energy within himself. If he or we conform to someone else's idea of who we should be, if we accept our place because we fear to look foolish or we worry we'll fail at something new, then I think we, and the world, would be poorer for it. If there's a secret identity hiding inside of you, let it fly! Risk letting it go free.

Coyote is foolish for trying to fly, but if humans never dreamed we could fly, the kite, airplane, and space ship might never have been invented. I'm sure Leonardo de Vinci was thought to be foolish for imagining human flight.

Beyond imagining new inventions, we may reinvent ourselves. We take piano lessons and learn we're virtuosos, or we learn we can't keep time. We try to speak before thousands and learn we get stage fright—or we learn we have a talent heretofore untapped. Coyote shows us that we should try, even when it seems outrageous. When we try new things we may discover new talents and new capabilities.

To accept who we are implies we know who we are. One way we discover who we are is to try new things.

Accepting who we are does not mean we have to like everything about ourselves. You might not want to accept that you're angry, or meek, or anxious, or a failure, for example. But if we don't accept that these feelings or concerns are ours, we cannot change them. To deny an aspect of who we are denies our ability to change that aspect.

I've seen you try something new. I've seen you reach beyond your comfort zone. And I've seen you rewarded for doing so. Yes, accept who you are now, for that is who you are. And whether you change or not, you are worthy. We see you. We accept you. You do not need to change because we want you to change, but because you want to change.

Institutions can also get stuck in an idea of who they are and not try new ventures. When we began the building expansion project, some said we would fail. Some said we'd never raise enough money. Some feared that failure was too big a risk. But we didn't accept that advice. We tried, knowing we might fail. Instead, we exceeded our expectations. We learned something about who we are and what we're capable of. We learned we could fly!

This challenge of acceptance and change reminds me of the beginning to the Serenity Prayer:

God grant me the serenity to accept

the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

May we be like Coyote and try new things, even when it seems foolish.

May we accept that who we are can include courageous.

May we be as wildly adventurous and whole-hearted as Coyote.

May it be so.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. Have you ever felt pressured to be someone you're not, or do something you didn't feel right about? How did you resolve this conflict? Do you still feel such pressure?
2. Are you happy about whom you are right now—why or why not? What brings you the most happiness about yourself? How more easily might you live into who you wish to become?
3. Do you try to change other people to fit your expectations? How has that worked?