What Love and Justice Look Like Now
Rev. Karen Fraser Gitlitz
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Thank you for the warm welcome, Melora! And thank you to the Unitarian Universalist Ministers of Southern Ontario for the invitation to speak.

It's an honour to be standing here before all of you. The very first thing I did after receiving Stephen Atkinson's invitation was to re-read all the past Confluence lectures. That might have been a mistake, because it was a bit intimidating. We are blessed with some wise, thoughtful, profound, funny and provocative ministers!

After I stopped hyperventilating, I realized that the date – this year – is particularly auspicious for me: we are very close to the 10th anniversary of my ordination by the Unitarian Church of Vancouver (as it was then known), and even closer to the spring day when, with the support of the Board of Trustees and the Minister, Steven Epperson, I stood up in front of the annual meeting and asked them to ordain me.

I had two minutes to speak. What I chose to say was "never forget that this church saves lives." Which may have been a bit shocking, because it isn't the usual language or at least, it wasn't at that time. I said it because it was the most important thing I could think to say; it summed up my journey with them to that point. They were part of my healing and their confidence in what they saw in me shaped me just as much – or more – than seminary shaped me, and for that I will always be grateful to them.

Seminary also had its influence. It's a bit of a blur, at this point. In the moment, it seemed to involve many part-time jobs and many more required readings, which were not always compatible. On one occasion, when I was sitting in class with my eyes gently closed, taking things in – or so I thought – I may have snored – when I was startled by a loud *WHAP* on the desktop. I'm not sure if it was a book or a hand, but when I opened my eyes, Prof. Sharon Betcher was looking right at me and she said "theology is not just for academics, *Karen*: pastors need to be able to do theology too. Pastoral theology." Pastors need to be able to speak to people's lives, to interpret political and cultural events, and to lift up the deeper patterns that help us make sense of things.

Thus commissioned as a pastoral theologian, I have been trying to make sense of things ever since. Mostly my material is the stuff of daily life, the context in which I live and work, but like many of us, I suspect, I also look at larger events, elections, elections down south—the things we are all trying to figure out together.

As a pastoral theologian, it seems very fitting to take this Confluence lecture invitation as an opportunity to look at what's happened since I said, "this church saves lives."

I am a congregational minister. This is not the only thing that I choose to do with my life, but it is where I put the great majority of my time and energy. So, I'm going to tell you stories of congregational life. Not because the congregations I serve and have served are any better or any worse than yours, but because – in my experience – there are great similarities among us. I tell my stories so that together, we might see the patterns that will help us glean the future.

Mutual Mentorship

When I arrived in Saskatoon, I asked who I should get to know. Kathie Cram introduced me to Integrated Community Ministries, better known as ICM, a core neighbourhoods ministry of the United Church of Canada. At the first ICM lunch I attended, we all sat around a table, lay and ordained ministers, professionals, activists and people living in poverty. We checked in using an art image. A postcard was passed around and everyone took a moment to comment on what they saw in it. This was their regular practice: interpretation of words (written or spoken) requires comfort with the words and the culture they represent – and there were so many cultures represented around the table. We used a painting the way Parker Palmer talks about a third thing: a tool for illuminating ourselves, to reveal something of our culture, context and personality by what we saw and the way we spoke about it.
[Chapter 6, The truth told slant, in Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: They Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (2004; 2008)].

In their commitment to inclusion, ICM reminded me of Faithful Fools, a ministry that my colleague, the Rev. Laura Imayoshi, brought to Vancouver. I'd been involved with Faithful Fools in Vancouver for a couple of years and found it an enriching and growth-producing experience, so I was excited to find what felt like a sister or cousin in Saskatoon.

A year later, I was newly hired by ICM as one of a small, part-time team funded by a grant. Our goal was to help the larger group articulate what they'd been doing for the past two decades, to see if we could somehow extract the learning and share it with others. As I talked to ICM board members and long-time staff, I found they had difficulty putting the experience and the learning into words.

Each time we came up with a formulation, the experts, the people with lived experience of poverty, kept telling us "well, sort of" or "well, kind of" or "that's not quite it." Whatever "it" was, it was bound up in personal stories and relationships. I worked for ICM for seventeen months. By the end of my time with them, I was just starting to understand. Not from my interviews, as interesting as they were, but from the experience of being part of a team.

The four of us initially, then three of us, met once a week. I convened the group, and was responsible to the board, but we were meant to work together. The others were living in poverty — they provided what was called the "essential voice" or "first voice." I learned a lot during the

time we worked together. Small things revealed big things. Some of it was cultural context: how difficult it is to get things together and function in a meeting when your housing is precarious, or worse, non-existent.

One of the women was surprised when I made such a big deal when a family member died. She was grieving, but my response struck her as odd. A year later, there had been many deaths in her family — suicide, violence, accidents. My response was out of proportion because it indicated a novelty or uniqueness, which is not the case in her life.

But the most important learning, I discovered, was not the glimpse into a different culture. The most important learning was internal, inside me. It was the growth in my own awareness of my culture and my ways of being.

An important aspect of the essential voices program is that can be an entry point, a first job for someone who has never held a job. The time is sufficiently limited – 3 hours a week – that we can provide a reasonable honorarium and not affect people's benefits. Initially, I thought my role might be to share something about what it means to be at work, or how to read an agenda or how to behave in a meeting. All useful skills and it's possible I transmitted some of those things.

But the real learning was for me: how can I help raise up another's voice when it isn't being heard? How can I structure meetings so that they are more inclusive of everyone's perspective? How can I remind myself that my reading of cues is likely to be wrong – the presence of cultural differences meaning that I am very likely to misinterpret what is said?

Part of the work was just getting good at coming back to the table. There were days when someone would say "last week's conversation didn't go so well, let's try again." And I'd nod, and others would nod, and we'd try again.

One of my jobs, I discovered, was to be trustworthy. To be willing to let go of my judgements when they were pointed out to me. To show by my actions that this is a table we can always come back to. My other, equally important, job was to be willing to learn. Both of these women knew how to get things done in their own context. They knew how to live with precariousness, and I did not. I needed to respect their knowledge.

When trying to describe the Essential Voices concept, one of the phrases that we leaned on a lot, and one that has been most helpful to me, is mutual mentorship. The promise to be changed by another's presence sits at the heart of our first principle, the inherent worth and dignity of every person. This is why charity can feel cold: it's a one-way relationship. Nothing communicates respect for someone's inherent worth more than the willingness to learn from them, to be changed by them.

The three of us on the team were attempting to put a quality of relationship into words, and the very act of trying to name it fixed it, shut it down, creating boundaries and borders. If we call the person with lived experience of poverty "the essential voice" we define and limit them. Calling the professional the "professional" or "organizational" voice is limiting, but not in the same way, because there isn't the same stigma to professionalism as there is to living in poverty – at least, there isn't in my cultural context.

Other groups in Saskatoon were also working with mutual mentorship, trying to bring people together in a way that would be respectful and make room for all sorts of knowledge, both professional and lived experience. At the Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition and the Saskatoon Poverty Reduction Partnership we begin meetings by acknowledging that some of us in the room come to the table well housed, well fed, and well paid (by which I mean, receiving better than minimum wage). Others do not, and it affects their participation. The first voice representatives who are our teachers are not well housed, not well fed, and not paid. This power imbalance affects the conversation.

Two of my favourite parts of the opening statement are when we say

- We acknowledge that we don't know everything that there is to know about one another … and
- We also need to realize that many of us have more practice being at meetings and speaking publicly, but we all experience uncertainty at times.

Everyone has something to contribute. In order for that to happen, we need to shift the professional culture that leaves some feeling unwelcome or not included. Leveling the playing field requires people like me to open up and be willing to share my vulnerability, so to bring to life the reminder that we are not alone in experiencing uncertainty from time to time.

Many of the congregations that I have served begin services and meetings with a statement affirming diversity of belief. What if we were to acknowledge that we have different lived realities, and we are shaped by them in ways that function to include and exclude?

Making Room for Others

This work is difficult. I come into an understanding of the ways in which I am privileged when someone points something out to me. Some of the moments are painfully obvious and embarrassing. The first time I attended a continental gathering of UU ministers, I remember being asked if I had preached on Black Lives Matter. It's hard to imagine now, but at the time I knew almost nothing about it. No, tell me more would have been a good answer. But what I actually said was no, I don't think it is relevant to the congregation I serve. Later events would prove that to be completely inaccurate. If we were like the Socinians and had quarterly report cards on our spiritual health, I would have had a note home to my parents on that one!

More recently, it was Saskatoon's turn once again to host the Western region fall gathering. It was also my installation as their settled minister. Plans were already underway when we

realized that there was a gap. No significant cultural or political event happens in Saskatoon without a First Nations and/or Métis elder or cultural worker offering a few words to open the gathering in a good way. The adult programming for the fall gathering was organized in partnership with Marjorie Beaucage, a Métis filmmaker and cultural worker, who was facilitating the main workshop. Maybe she would also bring a prayer or offer a blessing?

We were conscious that it's good practice to involve an elder or cultural worker at the beginning of planning an event, not a couple of weeks before it happens. And we were aware that we'd muddled up more than one ask due to misunderstandings caused by cultural differences in talking about money and because we weren't sufficiently sensitive to the etiquette of invitation. In Plains Cree culture, in my imperfect understanding, how one asks for help makes a difference: if I stick out my hand and try to pass you something, it is not possible you to refuse it, so you are forced to take it. The polite way to offer is to put the tobacco on the ground or on the table in front of the person, so they can decide to pick it up or not, and that provides you with your answer.

When we invited Marjorie to participate in the installation service, she wanted to understand what it was about. She asked me how I understood covenant and she listened to what I said about the relationship between a minister and a congregation. She paused for a moment, and then she said "everyone should shake your hand — that is how we seal a covenant." Meaning, right after the installation.

Not a prayer at the beginning or a blessing at the end.

This was a service with a script, with a lot of moving parts. I spoke to the service leader, Liz James. How would we do this? When would we do it? Would we invite everyone forward? Initially, we wondered about doing it at the end of the service. But Saskatoon Unitarians don't like the minister standing at the back of the hall shaking hands, so we didn't want something that looked like that. Plus, it would then be disconnected from the installation, and the concept of sealing the agreement, which is what Marjorie was offering.

We also wondered about the length of time it would take for everyone to come up. What if the service ran over? What if people have flights to catch? Then we remembered the teaching from the circle keeping part of Marjorie's workshop: trust people to look after themselves. If they need to leave, they will.

The whole conversation took place over a walk down two flights of stairs. By the time we reached the bottom we realized that there was only one response. We had invited Marjorie to participate and she told us how she would like to do that, by saying a few words and inviting everyone to shake my hand to seal the deal. We did the only thing possible. We invited Marjorie to say a few words right after the words of installation and to take that moment to invite people up to shake hands with me. Not worrying – or worrying as little as possible -- about uncontrolled

movement in the middle of a complex worship service. This was the only way to respect Marjorie's contribution.

Not only was it not a disaster – there was no chaos – it turned out beautifully. It was a celebration and a sealing, and the most joyful part of the whole ceremony.

Since I have been in Saskatoon, I've noticed how first Nations and Métis people are always careful to go round the circle and shake everyone's hand at the end of a meeting or event — whether it's a social action meeting, a reconciliation circle, a worship or a support group. Everyone shakes hands, acknowledging individual participants for their role, whether or not they were the speaker. This experience in this service, thanks to Marjorie's teaching, expanded my understanding of this cultural practice and expanded my understanding of covenant – an important concept in Unitarian polity.

White Supremacy
Sometimes the learnings are painful. I know from my own experience that it is one thing to decide to host a White supremacy teach in, and quite another to have it pointed out that there many aspects of white supremacy evident in your congregation and you are part of propagating it. Even when it is delivered in a very respectful manner.

As a child at the Unitarian Church of Vancouver, I sang our songs. I participated in Unitarian Sunday School. I watched as Margaret Murdoch wrote the word "Unitarian" on the board and asked us if we knew what it meant. We were a classroom of eight year olds, and we'd just met our substitute teacher. We had no idea who this enthusiastic woman was, so we all did the natural thing and looked at the floor. As I watched out of the corner of my eye, she drew a circle around the letters u-n-I, uni, and some rays of light on the circle, for the sun.

She said that the sun shines on each and every one of us alike, so we should treat each and every person alike, too.

Margaret is gone now, but this is a shout out to everyone who volunteers and staffs our children's programs: sometimes we are listening and learning even if it looks like we aren't!

This phrase was my foundation: the sun shines on each and every one of us alike, so we should treat each and every person alike, too.

As I grew up within our tradition, I found this idea in our songs, readings and sermons. I carried it with me into career and study, into congregational life as a young adult, and then into seminary. It was a remarkably helpful mantra. Until it wasn't.

Several years ago at a minister's retreat, I participated in an intercultural competency workshop. Having served in a variety of social ministry contexts, in inner city contexts in Vancouver and

Saskatoon – I had what I thought was a fair amount of experience working with people of different cultures. When I completed the inventory, I discovered I was right in the middle of the spectrum.

I am not the most radical of my colleagues, nor the most prophetic. I'm neither the first nor the last to take up a cause. I'm not even the most reciprocal of people (let alone ministers). By upbringing and temperament, I'm quite conventional. If the range of Canadian Unitarian Universalism was represented by the spectrum of music on the radio, I'd be the Middle of the Road station.

Once you've realized this about your life, there are two approaches you can take. You can spend a lot of time looking at who you wish you could be, or you accept who you are, and find opportunities to be useful. Because Middle of the Road, trusted or at least accepted by a wide group of people, can actually be useful.

Imagine a series of concentric circles. The most radical people, those leading the change, are right at the centre. This inner circle initiates and inspires the work, but the number of people who listen to them is not really that large. It is the people next out from the centre, the second circle, who listen to those at the centre, who interpret their excitement and share it in a way that may be less radical but more palatable, that have the most reach in a congregation.
[My thanks to the Rev. Keith Kron who shared the concentric circle image of social change with me many years ago – I have used it in many different contexts and it has always been useful!]

Of course we are all a moving target, able to be more or less helpful depending on the moment. After two years of doing essential voices partnership, I still got into an experience at a presentation where I was answering too many of the questions, at too much length, forgetting that my role was to point everyone back toward the person with lived experience of poverty and her understanding of the work. One of my colleagues, Randy Robinson, looked at me from the audience and raised one eyebrow ever so slightly, and I passed the microphone over to my co-worker.

My role at that event was to help bridge the cultural differences between the speaker, living in poverty, and the audience, primarily professionals. I am glad that I picked up on Randy's cue. There is always another layer to explore: maybe next time I'll be able to reflect on my learning in the moment, as it happens!

Precarity

That life is precarious is one of the great truths that we stumble upon, often in times of grief but sometimes also in times of intense joy – when we have that fear that the bubble could so easily burst. I grew up in the 70s, in what used to be called "comfortably middle class." One of the things that came with this experience was a sense of stability – even in the absence of stability. That is to say, most of the time my life felt secure and predictable, but when it wasn't – when we moved, or when things were difficult with my parent's work – the instability was understood to be

temporary, something that we would get through, with a return at the end to a new sense of stability and security. There is a belief, in this way of thinking, that events will likely go the way we want, and the most important thing is to work hard, because hard work will be rewarded. With this as my worldview, the tragedies of life, the illnesses and disasters, would often take me by surprise. It took some work to understand that they could be interpreted as a reminder of the preciousness of life, a reminder of what I might have forgotten to keep front and centre.

One of the roles of religion is to remind us of what is important. In congregations with a culture of privilege (which, by the way, doesn't mean everyone in the congregation has privilege, only that we act like we do, that privilege is our normal), in congregations with a culture of privilege, this means reminding me of what I'm likely to forget -- that life is precious, because it is precarious and fragile.

I learned a new word recently, precarity. Precarity, which comes from the same root as precarious, doesn't just refer to the precariousness of life – life is, after all, is always precarious. Precarity refers to the increasingly large numbers of people who, due to political and economic instability – find themselves without access to jobs or physical safety. Precarity is created by political forces.

Here in North America, many people my generation and older are the inheritors of 20th century prosperity. But a growing number of people my generation and younger are falling out of the social safety nets, not able to participate in the conditions of economic success. Or if they are ok themselves, they see their children falling off the back of the prosperity wagon.

In spite of the many great advances that we have inherited, and the great personal prosperity that many enjoy, there is a growing sense stability is disappearing, and a growing number of people living with precarity.

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, the cultural anthropologist who wrote *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015) claims that the best way to figure out how to live in precarious times is to study the beings—human and non-human—who inhabit precarious landscapes. Her signpost is the mushroom, the matsutake mushroom in particular, which shows up in disturbed areas, and was said to be the first living thing to return to the blast site at Hiroshima.

Tsing studies this mushroom and the human culture that surrounds the picking of it -- the refugees and transient populations that follow such part time work – in the hopes of identifying the strategies that help people thrive in a non-linear, non-causal world.

She identifies strategies such as curiosity, assemblage and entanglement that help people thrive in a non-linear, non-causal world.

When I think of my experience with essential voices, I see that in the beginning, I wanted to make my partner the essential voice. The person who I learned from (at best) or learned about. But the “essential” part of essential voices was the relationship, the process, the coming together of our two ways of being.

It took me time to realize that this process that was meant to help bring another culture to the table, was not just about learning culture, or being inspired by someone else’s life—although that certainly happened—it was an experience of learning how to live with precarity. And that by being in relationship with a person who experienced precarity, I got to experience the adaptability, the humour and the strong sense of community that were a part of our shared experience.

Sometimes it’s hard to get to the place of being able to see these gifts. Because there is the same stubbornness, frustration, and maladaption that is evident in all of our lives, but if you are living precarious these things are more visible, they can’t be hidden inside the walls of your home.

Tsing calls it living life without handrails. It requires a lot more generosity than I am used to, especially generosity in the time I give to people (when they need it, not next week or even tomorrow). To be present in that moment is to belong in that moment. No one knows what will happen next week.

I am so used to living a good part of my life in one or another community that I wasn’t always sensitive to the differences in the Essential Voices community. But if I placed a high priority on showing up, when I could show up, and a high priority on other’s requests of me, this was enough.

There was no membership ceremony for belonging, there was only each moment, each relationship.

Belonging
We human beings are defined by the facts of our birth. We are born in bodies that are totally dependent on others for survival. Unlike deer, we don’t come out, shake ourselves off, and start walking.

The situation we find ourselves in at our birth, the particulars of the emotional and physical systems surrounding and supporting us, this context shapes our nervous system, and our experience of whatever groups we become a part of, for the rest of our lives. Even as adults, no matter how much personal work we’ve done, when we are challenged or threatened, when we are feeling tired or agitated or under threat, we are often drawn back to those early relationship patterns and the strategies we learned about safety and security. In these moments of stress, we tend to focus on the point of attachment that is under threat: we do or don’t belong because

of what someone said or did. We lose sight of the larger network of which we are a part, and the many interconnections that support and maintain us.

The feeling of belonging — or at least, questions about belonging — are at the heart of the anxiety I see around us in our current political climate. Perhaps something happens in my congregation that I don't like. Ministers and congregants alike might ask, "do I belong here?" If so and so is going to behave like that, is this the right place for me?

The challenge of a chosen faith is if I can choose it, if I can question it, then there is a possibility that it is not right for me. And it may not be. I affirm that there are times when the right thing to do is to walk away.

But the anxiety that causes us to focus in on that threatened/dangerous link, that allows me to get trapped in either/or thinking (if this happens, then I don't belong here). This is what we must attend to. Because it is false. We are not dependent on one link, we are part of a network of embedded relationships — we have choices that we did not have when we were younger.

Podcast

As part of my preparation for this lecture I wanted to interview people I knew and people's whose books I'd read, so that I could look more consciously at the voices shaping me.

I proposed a podcast format, thinking that it would be more legitimate to record people if I had some purpose larger than my own interest. Because I spent most of the fall and winter recovering from a concussion, first on medical leave and then on a graduated return to work, I didn't get as far along in the project as I wanted. I don't know if the conversations have been helpful to anyone else, but they have certainly proved helpful to me.

My first podcast was with my colleague Meg Roberts, who had an amazing journey participating in the Headlines Theatre production of Swa'hamet. At one point, the conversation turned to belonging. I'd noticed that a number of people who belonged to visible minorities had passed through the Saskatoon congregation's doors, clearly finding some affinity with us online or in person, enough to come more than once, but not enough to stay. Meg asked a question that stayed with me: how do we help people of other cultures and with other ways of being feel like they belong in our congregations?

It occurred to me that one of the barriers is that those of us who are supposed to be doing the welcoming, we also feel some precariousness in our own sense of belonging. Concerned with my own belonging, my own sense of not-belonging, I am so busy looking for evidence of my own belonging, so busy wanting to establish my belonging that I inadvertently shut others out.

What would happen if we reversed our line that we welcome everyone? What if, instead of saying we hope you feel like you belong here, we recognized the ways in which all of us both

belong and don't belong. At one point, a Saskatoon Unitarians board president and I had an ongoing text thread we called Unitarian confessions: the ways in which we differed from the cultural norm. Because we all have ways in which we don't belong. There is a relief in being out about it. So if you are from Saskatoon, yes, I am the person who brought the non-healthy, non-local bag of cheezies to the local food potluck. It seemed better than bringing nothing. And I like cheezies.

(Let's hope I still have a job when I get home!)

Purpose
When I first started travelling to Saskatoon to preach, in 2011, in what was possibly the longest commute in the Canadian Unitarian Council –1600 kilometers, give or take – they were still talking about Ray Drennan's 2004 confluence lecture, and the way his sense of the empty centre, held by no one, but protected by all, had become part of their self-understanding as a congregation.

Re-reading that lecture I am struck by the sense of purposelessness that Ray was addressing. We were a people adrift, worried about our own distinctiveness.

Our political context has certainly changed. Last spring, longtime Saskatoon environmental activist and congregation member Ann Coxworth spoke of the role of the congregation in her life, describing the congregation as an island of sanity. Not too long before that, at a late winter gathering, I asked about the sparks of excitement – where did people see us doing exciting things, being excited? After a short pause, the answers came quickly: reconciliation activities. Refugee sponsorship. Partnerships with other groups. Explorations in deep diversity. There was both purpose and excitement.

Interdependence, relationships and power
In *Unitarians in Canada* the late Phillip Hewett talked about our tradition as one which holds a series of tensions. Individual and community; freedom and order; tolerance and conviction; rationalism and romanticism; and a past and a future orientation. [See Chapter 1]
Each of these tensions arose at a particular moment in our history and they are still alive in most of the congregations I have served, to one degree or another.

There is, however, another tension that has been growing in our midst for awhile, a tension between dominant and less dominant ways of being, whose language is still being uncovered in conversations about reconciliation, black lives matter, othering and white privilege or white supremacy.

As a person who loves words, it is particularly hard to grapple with this tension because it is embedded in the very language we are trying to use to describe it. But when I think about what is most exciting and alive for me right now in our movement, it is all the ways we are moving into

action, developing partnerships, rubbing up against other ways of being, and learning more about ourselves in the process. We are not the first to grapple with these tensions, as many of our congregations are discovering. Others have walked these paths and created tools that we can use. We are not alone in this work, and that is also exciting.

Our new national vision statement says that it is our interdependence that calls us to love and justice. It is in our relationships – the points of contact – where we have the ability to have an impact, to learn to see justice, not by taking the lead, but by getting curious, taking a learning stance, and becoming an ally.

One of my podcast interviews was with the Rev. Fulgence Ndagiimana, who came to Saskatoon as a refugee to make a new life for himself and his family. Fulgence had a personal, felt experience of the interconnection when the global Unitarian Universalist community put pressure on the Burundian government to release him. He defines interdependence as an interaction between human beings that takes place when they are trying to have their needs met (or between human and non-human beings and resources). For Fulgence, success is in the mutuality of interaction, how we ensure others needs are met while we are meeting our own.

This is not so different from the definition given by Warrick Baijius, a member of the Saskatoon congregation currently pursuing his PhD in water use planning, who answered my question about interdependence by talking about the importance of negotiating relationships.

For over three years now, there has been a post it note beside my computer that reads “What does a mature Unitarian Universalist look like?” It’s there because I think it is part of my job as a minister to have some knowledge of what this looks like. It’s also there because I would like to become that person.

At this point in my life and work, I believe that maturity in our faith lies in acquiring wisdom about relationships – by which I really mean, wisdom about the use and abuse of power.

If we are going to learn to negotiate relationships with integrity, we need to start getting comfortable talking about power, and power differentials. If we are going to grow our ability to be inclusive, we need to have the capacity to name the barriers and differences was well as the experiences and conditions that unite us.

The rays of the sun may fall on everyone alike, but we are not alike in our ability to access and use resources, and this tension, between the things that unite us and the things that differentiate us is one that we desperately need to become familiar with.

Good negotiators, good community organizers understand power, how to analyse it, how to work with it in healthy ways. This is what I would like to learn. This is what I would like us to learn.

One of our roles – to take on if we choose it -- is to take whatever (relative) privilege we have in a given system and use it to build a bridge to our partners with less privilege. Not just to make space for them, but to support them in changing the space in a way that makes sense to them. Their knowledge and wisdom, their language, their culture, their way of speaking is absolutely essential to our ability to thrive.

In the congregations I've served, we've spent a lot of time talking about how to use what we perceive as scarce resources. Considering our resources small helps us stay small. Consider, instead, what an amazing thing it is that we have these resources, and think about the many ways we can use them. It might bring about an entirely different result.

We have the potential to be bridge builders. We can play this role ***because of*** (not in spite of) where we are placed.

If I were to do this lecture all over again, I would do it with a conversation partner, someone with someone with a different experience of access power and culture than me. Before I close I want to say thank you to all of my conversation partners. Any mis-hearings are of course my own.

In conclusion, I point to Faith Eagle, mother and a spoken word poet. I got to know Faith Eagle and Lynn Thompson during the Essential Voices project several years ago now, and I am grateful for their continued presence in my life as conversation partners. Faith and Lynn spoke at a gathering of people wanting to create a new vision for Riversdale, one of Saskatoon's core communities. Watch and hear what Faith said in this *Riversdale Launch* YouTube video: https://youtu.be/CaBDeIEuMjI

To see the live version of this talk – which is not exactly the same as the text – click here: https://youtu.be/_2TD_iHmMYI

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