

Sermon "Attention and the Challenge of Inhabiting Our Lives" 3/15/26

By Worship Associate Virginia Voigt

What does it mean to inhabit our lives and what does it have to do with attention? To truly inhabit our lives requires close attention to ourselves, those moments which make up our lives, and how we choose to pay attention. What we pay attention to and how much, is often a struggle. When there are things going on around you which you find to be highly distressing, or when you are in physical or emotional pain because of personal or relational challenges, it is particularly hard. Who wants to stay in a state of distress or pain for any prolonged period of time? Inhabiting our lives brings understanding of ourselves and the world around us, in the moment. It has the potential for learning, problem solving, and personal growth.

Boundaries in terms of what we pay attention to in the moment are important. In order not to overwhelm ourselves too much of the time, paying attention to what is highly distressing or when we are in pain, requires us to pay enough attention in order to process it, but also requires us to focus on how we can learn, problem solve. and grow. For example, I limit my news consumption depending on my level of distress. This doesn't mean that I don't know what is going on, but that I'm in control of what I consume. I choose a few broadcasts on public radio and tv to watch. I also support other independent media which are reliable sources of information such as MPT, The New York Times, The New Yorker, The Atlantic, and The Banner. I support groups which advocate for the rights of the people such as the ACLU, AARP, and NASW. I have a garden flag in front of my house which says "No King, No Dictators, No Oligarchs". I also go to as many protests as I'm able. I have been at the first 2 No Kings protests and will attend the 3rd one. I'm taking a class for continuing education entitled "Exploring Collective Trauma and Collective Healing". It helps me understand more about trauma on a societal level which leads to

the perpetration of violence and how the perpetration of trauma affects the survivors. It offers solutions to repair both the trauma in the perpetrators and survivors after the fact.

I participate in many activities in which I inhabit my life, which provide ways to pay attention more closely to myself and those around me. Often they are enjoyable and put me in what is known as a “flow state”. I’m paying such close attention to what I’m doing that I am completely involved in what I’m doing, and it does not require any conscious effort. I’m sometimes in a flow state when doing yoga, working as a therapist, viewing art, listening to music, or engaged in sports which require close attention to technique and safety concerns.

Membership at Channing Memorial Church and my work as a worship associate offers me opportunities for spiritual growth, support, and fellowship. My wish for everyone is that you inhabit your lives to the best of your ability and continue to grow.

May it be so, Amen