

## Men's Lives, Men's Spirits

Sermon By Rev. Dr. Emily Brault on April 18, 2010

Disclaimer – I am not a man. Two-spirited maybe, but really this sermon is an experiment, a testing-of-the-waters, some ideas that I think are important to our spiritual journeys – as men and women, as individuals, as a community. But I want to say that the true work of authentic men's spirituality may in fact need to be done by men, for men. In men's groups, in men's friendships, where they talk about what it means to be men, and what influences that understanding.

I also want to say that one of the reasons I am a UU is because I am impressed by the men in our congregations. UU men tend to be a reflective sort, self-aware AND other-aware in a way that... contributes to our Uncommon Denomination. Most of the lit. you read about men's spirituality – focuses on the importance of self-reflection, cultivating inner qualities such as compassion, intimate connection, and mutual respect rather than power and stoicism. Men who use their power for the common good. Even the Robert Bly Iron Man movement – beating drums and warrior workshops, where men express their spirituality in more primal, aggressive modes – the emerging experience is one of reflection, of liberating themselves from their “inner prisons” of expectation, of tradition, of soul wounds that have kept them bound to certain ways of being in the world. Spirituality is always a process of becoming more aware – of ourselves, of others, of creation... so men's spirituality is, inevitably the same. It's about self-awareness and integration, reclaiming power, passion, and energy that flows from their values.

Maybe our movement tends to attract men who are already inclined towards their interior lives, towards reflection and balance in relationship, towards comfort with feelings and emotion. And you know what the paradox of this self-reflective experience is? In most circles, it is considered a “feminine spirituality” – the feminine is more comfortable with the interior, the soul! And most “get in touch with your male spirit” work is about reclaiming the feminine in men's lives! Isn't that interesting? So I guess I'm still wondering – was IS masculine spirituality? I mean, we know that masculine spirituality needs to be in balance with the feminine – but what is the feminine in balance with?

What does it mean to be men? Or Masculine?

{{ Feminism – dismantles patriarchy, displacing the male as NORM – which, it turns out, does a dis-service not only to women, but to men who don't fit the

norm (black men, gay men, handicapped men, poor men), AND does a dis-service to our understanding of what is truly generic (assuming that male experiences are universal and they can therefore speak for others). And does a dis-service to our understanding of what is unique to men as men.

And I think we are going through another shake-up of male identity today – during the recession, men have lost their jobs at a higher rate than women, and many men now find themselves being supported by their wives. – identity as breadwinner, as provider, as protector is shaken. PLUS – we as UU’s especially live with in a post-modern understandings where simple definitions of “this is man, this is woman” are not so easily accepted. On the one hand, this helps us be more eqaltarian in our dealings with people, but on another hand I wonder if we lose sight of some of the ways that gender really DOES influence our experiences of the world.}}

Being a man means that you inhabit a specific social location in our society that you mostly did not choose. Being a white man means you are a part of the human race that has been responsible for much of what’s gone in this world in the last 2000 years. It means that you have a certain power, a certain energy, that maybe comes from within you and definitely is projected onto you, that impacts the type of impact that you have on the world, on people, on your community, on your kids. I don’t know if there is some “essential manhood” that I can distill, or if it’s socially constructed, or if it’s psychologically or genetically predisposed or if men are really from Mars... The reality is that there is some mixture of Being a Man (social, biological, psychological) that men themselves have to figure out. Whether you are a black man, a gay man, a handicapped man, a poor man, a religious man... how do you access the Divine Masculine in your life? And I ask this of women, too – for the sake of our balance, What is the Sacred Masculine in our lives? What is this energy?

I think, from what I can gather, masculine spirituality is a spirituality of action, of engagement, of interacting with the outside world. {{ Richard Rohr (Catholic big name in masculine spirituality conversations): “Masculine spirituality would emphasize action over theory, service to the human community over religious discussions, speaking the truth over social graces, and doing justice over looking nice. Without a complementary masculine, spirituality becomes overly feminine (which is really a false feminine) and characterized by too much inwardness, preoccupation with relationships, a morass of unclarified feeling, and endless self-protectiveness.” }} UU – embodied by our commitment to service for others, to social justice, to LIVING our faith, not just sitting around and talking about it.

On a more personal level, I ask “Where are our images of the Divine Masculine, or the Sacred Masculine?” Maybe the Divine Masculine is in the image of John the Baptist – a man of great vitality, sensual and earthy, prophetic and full of convictions. Image of the “wild man.” Tom McGrath: “The wild man is not a savage, a brute, nor a dominator of others. He’s the bearer of strong passion that can be used for mission. He’s almost too pagan to feel comfortable within the temple. He is John the Baptist, calling out in the wilderness. Somehow the church needs to tap into the wild man that is dormant in the “nice beige men” sitting out in the pews – for their own good and for the good of the whole church.”

Maybe there is Sacred Masculine in the image of the warrior – not as imperialist brute but as one who gives himself for the good of another. One who embodies the paradox of self-love and self-sacrificing love.

Divine Masculine in the image of lover – one who is intimate, vulnerable, mutually giving and receiving.

Sacred Masculine – image of the Male God. LOADED. Power dynamics: at expense of female, justifies male authority and often produces hyper-masculine male ideal (fear of body, extreme competitive, aggressive, strong individualistic ideology). {{Paradox of homo-erotic anxiety provoked in the maleness of God.}} Furthermore, since religious devotion and constrained sexuality are seen in the wider culture as unmanly, this exaggerated definition of masculinity compensates fundamentalist men for their own perceived sense of masculine deficiency, and perpetuates rigid definitions of family, etc. Power over instead of power with.

“father wound” – sense of emptiness and deep loss they have about our fathers, our male role models. Didn’t experience men who were demonstrative, communicative, who knew how to touch, who knew how to look into their children’s eyes, to talk to them. Plus political/social implication: On the one hand, I reject God the Father imagery because it’s been used to legitimate authority of men at the expense of women. But on the other hand, I EMBRACE it, because I could really use a Divine Father. Image of God as Father – maybe a good thing, cuz we lack decent father images? It’s just we have to work through our own Father Wounds to get to the good stuff. Spiritual transformation is often birthed out of a place of pain...

So how do we foster healthy, male humanness in our church?

- Need respect for and welcoming masculine energy, (which has waned?) where men can talk about their anger, their wounds, their energy, their sexuality in safe places.
- what positive masculinity can offer: commit power to the common good, self-awareness and integration, action and activity.

We need both masculine and feminine energy to be whole.