

It Takes Three Hugs to Thrive

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It takes three hugs to thrive: One hug to survive; Two to live; Three hugs to thrive. George taught me that truth 15 years ago. I'm now 70. He was older than 70 back then. As the minister, I'd stand outside the chapel doors after worship and everyone had to get by me or around me.

The next person in line was George. We hugged. One hug.

He stands there. Congregants wait in line behind him. He is trying to tell me something. I don't think I appreciated George. "One hug," he says. I nod, "To survive".

He inhales, hugs me again. "Two hugs to live."

Please be done, I think to myself.

"Three," he begins.

George! Look at the line! He is undeterred. He's been a Unitarian Universalist for over fifty years.

"Three hugs," he repeats. For a moment it feels as if he sees into my soul.

"Three hugs to thrive!" He smiles. Lets me go. I realize I've been blessed.

I was not born a Unitarian Universalist. I found it in my 30's when I walked into a UU Congregation after being "un-churched" for years. I was looking for a religious grounding for my children that was not fear-based. What I found was an unconditional welcome of grace for myself. For UU's it is our First Principle: "The inherent worth and dignity of all people." I was home.

That Universalist imperative called to me. Thing is, I fail at that more than I like to admit. I get tired or angry or resentful. When it happens I feel my spirit sour and get smaller, especially, if I am afraid. But I have people in my life who remind me that I am loved and blessed. People like George. Who remind me that God's Universal love and Grace invite me to thrive, not just survive, in this life.

Too many people are not even seen much less appreciated or welcomed, in our world. They are denied the spiritual hugs and the grace of having their inherent worth and dignity affirmed. As a result, too many folks are barely surviving, much less thriving in our world.

November 20th is Transgender Day of Remembrance (tdor). Its purpose is to raise awareness of hate crimes against transgender people, and to publicly mourn and honor the lives of those lost to violence, and this year, to Covid-19. By remembering, we can pledge ourselves anew to not only do less harm but to grow our affirmation and bless and celebrate the whole beautiful diversity of our human family.

We cannot literally hug each other these days with Covid-19 restrictions. We can commit to follow public health guidelines, and do what we can so that more of us will survive, our health care systems won't be overwhelmed, and fewer families will grieve. We can also offer a kind welcome to those we encounter every day, in big and small ways, where ever we are. It might even be at a church doorway.