

Sacred Space©
Sermon by Rev. Duffy Peet
Shared with the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Bozeman on August 27, 2017

The last time I delivered a sermon in this building was over 15 months ago. At that time I wasn't yet your minister. My sermon that day in mid-May of 2016 was titled "From Change to Transition." After sharing my thoughts with you that day I had to leave this building and return sometime later to learn that Bozeman would be my new home. Just a few short weeks after that, the members and friends of this Fellowship had to leave this space as well, not just for a short while though, but for more than a year. The departure was necessitated by the renovation project which would expand this building to better meet our needs. Since moving out, this Fellowship has gone through significant change. We held worship services in two temporary locations. We had to move our office into a temporary space for several weeks. And we had to wait for what seemed like an eternity to get approval from the City to move back into our building. We weathered all that and today we begin holding weekly worship services in this, our newly remodeled building. How sweet it is to be back here again.

So as Cathy did earlier, I want to welcome you all to this service. I want to go further though and specifically welcome the members and friends of this Fellowship who have been active participants on this journey. Over the course of the past year and some months we have sailed together over uncharted waters and through sometimes turbulent seas. Today, we have returned the ship which we know as our **Fellowship** to the port that will be our familiar harbor for years to come. With that in mind I say to you, welcome home. It seems to me that this would be an appropriate time to offer a rousing and heartfelt round of applause to our shipmates as a way of acknowledging our appreciation for the journey now completed.

With the journey I just alluded to now complete, I want to turn my attention to what the title of this sermon refers to. The title, as you have noticed, is "Sacred Space." When I thought about sharing with you today, my thoughts were on the significance this building has had and will continue to have in the life of this Fellowship. I thought about the many hopes, expectations and dreams this building, this space, has fulfilled. And I also considered the many more hopes, expectations and dreams this building has yet to fulfill. As I sat with these thoughts it became clear to me that this isn't just another place where we hold our worship services. Many people have put a great deal into making this building what it is today, our new home. People have poured their time, their talents, their hearts and a significant amount of what was in their wallets and back accounts into this building. Clearly, this building holds an important place in the lives of the members and friends of this Fellowship. So I would ask you now to look around at this space. You may notice that your eyes are drawn to certain things that appeal to you. Or you might find yourself noticing something that you missed previously. It is quite possible that you may find something you wish was different than it currently is. As you look around, take time to attend to how it feels to see this space filled with people who, like you, have given so much to make this all possible. Each person in this room has a different perception of and feeling about the various elements of this space. And yet each one of you, in your own way, find meaning and significance in this space.

This space is special to each of us. It isn't simply another meeting room where we can gather. It was with this understanding that I decided on "Sacred Space" as the title for this sermon. Now I recognize that some of you might feel uneasy with the word sacred. If so, I would invite you to consider putting special or significant in its place. What is important here isn't the particular word but the sense that this space is quite different than other spaces we frequent. For me this space feels very different than other places I visit even though similar activities occur in those other places. So while I know I will enjoy many great meals with friends here, this doesn't feel like any restaurant I have ever been in. There will be a good number of ideas presented here, yet this doesn't feel like a conference center or a college classroom. And there will certainly be music in this space, but it doesn't feel like a performing arts center, an auditorium or a dance hall. I could go on and on with examples but I hope by now you get my point. This space is different than other spaces. I would propose that this space, our Fellowship home, isn't just different, it truly is special. And I believe at least for some of us, that level of specialness is best identified with the word sacred.

I want to return now to what I mentioned just a moment ago, the fact that each person's perception and feeling about this space is different. It is also true that each person's perspective regarding what does or could make this space special or sacred is different. Both the process of accepting the gift of the building as well as the renovation project offer examples of what I am asserting here. We all recognize that there were some differences of opinion within the congregation in regards to both of these. Differences of opinion in a community this size is both normal and appropriate. And even though such differences of opinion can at times be uncomfortable or challenging, they are frequently very important and beneficial to the community in the long run. Today, this community has navigated the waters of obtaining a building of our own and of renovating the building to meet our needs. And while there are still areas that need to be finished, we have done much of the work related to the physical structure of this building. But there remains some very important work to be done. I would suggest that the important work that lies before us now is making this, our new Fellowship home, sacred space. And I would say that the process of making this building sacred space for **all** of us could be just as challenging and exciting as the work we have already undertaken and accomplished. So today, I invite you to become an active participant in the process of making our new home sacred space.

You may have noticed the brightly colored sticky note in your Order of Service. This is one of the tools each of us will use today as we begin the discussion and work around making this space sacred space. As I mentioned earlier, if you feel uneasy with the word sacred replace it with very special or significant. You will find a second tool in the small pocket of the chair in front of you or, for those of you in the front row, the tool was on your seat. That second tool is a small pencil. If you have access to a writing tool you would be more comfortable with, feel free to use it. Here is what I would ask you to do with your two tools. First, take a moment to think about the things that you feel are important or necessary for a space to feel sacred for you. This might include things that are tangible, things that anyone can see, hear or touch. Allow yourself to also consider things that are intangible. For example the openness or the sense of being welcome when people gather here. And I would ask you not to forget to think about those things

you might take for granted, such as that this space is a safe place for everyone who enters.

Now for the second step in our work today. Take time, either now or during the remainder of the service, to write down on your sticky note the things you feel are most important in making a space feel sacred. Please write so others will be able to easily read and understand what you have written. Writing clearly is very important since after the service I want you to post your note on one of the walls in the community room where coffee will be available. My hope is that the walls will be filled with an array of various colored notes, each one containing important ideas regarding sacred space for us to contemplate. Then, once you've posted your note and gotten your beverage of choice, take the time to go around the room and read what others have written. As you do so, you might find yourself entering into conversations with others who are reading the notes—conversations regarding the ideas that are posted. It is my hope that what we are doing here this morning will be the beginning of many future conversations—conversations regarding what makes this space we now call home feel special or sacred for each of us. Later, I will collect the notes and create a document that includes all of the ideas people have written down. The document will be something we can refer to in the future as discussions about our building occur.

The work on the physical aspects of this building is nearly complete. And just as the work that was done on this building transformed it, I believe the work we are beginning today—the work of creating sacred space—will change us. I am confident that we are up to the task that lies ahead. I look forward to our continuing journey and work together. In the days ahead, may we find in this space new understandings, new levels of compassion, trust and commitment, and a new sense of what is possible when people join together in creating space that deserves to be called sacred.

May it be so.