

As the calendar changes from one year to the next, it's common for people to make New Year's resolutions. With that in mind, in December, when I made the decision about what to preach on this month, I thought my first sermon of the new year should be about this time in our lives when we tend to make commitments to change in some way.

But today, almost two weeks into 2013, the first of the year and New Year Resolutions feels like a long time ago. That's one of the reasons I stopped making New Year Resolutions. Generally, I found the initiative I felt, before the calendar turned, was hard to maintain into the new year. And I would feel disappointed in myself for not living up to the resolutions I had made. I suspect, mine is not an uncommon occurrence.

Yet, we do change as we live our lives. Sometimes the changes are small and hardly noticeable. At other times, like a 14 year old boy, we change by many inches within months...sometimes literally and horizontally, sometimes it's just figuratively. And like that 14 year old boy, many of our changes seem to "just happen".

It's true, that with diligence, commitment, planning and forethought, we are able to make changes in our lives. But I suspect that's just not the way most of our changes happen. I would wager, the vast majority of the changes we make during our life time are not the result of determined effort. I suspect determined effort most often tends to keep us on the path we're already travelling---either by conscious intent or as a result of the power of habit and inertia. When we fight change, hold it at arms length.

But whether we come by our changes by determined effort or they "just happen", I find myself wondering about this thing called change. More to the point, I'm particularly interested in looking at a certain type of change. The type of change we can legitimately call a turning point. There is a saying that goes something like: "There is a time in every man's life..."

Now *that* sounds like the moment of a turning point. Either one takes a stand and proves oneself worthy or you miss it and heaven knows what will befall you. I suspect this is the way we tend to think about turning points in our lives. We imagine them to be clear and unequivocal. And we imagine ourselves making a choice, a firm decision.

These kinds of choice points or big decisions do happen for some of us. We come to understand: "If I keep drinking like this, it can only lead in one direction". Or "I just had to stand up for myself". Or, it finally becomes clear "I just can't trust him, or her or it". These are momentous times, momentous occurrences. And if we're lucky, they are rare and far between.

These types of turning points are clear and maybe even unavoidable. They sit before us like a wall. We have to come to grips with them, they can't be ignored. We see them and make a conscious choice as to how to address the issue. We can feel in charge, empowered. We, are in control.

Other turning points, and I suspect most commonly, can only be seen in retrospect. We get far down the road, stop and look back and recognize there was a particular event, or person or decision, that started us down a different path that led to where we are today. We didn't know it at the time, but our lives were being reprogrammed, perhaps by fate, or the universe, acting on our behalf.

I had no idea when I first met Maggie that my life would be changed. I liked her well enough, and she says she like me, but I had no idea what being in relationship with her would lead to. You may have heard me say before, I blame Maggie, for me being in the ministry. Maggie introduced me to Unitarian Universalism. And Maggie, encouraged me to go into the ministry.

These things unfolded over time. I'm sure she didn't plan it. I know I certainly didn't. But I do know, the probability of me being where I am today would be very small had I not met Maggie.

Turning points in our lives, can be small or large. And most often, they become recognizable as turning points after the fact. Even though, we have to play a role in the creation of a turning point. We either accept the possibility or hold it off, refuse to engage or to be a party to this endeavor. We have to allow ourselves to be pulled into possibility, be open to change. We have to take the risk associated with a new relationship or accepting a new idea or trying something new and different.

I want you to take a moment and reflect on a turning point in your life. Was it a boulder that rolled into your living room, not to be ignored or was it small change, like a new awareness? Did it fundamentally change your life or merely cause you to make a minor shift in you process. Was this turning point of your own making? Or did it come to you, invited or otherwise? What role did you play and what role did others play? Did they encourage you, or stand in your way?

I don't think we ask ourselves these questions often enough. Just how was it, that I came to be *who* and *what* I am? How did I get to *where* I am? Where there particular moments that made a difference? Perhaps the answers to these and similar questions can inform us, help us to get to where we might want to go. In other words, can we use our prior experience with turning points, to help us navigate our present and future existence?

What did you do to create the change or to allow the change to manifest? What if anything did others do? Were other people key players in the change?

So let us stop and reflect on significant turning points in our lives.

Now I'd like to do something I've never done before. It may be a significant turning point in my life, or at least my career. I'm going to ask for a few volunteers to share a short reflection on a turning point in your life, or a New Year's resolution. Let's be in the moment with each other.

Before I close, I want to take note of the fact that turning points occur within families, organizations and institutions. A child may become severely ill and the family dynamic needs to change to accommodate the new reality. The company you work for goes bankrupt, or closes its doors and you are 55, not old enough for retirement and not young enough to be competitive in the job market.

I am hoping that at a national level, we are now at a turning point. I hope that the dire weather patterns of late have caused us to turn away from debating whether there is climate change to what are we willing or being forced to do about it?

I'm curious about what history will say was the turning point that shifted the country toward acceptance of gay marriage. I'm curious as to whether or not we're at a turning point, now that a couple states have legalized the use of marijuana. And whether this will lead to us adopting a more sane policy on drug use in general?

I'm hoping, against all hope, that our nation is finally able and willing to do something about gun violence in our midst. I sincerely hope, we have reached a turning point and are willing to make it harder for people to obtain and keep military weapons in our communities. I pray we are at a turning point and are willing to do more to protect us all from mass murder in our cities, post offices, shopping malls and our schools.