

Order of Worship, October 14, 2018

Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church, Portland, ME

Thought for Contemplation: "There is no remedy for love but to love more."

Henry David Thoreau

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHALICE LIGHTING. Helen Kalinich

I light this chalice to call us to joy

I light this chalice to call us to peace

I light this chalice to call us to love,

This day and all our days that come after.

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

CALL TO WORSHIP *Welcome Morning* by Anne Sexton

There is joy in all:

In the hair I brush each morning,

In the Cannon towel, newly washed,

That I rub my body with each morning,

In the chapel of eggs I cook

Each morning,

In the outcry from the kettle

That heats my coffee

Each morning,

In the spoon and the chair

That cry "hello there Anne"

Each morning,

In the godhead of the table

That I set my silver, plate, cup upon

Each morning.

All this is God,

Right here in my pea-green house
Each morning
And I mean,
Though often forget,
To give thanks,
To faint down by the kitchen table
In a prayer of rejoicing
As the holy birds at the kitchen window
Peck into their marriage of seeds.

So while I think of it,
Let me paint a thank-you on my palm
For this God, this laughter of the morning,
Lest it goes unspoken.

The joy that isn't shared, I've learned,
Dies young.

from *The Awful Rowing Toward God*

HYMN *Morning Has Broken*

#38

CHILDREN'S TIME

Rev. Anita

Autumn leaves are beautiful. Spread out a small carpet of leaves I have collected from Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts over the past two weeks. Look at them all. Really pretty and interesting. Please, each one of you select a leaf to which you feel drawn. Maybe you like its shape or its colors. Take it and hold it in your hand. Look it over carefully. Notice its veins, the shades of color, if it has a stem. They are all quite beautiful, aren't they?

Now, I would like for you to tell me, now that you have looked at the leaf in your hand carefully, who has a leaf that is perfect? Really perfect. No dried-out spots. Not cracks. No parts broken off. No holes eaten out by a caterpillar, or bites taken out by another creature. A perfect leaf. Anybody? Probably not.

Hmmm. Isn't that interesting. All these leaves are so beautiful, and yet not a one of them is perfect. That's important to remember. Important to remember about the world, about life, and about you. You don't need to be perfect to be

beautiful. In fact, you can't be perfect, so let us not even pretend that. Not you, nor me. No one is perfect. And yet, even though you are not perfect, you are beautiful. That is so important to remember. You are special and beautiful and beloved, and it has nothing to do with being perfect. You can keep your leaf if you want to- keep it because it is beautiful, and not perfect, reminding you that you are beautiful too.

9amSong (seated) Go Now in Peace #413

(Children are invited to go to their program.)

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION

JOYS AND SORROWS

MEDIATION AND PRAYER

READING: *Ecclesiastes 1:4-7*

A generation goes, and a generation comes.

But the earth remains forever.

The sun rises and the sun goes down,

And hurries to the place where it rises.

The wind blows to the south,

And goes around to the north;

Round and round goes the wind,

And on its circuits the wind returns.

All streams run to the sea,

But the sea is not full;

To the place where the streams flow,

There they continue to flow.

HYMN *the Lone Wild Bird* #15

OFFERING

READING: *Blessing for the Brokenhearted* by Jan Richardson from *The Cure for Sorrow*, 2017

Let us agree
for now
that we will not say
the breaking
makes us stronger
or that it is better
to have this pain
than to have done
without this love.
Let us promise
we will not
tell ourselves
time will heal
the wound,
when everyday
our waking
opens it anew.

Perhaps for now
it can be enough
to simply marvel
at the mystery
of how a heart
so broken
can go on beating,

as if it were made
for precisely this-
as if it knows
the only cure for love
is more of it.

as if it sees
the heart's sole remedy
for breaking
is to love still,

as if it trusts
that its own
persistent pulse
is the rhythm
of a blessing
we cannot
begin to fathom
but will save us
nonetheless.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE (9am)

ANTHEM *Things That Never Die*(11am)

SERMON

the Only Cure for Love

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

We have known a lot of sorrow here in the past weeks. Losses to our congregation of Judy Field and Ann Bainbridge in particular, and losses of other kinds which affect us personally; for some it might be loss of health, or of a relationship, loss of job security, or the losing of capacities upon which we have always depended. Adlai Stevenson once observed: "We are always saying farewell in this world, always standing at the edge of a loss..." These losses touch us or those we care about, in especially vulnerable and personal places.

There are other kinds of losses we have sustained, of things that we have thought foundational, giving us stability, keeping us grounded. Many of us feel we are losing the confidence we once had in our government to protect us, or to oversee the common good. These losses of security can feel intensely personal,

leaving us feeling exposed, longing for an experience of safety. There has been a lot of sorrow here in the past weeks.

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Let us promise
we will not
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time will heal
the wound,
when everyday
our waking
opens it anew.¹

Can we do that? Allow ourselves the time to feel bad? To feel grief? The pain of loss? The sorrow of lived sadness? I couldn't always do that.

When I was young, an adolescent and then a young adult, I thought I was an angry person. They were angry times. The violence evoked by the Civil Rights Movement was unnerving, and anger flared on every side. The Vietnam War was seeming increasingly pointless, and the young people, we, were raging in response. I was raging. Anger at our government and our experience of impotence pulsed through my veins even as it coursed through the lifeblood of our nation. I was angry. Angry about the lot of it.

But something happened over time. I stepped back, stepped back from my own internal roiling. Got a little distance, and through that, an important insight.

¹ Jan Richardson, *Blessing for the Brokenhearted*

I recognized that in those days, I had developed an all-purpose negative feeling- anger. And I funneled everything that happened to me that was troubling into that catch-all expressive feeling. Anger, which could be vented. Anger, which felt strong.

But that left me with a tiny palette of emotions. Inadequate really. I do not know how or when it was that I let myself put down my guard. I only remember the experience one day of realizing that what I was feeling in a particular situation was not anger, but actually, was sorrow. I was feeling sad. Very sad. And instead of rapidly converting that sadness into anger, anger at whomever or whatever was the reason for my sorrow, I let it in. And I wept. And wept.

Slowly I built a repertoire of negative feelings. Hurt. Embarrassment. Humiliation. Exposure. Dismissal. Disrespect. Loss. Disappointment. Betrayal.

I still had the capacity for anger, and I could become angry as a result of any of those negative experiences. But now, if I wanted, I could know about what exactly, I was angry. And of course, after recognizing the hurt or loss or disappointment I could choose to move to anger, but I also could choose instead, to stay with the pain, with the loss, with the sorrow. I could know myself. I could know my broken heart. Maybe you have made that journey of discovery too.

You might be afraid some time, to stay and sit with the sorrow, with the loss so large and profound it might feel like it could consume you. You might be afraid to let yourself down into its cushion of darkness, afraid of despair, afraid you might not find the leverage you need to lift yourself out of the dark and deep place within you. I've known that fear.

Perhaps for now
it can be enough
to simply marvel
at the mystery
of how a heart
so broken
can go on beating,²

² Ibid

It is a marvel, isn't it? That even when we are despairing, life goes on, the sun comes up, the leaves turn red and orange, the owl calls, the squirrel gathers acorns, and our own wounded heart keeps beating. Without any effort on our part. We can rest, and the glory of life, in the world, and in our very selves, goes on, in all its magic, waiting, waiting patiently for us to be ready to return.

Perhaps for now
it can be enough
to simply marvel
at the mystery
of how a heart
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The poet Anne Sexton understood the deeper call to marvel that resides in all:

There is joy in all:
In the hair I brush each morning,
In the Cannon towel, newly washed,
That I rub my body with each morning,
In the chapel of eggs I cook
Each morning,
In the outcry from the kettle
That heats my coffee
Each morning,
In the spoon and the chair
That cry "hello there Anne"
Each morning,
In the godhead of the table
That I set my silver, plate, cup upon
Each morning.³

³ Anne Sexton, *Welcome Morning*

It is a marvel, isn't it?

The children this morning had the opportunity to notice that our world does not need to be perfect to be beautiful. The leaf whose brilliant colors takes our breath away, has a tear, or a crack, a piece broken off, or a place once nibbled by a hungry creature. It is still a marvel, despite its imperfection. Stunning. Inspiring. As Anne Sexton would say, "All this is God."⁴

Ecclesiastes reminds us of the long view, that can take our personal ups and downs and place them in the wider context that holds us surely, and holds so much more:

A generation goes, and a generation comes.
But the earth remains forever.
The sun rises and the sun goes down,
And hurries to the place where it rises.
The wind blows to the south,
And goes around to the north;
Round and round goes the wind,
And on its circuits the wind returns.⁵

Sometimes it is helpful to remember that in the grand scheme of things, this is just a blip of time. An important blip no doubt, because it is our blip, our time, our joy or sorrow, our triumph or defeat. I am not dismissing that. And it can help us to take a few breaths, and recalibrate, so that events can find their right and manageable place and size in our story which is held and nested in the story of our world.

The serenity prayer asks us to accept the things we cannot change, and change the things we can. It is calling us to put our lives in the greater context – becoming aware of what is permanent and what is transient. What is malleable and what is a given. What is ours to change, and what belongs to others. I cannot change you, but I can change the way I respond to you. I cannot change the cycle of the seasons, but I can prepare with warm clothing for the winter, and if I know

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ecclesiastes 1:4-6

that the reduction of daylight hours may bring depression, I can plan to take excursions outside that expose me to the light that is so scarce. If I do not like the candidates who run for office, I can recruit new ones, or even run myself.

In these days of our country's serious testing of its values, and the institutions put in place to promote and protect them, and the threats so many of us perceive, it is reasonable to ask ourselves, what of this is ours to change, in this our small moment in time and place and history. I find the call contained in the Jewish tradition of Tikkun Olam compelling. Tikkun Olam is the repair of the world. Acknowledging that this world, the one that we were given is beautiful, we also acknowledge that it is not perfect, that it is in some ways broken, in need of repair. We, as the co-creators with the divine, are each called to make our small contribution to the repair of the world. It does not rest on any single one of us, and yet, it rests on all of us.

We can do this, this repair of the heartbreak of world, by loving it, loving it back into health and wholeness, even as we love ourselves and our nation back into health and wholeness.

the only cure for love
is more of it.

as if it sees
the heart's sole remedy
for breaking
is to love still,

as if it trusts
that its own
persistent pulse
is the rhythm
of a blessing
we cannot
begin to fathom
but will save us
nonetheless.

It is the love that saves us. It is the only thing that ever has.

May we learn to love more. Amen. And Blessed Be.

CLOSING HYMN *What Wondrous Love*#18

BENEDICTION

EXTINGUISH THE CHALICE

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)