

Thought for Contemplation: “The future will ask us not how many we are, but what values we represent.” 16th century Transylvanian minister

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHALICE LIGHTING

May flame and this chalice remind us
That there is enough love in this world
To hold everyone,
And that we are here to share it.

Anita Farber-Robertson

CALL TO WORSHIP All We Are One - Yvonne Seon

From: *Voices from the Margins, An Anthology of Meditation* edited by Jacqui James and Mark D. Morrison Reed, Skinner House Books, 2012

Each of us come from a different place, yet all we are one.
We crave for ourselves our own unique space, yet all we are one.
We learn how to speak, eat, dress, cook, and play in different ways.
Of common homeland, we have not a trace, yet all we are one.
We kill, maim, and harm one another with no thought for God’s will.
We forget the One God and one grace, yet all we are one.
On a mountain in East Africa near Olduvai Gorge, our common mother, “Eve.”
Says that we come from one human race, and all we are one.

HYMN *Gather the Spirit* #347

CHILDREN’S TIME Rev. Anita

I am going to invite you to think with me for a moment about the way some things are and how we manage them.

For instance, I have here pens and pencils. How many of you want pens? How many of you want pencils? I have both, so I can just give them out according to what you prefer.

But what if we were going to do an activity all together and I asked if you wanted to go outside to do it, or if you wanted to stay and do it inside.

How would we figure that out?

We could take a vote and then do whatever it was that most people wanted.

That would work, but the people who didn't get to do what they wanted might feel badly. But they understand that the group does what the majority wants, so they go along and hope that next time they will be in the majority and it will go their way.

But, instead of just voting, we could have a conversation first and people could share why they'd prefer to be outside or inside. Hearing what each other had to say might change your mind.

For instance, if it is cold outside and you learn that some kids don't have jackets, even though you would have liked to be outside, you might still choose to stay inside, because it would be better for everyone if a few kids weren't out there freezing cold. But if you keep talking about it, you might find out that someone has an extra jacket they could lend to the kid without a jacket. And you might remember that you had stuffed an extra sweater in your cubby or locker awhile ago, that you could get to share. And then the group could decide if they would rather go get those extra things and go outside, or just forget the bother and be inside. Everyone would realize that they really have a choice, and that they can choose together.

That's why it is so important to have conversations before voting. Unless we understand what the decision might mean to others, we don't really have all the information we need to decide.

Sometimes people think it would be quicker if we just rushed through and voted stuff without spending all of that time on conversation. But when we do that, we usually don't understand how the vote will affect all the people, and often we make bad choices, or find that we have to come back and decide all over again.

That's why we have so many meetings at church. Because when we talk together, we make better decisions. And when we understand that, we can even teach it to people outside of the church- teach them how important it is to have conversation before making decisions.

9amSong (seated) Go Now in Peace #413

(Children are invited to go now for a brief introduction to their program.)

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION

JOYS AND SORROWS

MEDIATION AND PRAYER

ANTIPHONAL READING: *We Need One Another* #468

OFFERING

READING: *Roundtabling*. By Mary Benet McKinney, in *Shared Wisdom*

Concerning the why and how and what and who of ministry,
One image keeps surfacing:
A table that is round.

It will take some sawing
To be roundtabled.
Some redefining
And redesigning

Such redoing and rebirthing
Of arrow Churching
Can painful be
For people and tables

But so was the cross,
A painful too table
Of giving and yes

And from such death comes life,
From such dying comes rising,
In search of roundtabling

And what would roundtable Churching mean?

It would mean no daising and throning,
For but one King is there.

And He was a footwisher,
At table no less...

For at the narrowing tables,
Servant and mirror
Become picture framed
And centers of attention

And crosses become but gilded ornaments
On bare stone walls
In buildings used but once a week only

But the time and the tables
are changing and rearranging
and what of narrowlong tableministers,
when they confront
a roundtable people
after years of working up the table
(as in "up the ladder")
To finally sit at its head,
Only to discover

That the table has turned around???

Continued rarified air

Will only isolate

For there are no people there,

Only roles

They must be loved into roundness,

Where apart is spelled *a part*

And the call is to the gathering

For God has called a People,

Not “them and us”

“Them and us”

Are unable

To gather round, for at a roundtable,

There are no sides

And ALL are invited

To wholeness and to food...

Roundtabling means

No preferred seating,

No first and last,

No better, and no corners

For “the least of these”

Roundtabling means

Being with,

A part of

Together, and one

It means room for the Spirit
And gifts
And disturbing profound peace for all...
And it is we in the present
Who are mixing and kneading
The dough for the future.

We can no longer prepare for the past...

MUSICAL SOLO *I can See Clearly Now* (9am)

ANTHEM (11am)

SERMON *New Living into Old Values*
The Rev Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

New Living into Old Values

When I was in the fourth grade I went with a group of friends to a local park. While we were there, a most amazing colorful bird flew in, settled, just for a few moments and then flew off. There were four of us girls, and each of us were mesmerized. We were city kids. This was Manhattan. We knew pigeons and sparrows. This bird was something else entirely. As we walked home from the park together, all we could talk about was this bird that we had seen. It had touched something deep inside of us, and we wanted to understand that better. We also wanted a way to try to explain what had happened to us, to in some way evoke a little of that experience of awe and wonder in others. Now, looking back, I would use the word transcendence to describe the experience, but we were fourth graders.

That experience bonded us- four girls who knew each other from school, but had not been particularly close before-and we didn't want to lose the magic of what had happened. So we decided that we would try capture it in a way in which it could be shared. We'd write a composition together, find the words that would tell the story and evoke the experience. We called ourselves the Nature Club, NC for short, because to us city kids, spending time describing a bird, seemed like a nature activity.

Writing a composition together, it turned out, was not easy. Nor was capturing the experience, but we went about it with enthusiasm and determination. For two months we met once a week after school and worked on our composition. We agonized over the words. We threw out ideas that changed the shape of what we were doing. And then the next week, we maybe threw that idea out in favor of another better idea. We all participated. No one was better than another. It was agonizing and exhilarating. And although I do not have the composition we created, I am sure it was wonderful, because it made us feel vibrant, and alive and connected.

There is a story that is told in the Apache tradition. I'll tell it the way it was told to me:

Before there were any people the Creator had a heavenly companion named Dog. One day the Creator told Dog, "I am going away for a while."

Dog asked, "Will you be gone very long?"

The Creator answered, "Yes, I'll be gone for a long time."

Dog said,
I'll get lonely."

So the Creator thought and said, "I'll make a companion for you."
The Creator took clay and shaped it into a man.

The Creator told the clay to sit up and the man sat up. The
Creator told the man to walk and the man walked.

Dog was becoming very excited about this companion.

The Creator told the man to run and the man ran, with Dog
running and jumping and barking at his side.

Then the Creator told the man to laugh. The man laughed.

The Creator said, "Laugh again." The man laughed even more.

The Creator said a third time, "Laugh again." And the man laughed
and laughed and laughed.

And the Creator said, "Now you are fit to live."

And that is the story of how man became Dog's best friend.

Hmmm. Two things made the man fit to live- one, that he could
companion another, and the other, that he could laugh. Wise. I'm not
sure whose wisdom it is- the Creator's or the Apache's, but I am sure it
is wise.

In the Biblical tradition we are told a story of God creating an
earthling (ada'm in Hebrew is earth; Adam, is one made of the earth-
earthling) and God, recognizing that the earthling would be lonely, first
gave the earthling the companionship of animals, and then divided the
earthling in two, creating the possibility for human companionship. So,
while the Biblical tradition is not so clear about the necessity of
laughter, it certainly gets the idea of companionship of which laughter
is a part.

Our ancestors of various traditions, understood the debilitation of loneliness. They understood that human beings are intended to live and work and play together.

It puzzles me that this seems to be such a difficult truth to learn and trust, that we were made to live and work and play together.

Instead, in our culture we created isolating hierarchies. Even when we rebelled against it, we did it again. The prophets railed against the powers that be, that disregarded and disempowered the powerless. Then, along came Jesus the peasant who gathered around him the plain folk, and spoke of love and truth and beloved community. He was killed for that, by the powers that be, but his followers tried to capture and continue that special feeling that comes from living and working together in equitable community. They shared meals. Called up preachers from their midst. Took care of those who needed care. For a while they held on to an egalitarian way of being church.

But by 313 Christian Era, Constantine, the Roman Emperor had embraced Christianity and Christianity had embraced him in return. Hierarchy had become the accepted human order.

From that grew the structure we know as the Roman Church, a hierarchy fortified in all its manifestations.

There is a saying we used to teach in seminary. *Ecclesiology is normative polity*. That means that the way we structure the church, is the way we are affirming, that human beings ought to be in relation to one another.

And eventually, protest to the Roman hierarchy emerged. In our own Protestant Reformation, we proclaimed the priesthood of all believers, in contrast to the hierarchies of the Roman church. That everyone had access to the holy and to divine wisdom. The printing

press made that actionable. People learned to read and interpret the Bible for themselves. Which launched another egalitarian revolt- ours.

It took the form of New England First Parishes, most of which eventually became Unitarian, where people gathered together in more egalitarian churches discovering that they could govern themselves, ...eventually launching the American revolution.

And we can see that the egalitarian concepts that fomented the American Revolution though intoxicating, were vulnerable, hard to practice and harder to defend.

Ecclesiology is normative polity. It still is. The way we order ourselves in our churches is a statement about how we understand power and its rightful exercise, how we understand the right relation between the sexes and the genders, the haves and the have nots, the weak and the strong, the powerful, the less powerful and the powerless.

I have been really aware of it this week as I spent four days in a hotel in Spokane, Washington with the Board of the UU Ministers' Association and the members of the Ethics Committee, of which I am a member, and the Accountability Committee with which we work. The issues of power, its use and its abuse are the deep issues that surface when ministers misconduct themselves in various ways. And I, and we, the people gathered together for the health and healing of our beloved Unitarian Universalism looked squarely in the face the ways in which we too, Unitarian Universalist congregations and our ministers, had become the embodiment of the structure we supposedly opposed. Hierarchy. Hierarchy, that when unchecked and unmonitored, quickly becomes oppressive. And it had happened to us.

Ecclesiology is normative polity.

Not surprisingly, it is part of A2U2 as well, sometimes in its formal structures, and sometimes in its informal practices. Who needs to be consulted before a change can be permitted? Who can be ignored? Who knows how to make things happen? Who accommodates to what others have decided? When considering an action, which interests are weighed, and which are never even mentioned? Who is on the inside, who has access to the inside, and who is without a clue? How much of that structure is necessary for functioning with a community this size, and how much is habit and our acculturation to the values of the rest of the world?

Concerning the why and how and what and who of ministry,
One image keeps surfacing:
A table that is round.

It will take some sawing
To be roundtabled.
Some redefining
And redesigning

Such redoing and rebirthing
Of arrow Churching
Can painful be
For people and tables¹

Hmmm. Think of how much easier it is to have a conversation in a circle, than it is at a rectangular table. Easier, isn't it?

And what would roundtable Churching mean?, the poet asks, and answers:

¹ Mary Benet McKinney, in *Shared Wisdom*

It would mean no daising and throning...²

The poet has observed the dynamics rightly, for she did name what is happening in our country years before it happened.

But the time and the tables
are changing and rearranging
and what of narrowlong tableministers,
when they confront
a roundtable people
after years of working up the table
(as in “up the ladder”)
To finally sit at its head,
Only to discover
That the table has turned around???³

Sounds like what is going on in our secular world, with incumbents being threatened or unseated by upstart outsiders. In our country, any move toward roundtabling will only happen with a serious fight.

But we, at A2U2 could chose to do it ourselves. We could decide that we wish to live the beloved community we proclaim. We could decide that equity is more important than seniority, that access rightfully belongs to all who wish to participate, that it could be energizing and invigorating to discover that the table has been turned around. And in fact, we are choosing to do that.

² OP cit

³ Ibid

You will be learning soon about our new Community Council, a gathering of the representatives of all the stakeholders within the church, a gathering where folks will think together about matters that concern us all, where pluses and minus are explored and alternatives invented, before the designated leadership makes its decisions. Roundtabling.

You will be hearing from the Transition Team about House Meetings to be held, in which every member of this congregation is invited and encouraged to participate, so that there is no voice marginalized, no opinion unheard.

Roundtabling.

The poet says:

They must be loved into roundness,
Where apart is spelled *a part*
And the call is to the gathering⁴

Can we do that? Love ourselves into roundness?

at a roundtable,
There are no sides

And ALL are invited
To wholeness and to food...
Roundtabling means
No preferred seating,
No first and last,
No better, and no corners
For “the least of these”

⁴ Ibid

Roundtabling means
Being with,
A part of
Together, and one

It means room for the Spirit
And gifts
And disturbing profound peace for all...⁵

These are the values we have so carefully and lovingly received-
The inherent worth and dignity of every person
Justice, equity and compassion in human relations
Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth
Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a
part.
A part, not apart.

And it is we in the present
Who are mixing and kneading
The dough for the future.

We can no longer prepare for the past...⁶

Amen. And Blessed Be.

CLOSING HYMN *From You I Receive* #402

⁵ Op cit

⁶ Ibid

BENEDICTION

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)