

Thought for Contemplation: “Beware of over-great pleasure in being popular or even beloved.”

Margaret Fuller

Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church

March 3, 2019

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHALICE LIGHTING reader: Leo Robinson, Lighter: Ethan Scott

We light this chalice that it might remind

Our eyes to be seeing,

Our ears to be listening,

Our minds to be open,

And our hearts truly welcoming

Of the stories and the people who touch our lives.

Anita Farber-Robertson

CALL TO WORSHIP

May the doors of this house be wide enough
To receive all who hunger for love,
all who are lonely for friendship.

May its threshold be so low that it be no stumbling block
To young feet, or old feet,
or broken or tired feet.

May this house welcome all who have-
cares to unburden,
hopes to nurture,
prayers to whisper or sing.

As it has welcomed us, each one,
may this house be a home for all
who would enter-
with doors open wide
and windows shining welcome.

Blessing adapted and based on a wedding blessing attributed to Jewish prayer books

HYMN *Here We Have Gathered* #360

CHILDREN'S TIME Bob Moseley

Song (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

MEDITATION AND PRAYER

READING: *A Crabby Old Woman* author unknown *Reader: Miriam Congdon*

When an old lady died in the geriatric ward of a small hospital near Dundee, Scotland, it was believed that she had nothing left of any value. Later, when the nurses were going through her meager possessions, they found this poem. Its quality and content so impressed the staff that copies were made and distributed to every nurse in the hospital...One nurse took her copy to Ireland. The old lady's sole bequest to posterity has since appeared in the Christmas edition of the News Magazine of the North Ireland Assn. for Mental Health. A slide presentation has also been made based on her simple, but eloquent poem. And this little old Scottish lady, with nothing left to give to the world, is now the author of this "Anonymous" poem winging across the world:

Crabby Old Woman

What do you see, nurses?

What do you see?

What are you thinking,

When you're looking at me?

A crabby old woman,

Not very wise,
Uncertain of habit,
With faraway eyes.
Who dribbles her food,
And makes no reply,
When you say in a loud voice,
"I do wish you'd try!"
Who seems not to notice,
The things that you do,
And forever is losing,
A stocking or shoe.
Who, resisting or not,
Let's you do as you will,
With bathing and feeding,
The long day to fill?
Is that what you're thinking?
Is that what you see?
Then open your eyes, nurse,
You're not looking at me.
I'll tell you who I am,
As I sit here so still,
As I do at your bidding,
As I eat at your will.

I'm a small child of ten,
With a father and mother,
Brothers and sisters,
Who love one another.
A young girl of sixteen,
With wings on her feet,
Dreaming that soon now,
A lover she'll meet.
A bride soon at twenty,
My heart gives a leap,
Remembering the vows,
That I promised to keep.
At twenty-five now,
I have young of my own,
Who need me to guide,
And a secure happy home.
A woman of thirty,
My young now grown fast,
Bound to each other,
With ties that should last.
At forty, my young sons,
Have grown and are gone,
But my man's beside me,

To see I don't mourn.

At fifty once more,

Babies play round my knee,

Again we know children,

My loved one and me.

Dark days are upon me,

My husband is dead,

I look at the future,

I shudder with dread.

For my young are all rearing,

Young of their own,

And I think of the years,

And the love that I've known.

I'm now an old woman,

And nature is cruel,

'Tis jest to make old age,

Look like a fool.'

The body, it crumbles,

Grace and vigor depart,

There is now a stone,

Where I once had a heart.

But inside this old carcass,

A young girl still dwells,

And now and again,
My battered heart swells.
I remember the joys,
I remember the pain,
And I'm loving and living,
Life over again.
I think of the years,
All too few, gone too fast,
And accept the stark fact,
That nothing can last.
So open your eyes, people,
Open and see,
Not a crabby old woman;
Look closer - see ME!!!

OFFERING

ANTHEM

SERMON

Missing the Obvious

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

At NASA some years ago, scientists built a gun specifically to launch standard four-pound dead chickens at the windshields of airliners, military jets and the space shuttle, all traveling at maximum velocity. The idea is to simulate the frequent incidents

of collisions with airborne fowl to test the strength of the windshields.

British engineers heard about the gun and were eager to test it on the windshields of their new high-speed trains. Arrangements were made, and a gun was sent to the British engineers.

When that gun was fired, the engineers stood shocked as the chicken hurled out of the barrel, crashed into the shatterproof shield, smashed it to smithereens, blasted through the control console, snapped the engineer's back-rest in two, and embedded itself in the back wall of the cabin, like an arrow shot from a bow.

The horrified Brits sent NASA the disastrous results of the experiment, along with the designs of the windshield and begged the U.S. scientists for suggestions.

NASA responded with a one-line memo:

*Defrost the chicken.*¹

Smart people, missing the obvious. We've all done it at some time. It looks pretty funny to those looking in. And we can feel pretty foolish when it happens to us, or, we can step back and join in the laughter as we have our "aha!" moment of recognition.

Betsy was newly married, a good friend of my sister-in-law Leslie. They were both school teachers in the New York City Public School system. One day Leslie went over to visit Betsy. When she got there, she could see that Betsy was a bit distraught. "Leslie," she asked, "Tell

¹Found in *Feathers*, the California Poetry Federation Newsletter, 1995 issue.

me what you do with all of your bags!” Leslie wasn’t sure what she meant. “The bags, the big brown bags from the supermarket. They are overrunning my apartment! I’ve run out of closet space she exclaimed as she dramatically yanked open the door to one of her closets, out of which tumbled a huge pile of brown paper supermarket grocery bags.

Leslie had a hard time keeping the laughter from splitting her sides. Trying to keep it to a quiet chuckle, and trying to speak respectfully and caringly, she said to Betsy, “You fold them. You fold them Betsy. That is how you store the bags.”

Smart people, missing the obvious. We’ve all done it at some time. Sometimes it is harmless.

Chuck was my best friend in high school, an African American. Chuck spent a lot of time at our house. My mother loved Chuck. And truthfully, Chuck loved her. Toward the end of her life, my mother had a heart attack. I jumped into the car and drove straight to New York. I waited at the bank of elevators in the hospital, and when the door to the elevator opened, Chuck stepped out. He was the first one to get there, to be with her. They were that close.

On another day, more than thirty years earlier, we had all gathered in at my Mom’s for some reason, from our geographically scattered homes. We were sitting and talking and enjoying each other, Chuck, my mother, my sisters and me. I do not remember how the topic came up, but Chuck said something about being black. “Oh Chuck,” my mother said. “You are not really black. You are just like us!”

Startled, and a little nonplussed, my sisters and I looked at each other, speechless. But Chuck, ever sharp and quick, turned to me with a quizzical gesture and said “I’m Jewish?”

My mother meant well. She meant to be saying that Chuck was part of the family. She meant to be inclusive. She meant to be extending him an emotional affirmation of belonging. But by suggesting that he wasn’t really black, she was unintentionally asking him to deny his reality as a black man in America, which was definitely different from our family’s reality. By insisting that he was just like us, she was erasing his experience, and asking him to do the same, as the price for admission.

Happily, Chuck never held that against her, and over the years, he and I often had a good private laugh between us, recalling the strange conversation that day.

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I know someone who cares deeply about inequality in our country and in particular about racism, how its toxicity pervades our American life, and its insidiousness keeps tripping us up. She talked with me about preaching on White Privilege to her essentially white congregation, and I helped her sort out some of her ideas and thoughts about it. She did preach the sermon and was very pleased with the reception it received. However, there was a visitor in the congregation that day, an Asian woman, someone who I also happened to know. She spoke with me several weeks later. Her experience of that sermon would have astonished the preacher.

“I didn’t know what she was talking about. It’s not my experience,” she said. “I’m not white. I don’t have white privilege. I never have. And I am not black. That’s not my experience either. I do have to deal with prejudice and stereotypes, and people making assumptions about me, and those are real struggles for me, but they are not the ones about which she was speaking. I felt invisible. This country is made up of more than white and black people. I felt erased.”

Smart people, missing the obvious. We’ve all done it at some time. Sometimes it is harmless. And sometimes, it’s not.

What do you see, nurses?

What do you see?

What are you thinking,

When you're looking at me?

A crabby old woman,

Not very wise,

Uncertain of habit,

With faraway eyes.

Who dribbles her food,

And makes no reply,

When you say in a loud voice,

"I do wish you'd TRY!"

...

You're not looking at me.

I'll tell you who I am,

As I sit here so still,

...

I'm a small child of ten,
With a father and mother,
Brothers and sisters,
Who love one another.
A young girl of sixteen,
With wings on her feet,
Dreaming that soon now,
A lover she'll meet.
A bride soon at twenty,
My heart gives a leap,
Remembering the vows,
That I promised to keep.
At twenty-five now,
I have young of my own,
Who need me to guide,
And secure a happy home.

...

I'm now an old woman,
...
But inside this old carcass,
A young girl still dwells,

...

So open your eyes, people,
Open and see,
Not a crabby old woman;
Look closer - see ME!!!²

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Often in Unitarian Universalist congregations, when I ask people why they come or what they enjoy about church life, they say they come to be with like-minded people. Maybe even you have said that- or thought it. Could be. It is initially comfortable being with like-minded people. But what happens if all at some point you find that what people are thinking is not like what you are thinking? If an issue surfaces in which you find yourself with a very different opinion. What happens to your relationship to your community, if the bond is that you are like-minded? Is there a subtle pressure, maybe not even by others, but by you on yourself, to self-censor? Is there a touch of anxiety, or concern, that if the community knew what you really thought about that, you would no longer feel so safe, so comfortable, that maybe even your feeling of belonging was at risk?

What if you, or some others here, have quietly absorbed a message that suggests that the price of admission to this warmly embracing and loving community, is that you squelch or deny the ways in which your experience is different? Because you are young, or old, or not white, or not educated, not financially stable, or not politically liberal, or not in favor of abortion rights, because you are homeless, or depressed, or think that stained glass would be lovely in the sanctuary?

² Author unknow. Poem discovered in the hospice unit of a small Scottish hospital

Are there hidden prices to admission? Hidden costs for staying-staying, actually, anywhere that matters to you? In your family? Your community? Your church?

Smart people, missing the obvious. We've all done it at some time. Sometimes it is harmless. And sometimes, it's not.

It was Hosea Ballou who reminded us:

"If we agree in love, there is no disagreement that can do us any injury, but if we do not, no agreement can do us any good."

When our intention is to be a beloved and diverse community that transforms lives through the power love, each one of us needs to be safe to grow and become who we are called to be. Creating the space for *all* of who we are, is the price of admission to authentic beloved community. May we always be prepared to pay that price.

Amen, and blessed be.

CLOSING HYMN *Come Sing a Song with Me* #346

BENEDICTION

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)