

Worship

Allen Ave. Unitarian Universalist Church

Sunday, September 16, 2018

Thought for Contemplation: “Anybody can observe the Sabbath, but making it holy surely takes the rest of the week.” -*Alice Walker*

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHALICE LIGHTING. Marilyn Williams and John Williams

Let the light of this chalice be for wonder

Let the warmth of this chalice be for love

Let the glow of this chalice be for caring

Of each other and our world.

Anita Farber-Robertson

CALL TO WORSHIP -from the Baal Shem Tov

The Baal Shem Tov said:

The first time an event occurs in nature it is called a miracle;
later It comes to seem natural and is taken for granted.

Let your worship and your service be your miracle each day.¹

Welcome, and let our worship be our miracle this day.

HYMN *We Give Thanks* #1010

CHILDREN'S TIME Bob Mosely, DRE

WELCOME of REV. ANITA and BOB MOSELEY (See insert)

9am Song (seated) Go Now in Peace #413

¹ *Gates of Repentance, The New Union Prayer Book, Central Conference of American Rabbis, 5738 New York 1978*

(Children are invited to go to their program)

MUSICAL REFLECTION

JOYS AND SORROWS

MEDIATION AND PRAYER

READING *A Time for Turning* by Nurya Love Parish

It is a holy time, this turning of the year.
A faint chill starts to hover in the air.
You think about unpacking your wool sweaters,
then do it. A few leaves change from green to yellow,
and drop gently to the earth.

These are the Days of Awe.
Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year.
A holy presence hovers in the air,
And you are asked
to unpack your very heart,
to turn with the turning of the year.
To drop humbly and gently to the earth
and praise the Source of Life,
the earth that gives you breath.

ANTHEM Alleluia, Alleluia

READING *Prayer for the Lady Who Forgave Us* by John Shea

There is a long-suffering lady with thin hands
who stands on the corner of Delphia and Lawrence
and forgives you.

“You are forgiven,” she smiles.

The neighborhood is embarrassed.

It is sure it has done nothing wrong
yet, every day, in a small voice
it is forgiven.

On the way to the Jewel Food Store
housewives pass her with hard looks
then whisper in the cereal section.

Stan Dumke asked her right out
what she was up to
and she forgave him.

A group who care about the neighborhood
agree that if she was old it would be harmless
or if she were religious it would be understandable
but as it is...they asked her to move on.

Like all things with eternal purposes

she stayed.

And she was informed upon.

On a most unforgiving day of snow and slush
while she was reconciling a reluctant passerby

the State people

whose business is sanity,

persuaded her into a car.

She is gone.

We are reduced to forgetting.

OFFERING AND MUSIC FOR REFLECTION

SERMON

Beginning Again

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

I love that lady who forgave us. I love that she kept on forgiving even when the people would not acknowledge that we needed forgiving. I think the people in her neighborhood may have been a lot like us- maybe they were Unitarian Universalists. Well maybe not like you- I don't know you well enough yet, but I certainly have known many UU's who in the process of shaking off unpleasantness from their childhood religious experience, from having been encouraged to admit they were sinners when they couldn't even think of what it was they might have

done wrong...of being told that somehow they, maybe you, were basically bad... in the process of shaking that off, shook off a lot of other things that might have been helpful.

If we had that kind of background, we might have realized at some point, that the proclamation of our essential badness was manifestly untrue. We knew, in some powerfully real way, that there was more to us than that- that we contain divine light, that we are not basically bad. Relieved and released, many people fled those churches or religions all together. Some made a new declaration, asserting that the truth was, that what we are- is good.

Not me. I am good a lot of the time. Maybe most of the time. I know that I have goodness in me, just as I know that you have goodness in you. But the honest truth of me is more complicated than that. I do things I ought not do, I do not do things I ought to, I am a flawed and seriously imperfect person. It's true. I am not making this up.

And sometimes, I need forgiving- and often I need to do the thing that comes before- acknowledgement. Acknowledgement can be uncomfortable, even when it is forthright and simple-like yes, I was the last one to leave the building and it was me who forgot to turn off the lights. It becomes extremely uncomfortable when what we need to acknowledge is a behavior that conflicts with our image of who we are

what we want people to believe about us, or what we want to believe about ourselves. But letting in the truth of us, transforms.

Sam Keen tells just such a story from his life. It began in the days when he was a small boy, during one of those endless summers of childhood. He and his father were sitting in the shade, under a peach tree. While they sat, his father picked up a peach seed and began whittling.

With increasing excitement, the boy watched the magic of his father's skilled hands as out of the seed emerged a tiny creature – a monkey. Oh, how he did wish to have that amazing treasure. He marshaled up his nerve and asked his father if he could have the monkey when it was finished.

“This one is for your mother, but I will carve you one someday.” His father answered.

Well the days passed, and months and years, and Sam grew up, never thinking any more about the peach seed monkey. Life was full and it absorbed him.

The day came when his father's life was drawing to a close, and Sam had come home to visit him. They sat under the shade of a Juniper tree and talked. Sam recalls:

I listened as he wrestled with the task of taking the measure of his success and failure in life. There came a moment of silence that cried out for testimony. Suddenly I

remembered the peach seed monkey, and I heard the right words coming from myself to fill the silence:

“In all that is important you have never failed me. With one exception, you kept the promises you made to me - you never carved me that peach seed monkey.”

Not long after that conversation Sam received a package in the mail. It was a peach seed monkey with a note attached.

“Here is the monkey I promised you. You will notice that I broke one leg and had to repair it with glue. I am sorry I didn’t have time to carve you a perfect one.”

Two weeks later, his father died. ²

The peach seed monkey became for Sam a symbol of all the promises made to him, all the care lavished on him, all that had been given to him, and that had created him as the human being he now was. What made it possible, this deep connection and resolution?

Sam took the risk and gave his father the gift of truth telling. And his father received it, difficult as it was. It must have been very hard to hear of the time he had not just disappointed his son, but failed to fulfill a promise- one that may have seemed small to him, but had been hugely formative for the little boy then, and for the little boy who still lived in his now grown son. Sam’s father tried to make it right, but the time was

² Sam Keen, To a Dancing God

past, his hands less sure. The monkey emerged flawed, broken. He sent the imperfect offering to Sam. And Sam accepted it, accepted it as fulfillment of the promise, despite its being fundamentally incomplete. The world was once again made whole. Forgiveness...can heal a universe of wounds...when we listen first, and accept the truth of the impact of what we have done, or left undone.

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³ John Shea, *Prayer for the Lady Who Forgave Us*

It doesn't need to be that way. While we may be as good as we know how to be, we will still create hurt, inflict suffering, disrespect others. It is the way of the world, the truth of our shared humanity. Instead of forgetting, we can listen, be loving and present. We can own what is real, our impact on others, and seek to reconcile. We are offered the grace of each new year, each new day, each new hour. Our precious lives can be made whole, as we begin again in love.

May it be so. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN *We Begin Again in Love* #1037

BENEDICTION

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)