

Worship

Allen Ave. Unitarian Universalist Church

Sunday, September 23, 2018

Thought for Contemplation: "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven." Ecclesiastes 3:1

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHALICE LIGHTING. Schuyler, Ben and Cora Stevenson

We light this chalice in the spirit of love

May it kindle good cheer in our hearts

And caring acts in our lives.

Anita Farber-Robertson

CALL TO WORSHIP Adapted from Rebecca Edmiston-Lange

Come into this place
which we make holy by our presence.

Come ... with ...
your vulnerabilities and strengths,
fears and anxieties,
loves and hopes.
For here you need not hide,
nor pretend, nor be anything other than who you are
and who you are called to be.

Come into this place
where we can touch and be touched,
heal and be healed,
forgive and be forgiven.
Come into this place where the ordinary is sanctified,
living is celebrated,
compassion is expected.
Come into this place,
together we make it a holy place.

HYMN *Just as Long As I Have Breath*

#6

CHILDREN'S TIME

Rev. Anita

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 CONCERNS

MEDIATION AND PRAYER

READING: *from A Walk in the Woods* by Bill Bryson

“Coldest ever for this date in Georgia,” a hotel employee said with a pleased smile as she hurried in from the parking lot, then stopped and said: “You hiking?”

“Yeah.” ...

I hoisted my pack and took a backward stagger under the weight (it would be days before I could do this with anything approaching aplomb), jerked tight the belt, and trudged off. At the edge of the woods I glanced back to make sure Katz was following. Ahead of me spread a vast, a vast stark world of winter-dead trees...

The date was March 9, 1996. We were on our way (p. 34)

I waited for Katz for three quarters of an hour, then went looking for him. The light was fading and the air was taking on an evening chill.. I walked and walked, down the hill and through the endless groves of trees, back over ground that I had gratefully put behind me forever, or so I'd thought....I called his name and listened, but there was nothing. I walked on and on...Finally, I rounded a bend and there he was stumbling towards me, wild haired and one gloved and nearer hysteria than I have ever seen a grown person,

It was hard to get the full story out of him in a coherent flow, because he was so furious, but I gathered he had thrown many items

from his pack over a cliff in a temper. None of the things that had been dangling from the outside were there any longer.

“What did you get rid of?” I asked, trying not to betray much alarm.

“Heavy (expletive deleted) (stuff), that’s what. The pepperoni, the rice, the brown sugar, the Spam, I don’t know what all. Lots. Katz was almost cataleptic with displeasure....I saw his glove in the path thirty yards back and went to retrieve it....

We trudged up the hill in the enveloping dusk. A few hundred yards beyond the summit was a...campsite

...(In the morning) he crouched by my tent...

“How do you feel?” he said.

I moved my legs experimentally. “Not too bad, actually.”

“Me either.”

He poured water into the filter cone...

“Is there a reason,” I asked, “why you are filtering the coffee with toilet paper?”

“I, oh,...I threw out the filter papers.”

“They wouldn’t have weighed 2 ounces.”

“I know but they were great for throwing. Fluttered all over.”

He dribbled on more water. “The toilet paper seems to be working okay.”

We watched through and were strangely proud. Our first refreshment in the wilderness.

OFFERING *Glory Bound* soloist Noel

READING: *Ligament* by Charif Shanahan

Even after she cut into my shoulder
Coldly, with a scalpel, resetting my clavicle,
Tying it down with borrowed ligament and screwing it
Into place, even after she sutured me shut,
Sewing the two banks of skin across the thin blood river,
Watching me sleep the chemical sleep
Until tender and hazy I awoke — Even after all that,
What seems the least plausible is how
She had known, walking into that white room,
To put her hand for just a second in my hand.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE (9am)

ANTHEM I Dream A World (11am)

SERMON

What Do We Really Need?

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

Eight years ago, when my husband and I were getting divorced, we needed to put our house on the market, the house we had lived in for about 20 years. We called a realtor, Judy.

Judy took her time walking through our 75-year-old, 3000 square foot house. “It’s very nice,” she said. “A great house, actually, in a great neighborhood.” She loved the detail of the fancy moldings, the huge well-appointed kitchen, the large deck. But she shook her head back and forth, indicating that something was wrong.

“Too much stuff.” She said. “Too much furniture. Too many paintings on the walls. Too many books and too many bookcases.” She went on:

“It needs to be shown to its best advantage- letting the large, sunny spacious rooms look large and sunny and spacious. All this furniture, all this stuff has to go.”

We cringed. We loved our stuff. She was adamant. We capitulated. We rented a huge storage unit and packed it with our beloved stuff- furniture, paintings, our antique pottery collection, my books. The space looked light and spacious and airy. Four weeks later we were made an offer that we accepted and the house was sold.

Then we had to decide what to do with the stuff- not just the stuff in the storage unit, but the stuff in the house. I was moving into a 925 square foot condo. He wasn’t sure where he was moving. But there were things in that house that we knew neither of us would take with us. With some deep breaths, we took our paintings and antiques to a

specialty auction house- we trusted they'd take good care of our beloved stuff. And then we took out our phones and started taking pictures of things and putting them on Craig's list. Some things sold and some things didn't. And then we got an idea. We ordered a dumpster.

Slowly we began taking hard and realistic looks at the precious stuff. Did we need it? Did we really want it? Would we ever use it? Maybe even more importantly, what would we be missing if we didn't have it?

We started carrying things out to the dumpster. The dumpster was on ground level. Our huge deck was on the second floor. We went upstairs and started carrying things out to the deck and throwing them over the railing into the dumpster. It was somewhat satisfying. At some point we reached a new mental state about the whole thing- maybe like what happened to Katz, when he realized that he was not going to be able to carry all of that stuff 2000 miles on the Appalachian Trail.

I remember the moment when it clicked for us. We had had three desks in the house, two very large polished wood executive desks, and one smaller student size desk. We'd put them on Craig's list. The smaller student desk sold. The two large, polished desks did not.

We knew we were not going to be able to fit them into our new places. And that is when it clicked for each of us separately, and both of us together. We looked at each other, laughed and nodded. Yes! We knew what we would do. We marched into my study, carried the big polished cherry desk out to the deck, counted “One, two, three!” and together we hefted that thing over the railing and into the dumpster. I felt a shock as it flew over, and then, a relief. He did too. We were laughing. “Ready?” he said. I nodded. We went into his study, carried the heavy desk out onto the deck, counted to three, and hurled it over the railing and into the dumpster. Amazed at ourselves, it felt wonderful.

Maybe those desks symbolized all of the things about our lives and our marriage that we had been carrying that were not serving us. Maybe they symbolized all of the things we had outgrown or outlived, without realizing it. Maybe they symbolized tethers that had to be released. And maybe they were just desks at which we each had sat for years and years, that were not going to fit into our lives any more. It was time to let go.

Maybe something like that has happened to you. A time when you realized that you were carrying things, holding on to things you didn't really need, or that were not serving you any longer. Sometimes

we are pushed into that realization, and sometimes it just comes, like a revelation from beyond, from the God we maybe don't believe in, from the universe that holds us, from a Higher Power. We don't know, it just comes.

Or, we can choose to put ourselves into a situation that will make the case to us of the need to simplify, intentional and unavoidable. Going backpacking like Bill Bryson and Katz, is one way to be reminded of how much is really necessary for you manage, and even thrive. When I come back from a backpacking trip, the thing I probably most want, the thing I most missed, is a shower. Pretty simple. Other things in my life are often nice; they make life more comfortable, but I am reminded that they are not necessary. Maybe that has happened to you- if not hiking, in another venue. I remember that I also was so reminded in the days when I went sailing. A week on a 30-foot boat means you don't take much- there is not that much room. Yet you thrive. You are sustained, without the stuff. In some ways, even expanded by the lack of stuff.

We go through cycles in our lives, individually and in our lives together. There are times for householding, when we are gathering things together, and times for relinquishing and moving on. As it says in Ecclesiastes, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every

matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted, ...a time to break down and a time to build up...a time to keep and a time to throw away.”

(Ecclesiastes 3:1-6 selected)

We move through those cycles, hopefully correctly discerning just what time it is for us. What is it we need, now? A question for all the dimensions of our lives. For our country yes, our city and towns, and yes, for A2U2. What is it we need, now? Really? And personally. What is it we need for our families? For ourselves? Is it a time to break down or a time to build up? A time to plant, or time to pluck up what is planted? A time to keep, or a time to throw away?

These are always important questions, challenges of discernment. And they are particularly present before us now, here at A2U2. We will be spending the next two years asking these questions, really trying to think deeply, and discern what it is we are, as a faith community, what it is we are called to be and do, and once we know that, understanding what we need and what we need to relinquish, that we might thrive as a faith community moving forward.

We are not always talking about stuff. There is more to life than stuff, more to meaning than stuff, more to church than stuff, more to church than buildings even.

Sometimes, we can forget that while equipment is important, skill sets are important, and tools are important, there is another dimension that is essential, for us as human beings. Charif Shanahan captured it for me in her poem, that I shared earlier.

Even after she cut into my shoulder
Coldly, with a scalpel, resetting my clavicle,
Tying it down with borrowed ligament and screwing it
Into place, even after she sutured me shut,
Sewing the two banks of skin across the thin blood river,
Watching me sleep the chemical sleep
Until tender and hazy I awoke — Even after all that,
What seems the least plausible is how
She had known, walking into that white room,
To put her hand for just a second in my hand.

It's not just about stuff, is it? When we ask what time it is and what do we really need, what we are often needing to talk about is relationships. How we are together. How we care for one another. How we listen carefully enough and astutely enough to know when it is not a time for discussion or persuasion, but rather is the time to tenderly hold a hand, or take our hand and rest it gently on a shoulder.

What seems the least plausible is how

She had known, walking into that white room,
To put her hand for just a second in my hand.

We need to know how to do that. We need to take with us the behaviors we have learned that support, sustain, comfort and encourage. We need to take with us the behaviors that allow for speaking truth in love and humility, creating space to hold and cherish another's truth alongside our own.

Slowly, together, we will begin taking realistic and maybe uncomfortable looks at the precious A2U2 stuff. Do we need it? Do we really want it? Will we ever use it? Maybe even more importantly, what would we be missing if we didn't have it?

Not everything will be up for relinquishment. Surely, we will bring our memories as we go forward; they are an important part of who we are. They are also the ballast that helps us stabilize and reorient ourselves, in unfamiliar territory. It is after all, the past that brought us here, together, today. It has wisdom. And it inevitably has sorry tales and truths that have bequeathed us troubles. I don't need to know a whole lot about you to know that to be true. I know people and congregations, and I know this country. Our past is rich, precious and often checkered. That we might harvest the richness, learning from and honoring the past, we may need to relinquish the nostalgia that romanticizes what was, be it buildings, people, places or routines.

As we explore together, I don't know what those things might be that you will chose to keep and what things you might choose to archive, or put away. What I hope is that you will grow closer as a community, and your relationships will become richer. The conversations we engender when we ask those questions will be about your deepest loves and longings, and what you need to walk the walk to get you there.

Journeys are can be challenging. They also are exciting, renewing, and expansive. They take planning, and incredible flexibility, lest we miss the joy that is often just around the corner.

We are going...powered by love, shaped by our faith, emboldened by joy, which is the secret source of courage.

May it be so. Amen. Blessed be.

Closing Hymn *Woyaya* #1020

Benediction

Extinguish the Chalice

Closing Music