

Worship

October 21, 2018

Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church

Thought for Contemplation: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like these."

Jesus of Nazareth, Matthew 6:28b-29

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHALICE LIGHTING. Ivy Lyra

May ours be a chalice of joy

May ours be a chalice of dreams

May ours be a chalice of love

Warming our hearts and lighting our way.

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

CALL TO WORSHIP

May we be reminded here of our highest aspirations,

And inspired to bring our gifts of love and service to the altar of humanity.

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,

But connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe,

To this community and to each other.

-anonymous *Singing the Living Tradition* # 434

HYMN *For All That Is Our Life* #128

CHILDREN'S TIME Bob Moseley

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

READING: *from Anna Quindlen's Villanova University Commencement Address June, 2000*

It is so easy to waste our lives: our days, our hours, our minutes. It is so easy to take for granted the color of our kids' eyes, the way the melody in a symphony rises and falls and disappears and rises again.

It is so easy to exist instead of live. I learned to live many years ago. Something really, really bad happened to me, something that changed my life in ways that, if I had my druthers, it would never have changed at all. And what I learned from it is what, today, seems to be the hardest lesson of all. I learned to love the journey, not the destination. I learned that it is not a dress rehearsal and that today is the only guarantee you get. I learned to look at all the good in the world and to try to give some of it back because I believed in it completely and utterly.

And I tried to do that in part, by telling others what I had learned. By telling them this:

Consider the lilies of the field. Look at the fuzz on a baby's ear. Read in the backyard with the sun on your face. Learn to be happy. And think of life as a terminal illness because if you do, you will live it with joy and passion, as it ought to be lived.

OFFERING

READING: *Drifting* by Mary Oliver

I was enjoying everything: the rain, the path
wherever it was taking me, the earth roots
beginning to stir.

I didn't intend to start thinking about God,
it just happened.

How God, or the gods are invisible,
quite understandable.

But holiness is visible, entirely.

It's wonderful to walk along like that,
thought not the usual intention to reach an answer
but merely drifting.

Like clouds that only seem weightless but of course are not.
Are really important.

I mean, terribly important.

Not decoration by any means.

By next week the violets will be blooming.

Anyway, this was my delicious walk in the rain.

What was it actually about?

Think about what it is that music is trying to say.
It was something like that.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

READING: *Eating the Avocado* by Carrie Fountain

Now I know that I've never described
anything, not one single thing, not

the flesh of the avocado which darkens
so quickly, though if you scrape
what's been exposed to the air it's new-green
beneath like nothing ever happened.

I want to describe this evening, though
it's not spectacular. The baby babbling
in the other room over the din
and whistle of a football game, and now
the dog just outside the door, scratching,
rattling the tags on her collar, the car
going by, far away but loud, a car without
a muffler, and the sound of the baby
returning again, pleasure and weight.

I want to describe the baby. I want to describe
the baby for many hours to anyone
who wishes to hear me. My feelings for her
take me so far inside myself I can see the pure
holiness in motherhood, and it makes me
burn with success and fear, the hole her
coming has left open, widening. Last night
we fed her some of the avocado I've just
finished eating while writing this poem.
Her first food. I thought my heart might burst,
knowing she would no longer be made
entirely of me, flesh of my flesh. Startled
in her amusing way by the idea of eating,
she tried to take it in, but her mouth
pushed it out. And my heart did burst.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE (9am)

ANTHEM *To Walk is by Thought to Go*

SERMON

Look at the View!

The Rev Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

Have you ever spent a lot of time thinking about a gift for a special toddler, or other small person in your life? Maybe it was your grandchild, or your Godchild. Maybe it was your closest friend's toddler, celebrating Christmas. Or maybe even, it was your own first born. You wanted it to be really special, and just right. And when you had finally chosen it, you wrapped it carefully in pretty paper, and maybe topped it off with a big bright bow. Right? Ever done that?

And then the moment comes, and you give the gift to the little one. They are so excited, and truthfully, so are you. You want them to be pleased. Maybe you want their parents to be pleased as well.

You have to help them open the gift- you have wrapped it so well and so carefully, it isn't obvious to the inexperienced gift opener, which is what a small child is, how exactly to get it open. So you help.

But once you start, the paper gets torn away. It crinkles as it tears. The little one likes that. Stops. Listens. Tears again, liking the sound, and maybe the glitter of the colors on the paper. Maybe he or she takes up the paper and begins to shake it, laughing.

You think the child is distracted. You try to bring him or her back to the task at hand. The task of opening this wonderful gift, seeing this special thing you have brought. But it turns out you are wrong, even though you don't know it.

The task at hand is playing with the pretty paper. It is not about the contents.

How many Christmas mornings have seen the children delirious with joy, rustling the wrapping paper, balling it up and tossing it, gathering it into a pile and jumping on it, or rolling around with the colored ribbons? The purchased toys all sit forlorn and ignored. It is not because the children are clueless. It is because they have not yet been taught what to enjoy and what to ignore. They look around and appreciate what is interesting, what is attractive to them, what is appealing in color, touch, sight, or sound to them in the moment, heedless of what things cost, or how hard they were to acquire, or who else might also have them. They have what we call Beginner's Mind, because that is what they are, beginners. And sometimes, we who are older are blessed, for a moment, or a day, or a stretch of days, with a beginner's eye, or a beginner's mind, experiencing the wonder and joy that comes noticing the amazing light and color and form that clothes our world.

“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like these.”¹

We have an advantage, living in New England. Every three months the seasons change, calling our attention to what we might otherwise take for granted. Last week I shared with the children my large and varied collection of autumn leaves which I had gathered over the previous three weeks in anticipation of my sharing with them. In fact, I have loved those beautiful leaves so well, that I took the ones that were not chosen by the children, and have spread them in a display in my office. You are welcome any time to come, to look, to enjoy, and even to take one or two home with you for your own pleasure.

That plan that I had, of sharing with the children a variety of shapes and colors of autumn leaves from which they could pick one of their very own, meant that I had been extremely alert to leaves wherever they had fallen, as I was deciding each time I passed one on the road or the sidewalk, in the woods, or along a park, whether it was

¹ Jesus of Nazareth, Matthew 6:28b-29

one to be picked up, saved and shared, or was one to be left for others to find, to see, and to savor, finding their own pleasure in the chance encounter. What that exercise did for me, in addition to alerting me to the joy and beauty of the season, was enhance my experience of connection and of sharing.

You see, it didn't really matter whether I took the leaf I saw to press and save for our children, or if I decided to leave it on the ground for another to appreciate. Either way, I had made a decision to share. Either way, I was aware of my connection to others, those I know, our children, and those I don't- the strangers who would see or not notice the dazzling leaves that rustled underfoot. My days were enhanced then, not only by the lightness of the joy of beauty, and my resonance with the turnings of the natural world, but by the fullness of the embrace I felt, being held in this human connection.

Periodically it strikes me how wise and deep is the theology expressed by our seven Unitarian Universalist principles. In this case I am thinking of the first principle and the last, the seventh.

The first principle is the affirmation of the inherent worth and dignity of every person. That means that we each have our own unique and inherently worthy experience of the world. It also implies that we have the responsibility to be present and to use the agency we have to

engage, to notice, to wonder and to value the gifts and blessings large and small that populate our lives- freely given.

“Consider the lilies of the field...”

The final principle is the affirmation of the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

In the book of Job, God answers the understandably complaining Job, who has become petulant and angry about his difficulties:

⁴“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?

Tell me, if you understand.

⁵Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!

Who stretched a measuring line across it?

⁶On what were its footings set,
or who laid its cornerstone—

⁷while the morning stars sang together
and all the angels^[a] shouted for joy?²

We are reminded here that we did not create ourselves, that we are part of a universe and a life cycle that sustains us and in which we are reliably embedded, despite our fantasies and hubris that would sometimes like to believe we are self-made and self-originating.

² Job 38:4-7 New International Version

To be elated and amazed at how wonderful it is to be us and to be here, inherently worthy, while also being awed by the universe of which we are one small yet integral part, interdependent, is to be grounded in the most basic and sustaining realities of our existence. It is from inhabiting the truth of both of those that we have a foundation upon which we can build our meaning and craft our lives.

What might it look like when we do that? Well, for each of us it will look a little different, sound a little different, even feel a little different. But my options and my understandings were expanded when Anna Quindlen shared this story as part of her commencement speech at Villanova University. She said:

I found one of my best teachers on the boardwalk of Coney Island maybe 15 years ago. It was December and I was doing a story about how the homeless survive in the winter months. He and I sat on the edge of the wooden supports, dangling our feet over the side, and he told me about his schedule panhandling the boulevard when the summer crowds were gone, sleeping in a church when the temperature went below freezing, hiding from the police amidst the Tilt a Whirl and the Cyclone and some of the other seasonal rides. But he told me that most of the time he stayed on the boardwalk, facing the water, just the way we were

sitting now even when it got cold and he had to wear his newspapers after he read them.

And I asked him why. Why didn't he go to one of the shelters? Why didn't he check himself into the hospital or detox? And he just stared out at the ocean and said, Look at the view, young lady. Look at the view."

And every day, (she says), every day in some little way, I try to do what he said. I try to look at the view. And that is the last thing I have to tell you today, words of wisdom from a man with not a dime in his pocket, no place to go, nowhere to be. Look at the view. You'll never be disappointed."³

And so my friends, I invite you, invite us, each of us inherently worthy individuals to use our own eyes, our own minds, and ears and hands and selves to take in the view that is spread out there before us; a view for each of us to enjoy, our own original experience of a universe we share, our own personal joy and lightness of being, held so firmly, lovingly, and reliably in this wondrous universe that we did not need to create.

³ Anna Quindlen from her Villanova University Commencement Address June 23, 2000

Consider the view...and the lilies of the field.

They might be the pretty paper in which our gift of life has been so carefully wrapped. With beginner's mind we might recognize that it truly is the most important gift.

May it be so. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN *I Seek the Spirit of the Child* #338

BENEDICTION

EXTINGUISH CHALICE

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)