

Order of Worship
Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church
Easter Sunday
April 21, 2019

Thought for Contemplation: "God comes to us disguised as our life."- Paula D'Arcy

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHALICE LIGHTING reader: Schuyler Stevenson, Lighter: Ben Stevenson, candle extinguisher: Cora Stevenson

We light this chalice of welcome,
How good it is to gather in this place.

We light this chalice of vision,
Of all we might do and to where we might go.

We light this chalice of love
Here for us now, to carry into the world. Anita Farber-Robertson

INTROIT

CALL TO WORSHIP

Let us be called to worship,
We who are joyful and full of hope
We who sorrow and come with heavy hearts
We who are fearful and need the company of others to gather
courage

We who are triumphant and wish to share successes
We who manage to live, day by day, ordinary lives that challenge
and reward in ways great and small.

We who gather here this morning in this place of memory and hope
Let us be called to worship. Anita Farber-Robertson

HYMN *Lo the Day of Days is Here* #269

CHILDREN'S TIME *Rev. Anita*

Look at these marigolds. They are really pretty little flowers. But they weren't always flowers. First they were seeds.

See here, what they looked like as seeds. Very different.

And then they started to grow and became seedlings, and then full plants, and then put out their flowers, the blossoms we are enjoying.

What happened to the seeds? Where did they go?

Can we look and see where they are, the seeds that started these plants?

No, we can't. We can't because something happened, something called transformation. The seeds transformed into plants, and when they did that, they had to stop being seeds. They kind of died to their old way of being, seeds, so that they could do the next thing, be a plant, a plant that makes beautiful flowers.

WE appreciate the seeds, because we want the flowers and we know that we need the seeds to make them. But we don't want the seeds we appreciate to stay seeds. Even though we need to say good bye to seeds because they are transforming into plants. We remember who they were and what they did with gratitude, even as we are happy to let them grow and become who they must be, marigolds.

So it is with all of us and all of life. We keep changing, transforming, becoming what we are most deeply called to be, and leaving the rest behind, although we hold it still, in memory.

Song (seated) *Go Now in Peace* #413

(Children are invited to go now to their program)

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION

JOYS AND SORROWS

MEDITATION AND PRAYER

PERSONAL TESTIMONY Toby Rzepka 9 a.m.;

Judith Moll 11 a.m

READING from *the Essene Book of Days* by Danaan Perry reader: Lee Shenton 11:00 am

Sometimes I feel that my life is a series of trapeze swings. I'm either hanging on to a trapeze bar swinging along, or for a few moments in my life, I'm hurtling across space in between trapeze bars.

Most of the time, I spend my life hanging on for dear life to my trapeze-bar-of-the-moment. It carries me along at a certain steady rate of swing, and I have the feeling that I'm in control of my life. I know most of the right questions and some of the right answers. But once in a while, as I'm merrily (or not-so-merrily) swinging along, I look out ahead of me into the distance and what do I see? I see another trapeze bar swinging towards me. It's empty, and I know in that place in me that knows, that this "new trapeze bar" has my name on it. It is my next step, my growth, my aliveness coming to get me. In my heart-of-hearts I know that for me to grow, I must release my grip on the present well-known bar to move to the new one.

Each time it happens to me, I hope (no pray) that I won't have to grab the new one. But in my knowing place I know that I must totally release my grasp on my old bar, and for some moment in time I must hurtle across space before I can grab onto the new bar. Each time I am filled with terror. It doesn't matter that in all previous hurtles across the void knowing I have always made it. Each time I am afraid that I will miss, that I will be crushed on the unseen rocks in the bottomless chasm between the bars. But I do it anyway. Perhaps this is the essence of what the mystics call the faith experience. No guarantees, no net, no insurance policy, but you do it anyway because somehow to keep hanging on to that old bar is no longer on the list of alternatives. And so, for an eternity that can last a microsecond or a thousand lifetimes, I soar across the dark void of "the past is gone, the future is not yet here". It is called transition. I have come to believe that is the only place where real change occurs. I mean real change, not the pseudo-change that only lasts until the next time my old buttons get punched.

I have noticed that, in our culture, this transition zone is looked upon as a "no-thing", a no-place between places. Sure, the old trapeze-bar was real, and that new one coming towards me, I hope that's real, too. But the void between? That's just a scary, confusing, disorienting "nowhere" that must be gotten through as fast as possible. What a waste! I have a sneaking suspicion that the transition zone is the only real thing, and the bars are illusions we dream up to avoid the void, where real change, the real growth occurs for us. Whether or not my hunch is true, it remains that the transition zones in our lives are incredibly rich places. They should be honoured, even savoured. Yes, with all the pain and fear and feelings of being out-of-control that can (but not necessarily) accompany transitions, they are still the most alive, most growth-filled, passionate, expansive moments in our lives.

And so transformation of fear may have nothing to do with making fear go away but rather with giving ourselves permission to "hang-out" in the transition between trapeze bars. Transforming our need to grab that new bar is allowing ourselves to dwell in the only place where

change really happens. It can be terrifying. It can also be enlightening in the true sense of the word. Hurling through the void, we just may learn how to fly.

OFFERING

READING Gospel of Mark 16:1-6. NRSV

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Salome bought spices so that they might go and anoint (Jesus) ... And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been pushed back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid for him.

ANTHEM

SERMON

The Space In-Between

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

When I was a seminarian, I served as the chaplain at the Doolittle Home, then a Unitarian Universalist Retirement Home in Foxboro, Massachusetts. It was a wonderful place to learn ministry and preaching, from people who would speak the truth in love and were

pleased to be part of my ministerial formation. For three and a half years I preached there every week, shared meals, visited with them, and even organized them into a Residents Council that had ideas about the running of things, (much to the chagrin of the Board of Trustees that had hired me). The average age of a resident there, was 87.

Weekly Chapel was held on the same day of the week as the monthly Board meetings, so occasionally a Board member would come early, attend worship, and join us for noontime dinner before the Board meeting. On one such day, a member of the Board who had attended worship stopped me in the corridor before going into dinner.

“Why do you preach like that to them?” She demanded, clearly unhappy. I was quizzical not understanding exactly about what it was that she was disturbed. “Why are you talking about all of *those* things to them?” Oh, I got it.

I had been preaching about something that was going on in the world. I have no idea about what exactly- this was more than 40 years ago, but I do remember that I was preaching about something that was current in the times. And I remember what I said to her. I remember it because I was as startled to hear it come out of my mouth, as she was to hear me say it.

“Because they are not dead yet.” I said. After a long pause, while she recovered, I went on.

“They are still people, engaged in life, living fully in their way, even living in this retirement residence.”

I was as sure of that as I was sure my name was Anita. I knew that I was speaking my truth, and if it was not acceptable to the Board, they would have to ask me to leave. Shaken as she was, that did not happen.

A couple of years later, after my ordination, when I was preparing to leave my position, I came to work one morning to a surprise. When I opened the front door a whole cluster of residents were assembled in the entry way, excited, happy, eager. They had been waiting for me. Waiting with their surprise.

“Guess what we did!” they clamored.

I had no idea.

“We all walked over to the town hall and registered to vote!”

It took my breath away. It still does, remembering that day, their pride and pleasure in what they had done. Something I’d never told them to do. Something I had never even suggested or hinted at. All I

had ever done, for three and a half years, was preach and minister to them as though they were not dead yet. And they believed me. And they chose to claim it.

In the words of Betsy Hill Williams,

There is a beginning and an end
To every race that is run.
The space in between is running.

There is a beginning and an end
To every game that is played.
The space in between is playing.

There is a beginning and an end
To every book that is read.
The space in between is reading.

Some spaces are long; some are short.
There are marathons and 50-yard dashes,
Monopoly and Tic Tac Toe,
Long chapter books and Haiku poems.

There is a beginning and an end
For everything that is alive.
The space in between is living.¹

¹ Betsy Hill Williams, *The Space Between*

The space in between is living. But between what? What do we understand as the beginning? Our birth, our entry into the world of consciousness? And what is the end? Death, the end of our participation in this world of consciousness? But truly, life is full of beginnings and endings. We know that the dying of things in the autumn yields to the resting of things in winter, which yields to the rebirth and renewal of life in the spring, its ripening in summer, harvest and dying again in autumn, on to resting in winter to rebirth in spring. It never ends, the beginnings, the endings, and the place where it happens, in-between.

We see in the trapeze artist, performance after performance, practice after practice, the truth about our lives. Always we are between. Always we are on the cusp of letting go, always we are in the reaching out to receive what is coming. And always there is the abyss, the eternal-seeming space between, when we just have to trust the very Spirit of Life to hold us while we exist in the space in-between.

I wonder how that experience might be different for each of us, depending upon how we frame these moments of release and reconnection.

Do we think of our release from the familiar trapeze bar we know, as a death? A good-bye to the familiar that flings us into an unknown from which we reach out to grab the next handle that will be a rebirth, reconnecting us to life, swinging us back into orbit?

Or, alternately, what if our release from the familiar trapeze bar is actually the moment of birth, the in-between space the experience of life, and the clutching onto the next bar, an ending, a death of sorts, until the next opportunity to leap, swinging back into life?

Very different.

My beloved residents decided to do that- to claim the space in-between as their place, in the living, the space in-between with all of its risks and potential rewards, real life.

When Moses and the Israelites walked for forty years through the desert, finding their way from slavery into freedom, and finally into a settled life, if the only thing that mattered was getting there, it would have been a profound story of death, because they'd wandered for a generation and most of those who had started out, didn't make to the other land, not even Moses. Even if you don't know your Bible, you probably know of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s electrifying and prophetic speech in 1968 acknowledging that he may not get there, where we

were going- to freedom, with us, but that he was okay because he had been to the mountain top and had seen the Promised Land. King was intentionally likening himself to Moses, because it was a message of validation and empowerment.

If the time the people spent in-between was wasted time, wasted in waiting, it would be a sad, sad story indeed. King would not have turned to it for validation. But if the in-between time was the time when they became a people, a time when they bonded in a new way and claimed for themselves a narrative about who they were and where they were going, a narrative about to whom they belonged, and to what they were accountable, a narrative about their amounting to something, my friends, that was no empty ether of time, but rather the crucible of creation itself. The beginning was their fleeing slavery, and the end was their settlement in the Promised Land and the time in-between was the becoming.

The Easter story can also be more deeply appreciated, if we relinquish the tired old ways of hearing it, and see it instead as a tale of transformation, in which what had been an experience of sadness and grief became an invitation to walk together toward an envisioned Promised Land. In this case, a land in which there would be justice, equity and compassion. The task was not in waiting, but in becoming, becoming something new.

When the women gathered at the tomb intending to prepare their friend's body for burial, they were thinking it was the end. The end of their friend, the end of the story, the end of the narrative they'd been telling as they'd travelled with Jesus.

However, they were in a parallel situation to the Israelites who were going on, now keepers of the vision, without Moses, and the Americans who are going forward, now keepers of the vision without King, and these folks, Jesus friends and followers, who had received the vision of beloved community, and were now called to learn how to live it.

It was a critical re-conception of what had been a story of death and loss, into a story of the becoming of a people. A story we all share.

And none of us are there yet. We are living in the in-between times, the times when we are to be creating the vision we have claimed, to be a people of justice, equity and compassion, to be the beloved community.

And to make sure that we do not get too discouraged, the God of Life and Love and all things beautiful, gives us spring, when the world awakes, and we wake with it, and once again, the call to push off of the old safe trapeze is compelling, and the leap into the creative space in-

between, almost seems wonderful. A little unnerving...but wonderful, nonetheless.

May it be so. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN *Lo the Earth Awakes Again* #61

BENEDICTION

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)

.