

Thought for Contemplation:

*“everything flowers from within,
Of self blessing;
though sometimes it is
necessary to re-teach a thing its loveliness...
until it flowers again from within,
of self blessing.”*

-Galway Kinnell

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS Pauli Juneau

SPECIAL PRESENTATION on THE SEARCH PROCESS Laura Graham

CHALICE LIGHTING reader: Marilyn Williams Lighter: John Williams

May this chalice light our morning
With love and learning
Sending us forward
With new wonder and hope.

Anita Farber-Robertson

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather here, in this place
Made holy by our presence
With our memories and hope,
Our sorrows and our joys,
With our gratitude, in whatever measure
That once again, we have had this time.
It is good, so good, to be together.

Anita Farber-Robertson

HYMN *The Morning Hangs a Signal*

#40

CHILDREN'S TIME Rev. Anita

Two weeks ago, when it was Labor Day weekend, I went hiking with some friends.

As we were going up the mountain, there was a family with three children coming down, two boys and a girl. They were bouncing and happy.

One boy said to me, "Oh, it is awesome up there. Wait until you get there. It is just awesome."

His brother said, "Good thing it is a nice day. We had a great view. If it hadn't been nice, the whole thing would have been pointless. You wouldn't have been able to see anything."

"Really?" I said. "Pointless?" You wouldn't have been able to see anything?"

He shook his head, certain.

"Maybe a mushroom." I said, "if it had been raining. You might have seen a mushroom."

His father and sister got engaged, thinking about what else they might have seen.

We wished them well as they went down, and they wished us well as we went up.

They were right. The view was awesome at the top. (show picture) We enjoyed ourselves up there. Long views are inspiring.

A few days later I was walking the dog by my house in Massachusetts. There was a beautiful long view- so beautiful, I stopped and took a picture. (show picture) See the water and the boats, and the dramatic clouds.

Yesterday I went walking the dog again. It was raining. No long view. But because there was no long view, I got to look at the close view. And the close view was beautiful too. (show pictures of stones) If I had only spent time looking at long views, I would have missed these beautiful close views, and that would have been shame.

Can you think of some close views you have noticed- maybe even pointed them out to others, of interesting or pretty things right up close that other people didn't even notice?

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: *Lost* by David Wagoner reader: Tim Vogel

Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,
I have made this place around you.
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.
No two trees are the same to Raven.
No two branches are the same to Wren.
If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.

ANTHEM *Return Again*

READING: *300 Goats* by Naomi Shihab Nye reader: Miriam Congdon 11:00 am

In icy fields.
Is water flowing in the tank?
Will they huddle together, warm bodies pressing?
(Is it the year of the goat or the sheep?
Scholars debating Chinese zodiac, follower or leader.)
O lead them to a warm corner,
little ones toward bulkier bodies.
Lead them to the brush, which cuts the icy wind.
Another frigid night swooping down —
Aren't you worried about them? I ask my friend,
who lives by herself on the ranch of goats,
far from here near the town of Ozona.
She shrugs, "Not really,
they know what to do. They're *goats*."

OFFERING
SERMON

Becoming as Goats

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

I've officiated at many weddings, helped couples think about what they wanted their wedding to be like and why. Most of them spend an incredible amount of time and energy on planning. Somewhere along in our work together on the service though, I caution them.

“It doesn’t always turn out exactly the way we planned it to be. Things happen- that we didn’t expect. No matter what happens, remember that the only thing that matters is that when you leave, you are married. Everything else is optional. If the dresses are wrong, the groom’s shoes don’t match, the music is too loud, and the boutonnieres never arrive, they all become the funny stories around which you weave the story of your wedding, to tell over and over again through the years.”

We won’t do it on purpose, I assure them. Have things go wrong, I mean. But it will happen- something will “go wrong,” be different from how you thought it would be, and you are going to get over it and go on, because the important thing, is that you have chosen each other and made promises before us. And we who gather are witnesses, committed to supporting you, as you live into those promises. That’s what matters. Everything else, is fluff.

I tell them that because it is easy to let the anxiety take over, getting lost in the weeds of the details, forgetting for what it is, that we are doing this at all. It has a purpose, the wedding, and that purpose, is not about the dress.

Aren't you worried about them? I ask my friend,
who lives by herself on the ranch of goats,

far from here near the town of Ozona.

She shrugs, "Not really,

they know what to do. They're *goats*."¹

They know what to do, the goats. Sometimes though, my couples need to be coached initially, on what to do; but most, at some point, understand that it is not about the dress. It is about the family they are creating, the story of that family, and what in that unfolding story is of ultimate importance. When they know that, they know what to do.

So it is with A2U2. We are going through a lot of planning as you prepare to search for and eventually call a new minister. The planning is important. Each step will help clarify who you are and where you want to go. And it doesn't always turn out exactly the way we planned it to be. No matter what happens, remember that the only thing that matters is that when the process is finished, you are confident that you have chosen the right person, who shares your vision, wants to do what you want to do, and who wants to go where you want to go, and they are confident they have chosen the congregation with whom they want to journey. The partnership. Everything else is optional.

¹ Naomi Shihab Nye, *300 Goats*, Source: *Poetry* (January 2016).

The other thing I tell them, these couples, is to pay attention. Time during the ceremony will be like a time warp. If they focus and stay truly present, it will seem like an eternity while they are up there, because it is; they are in sacred time, which is eternal. And, when it is over, they will be astonished. “That was it?!” It will feel so sudden, that transition out of sacred time and back into ordinary time. They make the transition, but they come out of it with the memory of being awake and aware and fully alive. That experience of being fully present becomes a resource into which they can dip when the going gets rough.

I’m not going to try to tell you that these two years of transition through which we are traveling together, is eternal time (although to some of you, impatient ones, it may feel almost eternal). But I am going to suggest that it is sacred time. It is time for stopping the headlong rush into whatever is next, and being present to yourselves here, to who you are now, in this never to be repeated moment.

Knowing how to stand in the moment, relieved of expectations, to simply be present, is to be blessed with incredible joy and the readiness to welcome what may be coming.

Dr. Rachel Remen tells the story of one of her patients who had Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. The woman spent all of her time cataloging all of her symptoms, down to tiniest detail, and then going from doctor

to doctor with her litany of woes. This was her life. She recorded it faithfully in her journal. Actually, what she revealed in her journal was that she thought she had no life. She recognized, in reading over the journal, that...

She...thought...that you had to be without symptoms to enjoy life, to go to the theater, to have children, to love. It was as if life was lived only by well people.²

Then the woman started meditating. Through meditation it occurred to her that it was not the disease that was stopping her from participating in life and its activities, but the ideas she had and the attributions she had made. There was nothing stopping her from going to the theater or a concert; if she got too tired, she could leave early.

It seems obvious now, to us, but it was a revelation to her- that she could have a life, a good life, even if it wasn't perfect, or even easy.

Aren't you worried about them? I ask my friend,
who lives by herself on the ranch of goats,
far from here near the town of Ozona.
She shrugs, "Not really,
they know what to do. They're *goats*."³

² Rachel Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, Riverhead Books, 1996.

³ Naomi Shihab Nye, *300 Goats*, Source: *Poetry* (January 2016).
Kitchen table Wisdom

Ah, were we goats! But we aren't goats. Sometimes, we get so detached from our true selves, we lose sight of what we would know intuitively if only we released the anxiety and just showed up.

Rachel Remen tells us that this woman has stopped pursuing the perfect health she once had, and now does what she can to strengthen the body she does have in simple ways. "She has discovered that by being willing to begin without being certain of the outcome, she is often able to do more than she (ever) would have thought.⁴

Hmmm. "Being willing to begin without being certain of the outcome..." To just do it. To just be here. Yourself. Do it; be here now. Feel the expansiveness of it. Know who you are. Know you are here. Now, know what you feel called to do. Can you try that- right now? Just being here in yourself? Expansive. Beautiful. Whole.

And we are going to do that as a congregation.

Not only that, we are going to do something else, something you might think of as the opposite. We are also going to be thinking about the future, the horizon, the desired state we want for A2U2, along with our history, the trajectory of our common story. Truly they are all of a piece.

⁴ Rachel Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom*

We cannot realistically and wisely craft a future unless we are grounded in our present. When we know who we are and from where we have come, our dreams have fertile soil in which to be planted and grow. Branches need roots.

It has been said that the true religions of Americans are optimism and denial. Shaky ground. Ground that requires defensiveness. We have seen some of the high cost of our American denial of our history, and how that denial has been wedded to our exceptionalism.

You have invited yourselves to do something different. You have before you the opportunity to craft a future of possibility that is grounded in reality. To keep your eye on the prize while your feet are on the ground. Maybe this is the deepest dimension of trying a different way to be church. To humbly acknowledge who and where you are, reaching deep into that soil, while courageously exploring paths to parts unknown.

Wherever you are is called Here,
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,
Must ask permission to know it and be known.⁵

⁵ David Wagoner, *Lost*

Let that be what we do together this year. Encountering *here* as the powerful stranger, asking permission to know it and be known, becoming over time, as wise as goats, knowing what to do, and when to do it. A different way of being church.

Amen and Blessed Be.

CLOSING HYMN *Just as Long as I Have Breath* #6

BENEDICTION

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)