

Thought for Contemplation: “Be the love you never received.” -Rune Cazuli

Worship Allen Ave. Unitarian Universalist Church

September 22, 2019

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHALICE LIGHTING Reader: Zoe Johnson-Watters, Lighter: Cora Stevenson, helper, Ben Stevenson

May this chalice remind us
That there is enough love in this world
To hold everyone,
And that we are here to share it.

Anita Farber-Robertson

CALL TO WORSHIP *Each Day* by Kristen Harper ♥ adapted, in *Voices from the Margins*

Each day provides us with an opportunity to love again,
To hurt again, to embrace joy,
To experience unease,
To discover the tragic.
Each day provides us with the opportunity to live.
This day is no different, this hour no more unique than the last,
Except...Maybe today, maybe now,
Among friends and fellow journeyers,
Maybe for the first time, maybe silently,
We (will) share ourselves.

HYMN *Woyaya* #1020

CHILDREN'S TIME *Bob Moseley*
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

READING *Nothing is Static* by Manish Mishra-Marzetti♥

The ground shifts, sometimes slowly,
sometimes like an earthquake,
reminding us that the solidity
we often love and seek
is an illusion.

The crumbling dust of the desert plains,
the moist fertility of farmlands,
the eroding coastline of tidal shores,
all are changing.

Communities dissolve or are created,
leaders retire or step away,
ministers come and go,
by-laws are amended.

New experiences,
lead to new truth,
which foster
evolution;

the natural course of life
always pushing us
toward greater understandings
of what it means
to be human.

Everything about our existence
points toward change,
flexibility, and
dynamic re-creation.

And it's hard because
change involves loss.

Can we hold the losses well,
while not holding ourselves back?

The ground shifts sometimes slowly,
sometimes like an earthquake;
Nothing is static.

OFFERING

READING *Mosaic Makers* Alicia Forde♥ reader: Carol Hayden 11:00 am

The Mosaic Makers by Alicia Forde

You are Mosaic Makers, practitioners of justice,
called to respond to brokenness in the world,
restoring beauty by joining in solidarity
with the least of these,
the poor, the undocumented, the wrongly persecuted
because of sex or gender identity or race.

You, the Mosaic Makers, practitioners of justice,
will minister to each other
for this ministry needs your energy your passion,
your hands in order to thrive.
It needs your wildly beating heart to animate its spirit.

Being Mosaic Makers isn't easy, the pieces can be so tiny.
It's difficult to see the whole picture,
you always risk making a mistake and needing to undo.
You will have moments of dis-ease, of needing to apologize.
Make amends, restore your covenant.
You will have moments of fatigue.
Share leadership, invite others
You, Mosaic Makers, practitioners of justice

your work is an act of gratitude for those who came before
and for that which is yet to be...

How blessed you are. How blessed we are to be in this together.

ANTHEM Turn the World Around

SERMON

Always the Opportunity

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

When I was growing up there was a couple with whom my parents were friends- Jim and Rita. Most often their socializing was in the evening.

I remember my mother preparing for when they would visit. There would be interesting foods she'd put out, that they would snack on as they socialized, finishing up with a dessert she made and coffee, over which they'd linger for a long time. Sometimes I'd help my mother make the dessert, hoping there would be some left over for me the next day. Almost always, there was.

Jim was Rita's second husband. Rita had married when very young, a dashing young man who had traveled to the United States briefly, dazzled Rita and brought her home to Persia as his bride.

Persia, as Rita always called it, now Iran, was a very different country from the United States, but she settled in. She lived with her husband's parents, learned the customs, and rules, of which there were many, and the specific constraints on the activities of women. Over time the constraints became burdensome. She wanted her girls to have the opportunity for a good education, which they would not have there, and so she left, returning to America.

One day, after they had been friends for many years, I was old enough for my mother to confide in me about something that astonished her and left her feeling deeply embarrassed.

My mother had learned somehow, that when they went to visit Rita and Jim, the food they spread out for company, was essentially the food they had purchased for the week. To be hospitable to their guests, they laid everything out lavishly and beautifully on the table. It was Persian hospitality.

My mother grew up in a Jewish American home. They promoted the "clean plate club," concept, where she had been taught as a child to eat everything on her plate. She had learned that to be offered food at Grandma's or Aunt Fanny's or Cousin Lilian's and not eat it, was to insult them, to hurt their feelings. Not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings, she ate whatever was put in front of her. So, as an adult, when they visited Rita and Jim's and saw that big spread, she thought they were expected to eat it. They gave it their best shot, not wanting to offend or hurt their hosts. They'd come home stuffed, a little uncomfortable, but it was worth it, because they valued the friendship.

When my mother told me that she had learned that over the years they had been gobbling up the family's weekly supply of food, because Rita's Persian sense of hospitality had put out things the guests were expected to know to not eat, she felt awful.

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I served a church which had been served by the same music director for more than fifty years. She was devoted to the church and committed to her work. She wanted to create a children's choir. She laid the ground-work- calling all the parents. Talking to all the children. Having one on one conversations with the children who had been especially receptive. The first rehearsal was scheduled for a Saturday morning. I happened to be in the building. The children filed into the sanctuary for their first rehearsal, all in their Saturday play clothes. The boys in their baseball caps. She was annoyed. Boys in the sanctuary with their hats on. She made them all take off their baseball caps. She muttered about the disrespectful children we had these days.

After they had gone, I tried to explain to her that these boys were not being disrespectful by wearing their baseball caps in the sanctuary. That disrespect was an intention, an attitude, and disrespect was not what these boys had. They had come wanting to sing. In their children's world, there is no disrespect in wearing a baseball cap indoors. She wouldn't have it...would not allow that the cultures might be different, the meanings might be different. The children's choir lost most of its boys.

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¹ Kristen Harper, *Voices from the Margins*, Jacqui James and Mark Morrison-Reed, ed., Skinner House, 2012

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Every year in the days just prior to the Unitarian Universalist Association's General Assembly, we hold Ministry Days, which include continuing education for our ministers. One year, several years ago, they brought in a renowned linguist to speak with us – he was speaking about cultural differences from a linguist's perspective. It was an eye opener for me. He was talking about patterns of speaking when we are speaking with each other in pairs or in groups. Apparently, different cultures have different amounts of time that are to be allotted to the spaces between when each person talks. It is how we know that the other person is finished, and we may speak without being rude, or cutting them off. The continuum and variations are huge, explaining many of the difficulties and misunderstandings we may be experiencing.

He explained, on one end of the continuum, is the Native American culture, and many other indigenous people. Those are the cultures in which the longest amount of time is left between each person speaking. A common consequence of this difference of practice between Euro-Americans and Native Americans is frustration and often, eventually, distrust or dismissal of each party by the other. It goes something like this:

An essentially Euro-American group is working on something-maybe a social justice project. It occurs to them that the group is missing the perspective of the Native American community. They invite the Native American community to participate in the planning. The Native American community agrees that they share common interests

²Kristen Harper, *Voices from the Margins*, Jacqui James and Mark Morrison-Reed, ed., Skinner House, 2012

and sends some representatives. They meet for several months. The Native American participants listen but never say anything. Eventually, the Native Americans stop coming. Some of the Euro-Americans are upset and disappointed. Others shrug- “they never really participated anyway,” they say. “They never said a word.”

Meanwhile, back in the Native American community, frustration has built to the point of anger. Better to step away, they thought, than get so angry. Why were they so angry? “Well, “ they explained, “we spent months at those meetings and they never let us get an word in edgewise!”

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At the other end of the spectrum, he said, were New Yorkers and Jews, who left no space at all. And sometimes, particularly New York Jews, talked at the same time. He noted that while in Euro-American culture talking at the same time is considered rude and disrespectful, its role and meaning in Jewish and particularly New York Jewish culture is the opposite. It is a way of offering encouragement and support. Talking along with someone is like saying, “I’m with you; I get it; I’m tracking you and empathetic.” There is actually a term in linguistics for this talking with someone while they are talking- it’s called underlining.

For me it was a huge Aha! I remembered a funny story my parents used to tell. When they were first married, it was the custom for all of the brothers and sisters and their spouses to gather for Sunday dinner

³ Kristen Harper, *Voices from the Margins*, Jacqui James and Mark Morrison-Reed, ed., Skinner House, 2012

at Grandma's house. My father, immigrant from Germany, welcomed into this New York Jewish family, would come home exhausted. He said, "I try to listen to what everybody is saying but I can't I can't keep track of it all." My puzzled mother asked why he was trying to listen to everybody. "Well," he said, "Everyone was talking. No one was listening. So, I thought they were all talking to me."

My mother got a good laugh out of that and tried to reassure her German husband that in fact all of those talking people were also listening. He was not meant to be the primary listener.

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We encounter these cultural differences in the church. What looks clean and uncluttered to some, may look cold and sterile to others. What expectations we have for timeliness of responses will vary according to our cultures of reference.

In my house, people who showed up early for something were experienced as rude. I remember one time when my mother, fed up with her brother and his wife, always coming early, answered the door when they rang the bell, wearing only her slip and holding a mop. "Oh," she said sweetly. "you're early."

I remember being both embarrassed by my Mom, and in awe of her chutzpah.

⁴ Kristen Harper, *Voices from the Margins*, Jacqui James and Mark Morrison-Reed, ed., Skinner House, 2012

So, when I arrive somewhere early, I stay in my car, put back the seat and rest, or read a book until the appointed time, because to me, it is more rude to be early, than it is to be late. I know that is not New England culture. I struggle with it still.

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When our culture is a match with the majority of folks, we do not notice that there are rules everyone is following, whether it be how long we wait before speaking, how much food we take from the table, how late is too late, how early too early, do we actively volunteer or wait to be invited, speak up or wait to be recognized, - those just a few. And we may not realize who we left out, who is missing from the conversation, from the relationship, from the creation of the new thing we are dreaming into being, because we are swimming in our own culture.

We live in a multicultural world in which we want to be participants, competent- even joyful. You have said you not only want it in your world, you want it in your lives and in your church.

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⁵ Kristen Harper, *Voices from the Margins*, Jacqui James and Mark Morrison-Reed, ed., Skinner House, 2012

Come, next Saturday for our Multicultural Competency Training. It will be fun, and eye opening. And it will help us be the people and the church we mean to be.

Amen, and Blessed be.

CLOSING HYMN *De Colores* #305

BENEDICTION

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)

♥ Indicates author is a person of color