**Thought for Contemplation:** “If we have no peace it is because we have forgotten we belong to each other.” Mother Teresa

**Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church**

**January 26, 2010**

 INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONNECTION 11:00 am

CHALICE LIGHTING reader: Leo Robinson, lighter: Ben Stevenson

We light this chalice

As we gather once again

Celebrating the warmth of this place

And the certainty of its welcome. Anita Farber-Robertson

CALL TO WORSHIP *Bring Your Broken Hallelujah Here* by Theresa I. Soto

Bring your broken hallelujah here.

Bring the large one that is beyond

Repair. Bring the small one that’s

too soft to share. Bring your broken

Hallelujah here. I know that people

Have told you that before you can give

You have to get yourself together. They

Overstated the value of perfection by a

Lot. Or they forgot. You are the gift.

We will all bring some broken things, songs

And dreams and long lost hopes. But

here, and together, we reach within.

As a community, we begin again. And

from the pieces we will build something new.

There is work that only you can do. We

wait for you.

HYMN *We Give Thanks* #1010

WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS CEREMONY (see insert)

Bettye McNeely

Charlie Mitchell & John LA Brie

Sandra Schuerman

Silvia Hansen

Don & Charley Schuman

Peter & Lisa Reed

reinstating:

Kevin Ryan

Cynthia & Ted Cushman

**Song** (seated) *Go with Me to that Land* #1018

(Children are invited to go to their program.)

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONNECTION 9:00 am

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION

JOYS AND SORROWS

MEDITATION AND PRAYER

READING: Lessons from the Geese by Robert McNeish readers: 9:00am Carol Jenkins & Tim Vogel

 11:00am Mike Luce, Keith Williams & Carol Hayden

**Lessons from the Geese, was written by** Dr Robert McNeish **of Baltimore.  Dr. McNeish, for many years a science teacher before he became involved in school administration, had been intrigued with observing geese for years and first wrote the piece for a sermon he delivered in his church.**

**FACT:** As each goose flaps its wings it creates an "uplift" for the bird that follows. By flying in a V formation, the whole flock adds 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.

*People who share a common direction and sense a community can get where they are going quicker and easier because they are traveling on the thrust of one another.*

**Science**: **Geese and some other species of birds migrate in distinctive “V” or “U” formations or in lines. By taking advantage of the wing tip vortex of the bird in front, each bird can save energy by reducing drag. The energy savings in flight can be as much as 50%.**

**FACT:** When a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of flying alone. It quickly moves back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird in front of it.

*If we have as much sense as a goose we stay in formation with those headed where we want to go. We are willing to accept their help and give our help to others.*

**SCIENCE: Geese have very keen eyesight and keep themselves in formation by focusing on the butt end of the goose in front of them (geese apparently have a very unique looking butt-end!)**

**FACT:** When the lead goose tires, it rotates back into the formation and another goose flies to the point position.

**Science: Contrary to popular opinion, the lead bird of the V formation is not always an adult male; rather, the geese shift their relative positions frequently during the flight.**

*It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing leadership. As with geese, people are interdependent on each other’s skills, capabilities and unique arrangements of gifts, talents or resources.*

**FACT:** The geese flying in formation honk to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

**Science: Migrating geese make loud, honking noises, called contact calls, to help them stay together**.

*We need to make sure our honking is encouraging. In groups where there is encouragement, the production is much greater. The power of encouragement is the quality of honking we seek.*

**FACT:** When a goose gets sick, wounded or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it. They stay with it until it dies or is able to fly again. Then they launch out with another formation or catch up with the flock.

**Science: Encounters such as detailed above, demonstrate that families of geese do not break up after the breeding season, but form strong family units that migrate and winter together until they return to their breeding ground.**

*If we have as much sense as geese, we will stand by each other in difficult times as well as when we are strong*

OFFERING

ANTHEM 11:00am

SERMON

*Turning to the Geese*

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

Have you been watching the news lately? Many of us are gripped by the current test of our nation’s democracy, a democracy whose roots are in our churches, the covenanted communities established on these shores by our forbearers, where democratic governance was honed and practiced. We wonder if it has the resilience to survive.

I acknowledge that all that we inherited from our religious forbearers was not great. They came uninvited. They accepted the authority of the English crown to give them the land, as though the English crown owned it. Despite their rebelliousness, they were so deeply embedded in English lore and culture, they could not see outside of it. The white supremist assumptions they held then, haunt and hamper us still, creating great chasms between the society we create, and the perfect, equitable city on a hill they, and we, imagined and to which we still aspire. Our history and our heritage are a mixed bag, some of it horrific and disturbing, and some of it so wonderful we are still nourished and sustained by what they have left and taught us.

And so, we must be careful, sorting through our inheritance, identifying what is troubling or even toxic, the sexism, the racism, the exceptionalism that keeps appearing within us, surfacing like contaminated ground water. Bubbling up. And us drinking of it.

In that, I am reminded of the old Rabbinic story of the kingdom in which the drinking water was making all of the subjects insane. The king consulted with the chief rabbi. He was faced with a conundrum.

“What shall we do?” cried the king, wringing his hands. “If we don’t drink the water, and stay sane, the people will all think we are crazy and run us out or kill us. And if we do drink the water, we too will be insane.”

The rabbi had a plan. “Your majesty,” he said. “You are right. This is a dilemma. This is what we will do. We will put marks on our foreheads, you and I. And then, we shall drink the water.”

“Drink the water?” The king was surprised. “Then we too shall be insane.”

“Yes, your majesty. We too shall become insane. But we will be able to look upon each other, and see the mark upon our forehead, and know that we are insane.”

And so they did.

I submit to you, my dear friends, that we must be like the king and the rabbi, when it comes to white supremacy, sexism and exceptionalism.

We must mark ourselves, to keep us aware that we are constantly drinking of that Kool-Aid. When we catch ourselves acting out of it, we can do for one another what the rabbi and the king did for each other- remind us that we carry the mark. That we too have drunk of the white supremist, sexist, exceptionalist Kool-Aid and are participants in it. It did come down to us as part of our inheritance, but there was more. From those forbearers of long ago, we inherited the practice of covenant and the sustaining values we so cherish.

That’s the other part. Along with the troubling beliefs and attitudes, we have inherited the dreams and the vision of the ancient Hebrew prophets, of the radical visionary Jesus, and of our Universalist forbearers. These things we cherish:

🟋The church as a covenanted community committed to one another’s well-being.

🟋The church as a place where people are nurtured and grow. 🟋The church as a democratic institution in which all who are gathered participate, sharing the gifts they have to offer;

🟋The church as sanctuary, where all have a place and are recognized and valued.

 It could be easy to forget these values when gripped with the anxiety of the times. Easy to succumb to becoming more like the very thing that is destroying us. Easy to so absorb the reactivity, so that we forget that in addition to those toxic elements in the common air we breathe, we have the strength and compassion of our foundational values and principles – principles which challenge those elements, and call us to another way, reminding us of the mark on our foreheads, telling us, yes, we have participated in those toxic things, but they don’t define us. We can see beyond and are much more. We have alternatives. We have community in covenant. Not just in theory, but in practice. Here, in the middle of an everyday city on an everyday street. Allen Ave. Pretty amazing.

Oh, we aren’t fully there yet. I know that (I haven’t drunk that much Kool-Aid!). You know it too. We are aspirational, not utopian. But doesn’t the world need that now? Doesn’t our country need that now? Don’t we need that now? Really need that aspiration to be repeated, lifted up, as the mission toward which we are moving, the goal our strategies are designed to approach. And we, as a faith community, need to have strategies that are not only effective, they need to be congruent with our aspiration. The means and the ends must align.

And for help with that, I turn to the geese, who do not get easily distracted by baubles, or wealth, power or status. They just do what needs to be done in a way that sustains the larger body…and gets them all there, whole and well.

I remind us:

✈“ As each goose flaps its wings it creates an "uplift" for the bird that follows. By flying in a V formation, the whole flock adds 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew alone.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

And so, we travel together. We at A2U2. And we welcome our new members into our formation, with its aspiration, and a determination to move forward, each mitigating the drag on the others.

✈“When a goose falls out of formation, it feels the drag and resistance of flying alone, and moves back into the more efficient formation.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Imagine if one of us were to decide to help homeless refugee families in Portland. How much resistance would we encounter? For how long could we help even one family? But by working in formation, with Family Promise, here as trained volunteers, and in formation with other congregations, we have been able to help dozens of families find their way and make a home in Portland.

✈“When the lead goose tires, it rotates back into the formation, and another goose flies to the point position.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

When we are working at our best, we are recruiting and grooming people all the time. No one person needs to be in the lead of anything all the time. We are going to let Diane retire as President at the end of this church year, with gratitude. She will step back into the congregation and someone else will step into that lead, with others behind them to help with the flying.

✈“The geese flying in formation honk to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.”

My mother used to say, “Anita, you can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.” She was right. It is easy to criticize. Surely there are many things we do that could have been done differently, or even better. And we do want to learn how to do better, but we want to learn in the context of being valued and affirmed. Let us always start with the honking, with the affirmations, with the deep appreciation, of each other and of the time and care that each has given. And sometimes let us stop right there. Sometimes let the appreciation sink in. Let us rest in it, in the wonder of each other and the generosity of the moment.

✈ “When a goose gets sick, wounded or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it. They stay with it until it dies or is able to fly again. Then they launch out with another formation or catch up to the flock.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

I must say, I have seen you, A2U2 do this for each other over and over again. You have walked with our beloveds while they died. You have comforted us while we grieved. You have held us in light and care when we were hurting. And you are currently struggling to find a system and an organizer who could coordinate meals and rides for people who are sick, recovering from surgery, or otherwise temporarily incapacitated. Maybe today is the day one of you realize you could move up into the formation and lead that compassionate organizational task. “When a goose gets sick, wounded or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it.” Isn’t that the foundation of our covenant? It is how we intend to be there, for one another.

Some of you may be thinking, isn’t that what families do? Aren’t these the jobs of families? And we all know that some families do these things better than others, for a variety of reasons. But it is part of the toxic cultural Kool-Aid that we drink, that makes us think that people, or families, ought to be making it alone.

Nobody can make it alone (although some pretend, denying the help they have received). Nobody should try. We were born to be in community. And we who have gathered, and you, dear ones who have just joined, have chosen this one, this blessed congregation, to be our own. A2U2, our covenanted community of faith and practice, can be the aspirational foundation of our resilience and our courage. And we all need that. May it be so.

Amen and blessed be.

CLOSING HYMN *We Would Be One* #318

BENEDICTION

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)

1. Robert McNeish [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Op cit [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Op cit [↑](#footnote-ref-4)