

Thought for Contemplation: "It is in our lives and not our words that our religion must be read." Thomas Jefferson

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONNECTION (11:00am)

Carol Hayden re: Share the Plate (11:00am)

CHALICE LIGHTING. Reader: Schuyler Stevenson, Lighter: Cora Stevenson

As this chalice holds our light

May it also hold our stories,

Of long ago,

Those living today

And those to come tomorrow.

Anita Farber-Robertson

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come with us, into this time for

renewing your strength

finding your thoughts

hearing your voice

and joining together in affirming

That life is good,

That love is possible,

And that together we are emboldened

to bless and heal our precious world.

Let us worship together.

Anita Farber-Robertson

HYMN *Over My Head*

30

CHILDREN'S TIME

Rev. Anita

There are things we used to think that we don't think anymore.

I used to think that girls couldn't be ball players.

Why? Because all the ball players I saw were boys.

I used to think that Daddy's couldn't stay home and raise their children.

Why? Because when I was growing up, all the Dads I knew didn't.

I used to think that only children went to school.

Then one day my Dad came home and announced that he had signed up to take French classes. And he had homework! Which was great, because I became a grownup who loves to take classes, just like my Dad.

I used to think that women couldn't be police officers, or astronauts, because they didn't used to be allowed to be. But now they are allowed to be, and they are good at it.

I used to think that a woman couldn't be president. Now I think she could.

What are some things you used to think?

That is the wonderful thing about life. We keep learning and changing what we think as we have more experiences. It is true about all kind of things, including our religion, what we think about life, about God, and about what it means to be a person.

...important things to think about, even as our thinking changes.

9amSong (seated) Go Now in Peace #413

(Children are invited to go now for a brief introduction to their program.)

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONNECTION (9:00am)

Carol Hayden re: Share the Plate (9:00am)

SHARING OUR JOURNEY Steve Hansen

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION

JOYS AND SORROWS

MEDIATION AND PRAYER

READING: from *Bringing God Home, A Traveler's Guide* by Forrest Church

reader: Carol Jenkins 9:00am; Lee Shenton 11:00am

I am not dismissive of my faith's virtues. I treasure my freedom of belief and subscribe to our emphasis on "deeds not creeds," holding with Thomas Jefferson that "It is in our lives and not our words that our religion must be read." I quote Plato in my sermons, ponder Hindu scriptures, and seek insight from contemporary biblical criticism. I would be a hypocrite to disdain essays written by members of the modern clergy. And I remain a humanist to the extent that I believe all meanings to be a product of human experience, not divine revelation.

But I have long since become disenchanted with the tiny gods of our modern age, including, but not limited to, materialism, success, knowledge, and, if we worship them, both health and happiness.

Every religion has its idols. When we grow too comfortable in our faith, there is always the danger that the God we believe in is too small. Yet nonbelievers fare no better. When we accustom ourselves to disbelief, the God we disbelieve is someone else's little God. In either instance, tripping along unmindfully from one day to the next, we need a prison breaker: rock over scissors, scissors over paper, paper over rock.

OFFERING

READING: *The Little Duck* by Donald Babcock

Reader: Pat Parker 9:00am; Barbara Murray 11:00am

Now we are ready to look at something pretty special.
It is a duck riding the ocean a hundred feet beyond the surf,
And he cuddles in the swells.
There is a big heaving in the Atlantic.
And he is part of it.
He can rest while the Atlantic heaves, because he rests in the Atlantic.
Probably he doesn't know how large the ocean is.

And neither do you.

But he realizes it.

And what does he do, I ask you.

He sits down in it.

He reposes in the immediate as if it were infinity – which it is.

That is religion, and the duck has it.

I like the little duck.

He doesn't know much.

But he has religion.

ANTHEM *Sweet Radiant Mystery*

SERMON

Finding Your Religion

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

I was delighted when Steve asked if he could share his spiritual journey. I was delighted because Steve is relatively new to our congregation, and I was sure people would want to know more about him. But even more importantly, I knew that Steve has a spiritual path that is quite different from my own. I wanted to hear about it, and experience the theological diversity in this, our big tent that welcomes all who journey.

In many ways, Unitarian Universalism is a way of *being*, more than a way of *believing*. I am reminded of the quip years ago by Lewis Beals Fisher who said:

“Universalists are often asked to tell where they stand.

The only true answer to give to this question is that we do not stand at all; we move.”

It's another way of saying that we grow, that we understand faith to be a journey and an explore. And if we are authentically seeking, learning and exploring, our faith will change. Mine has. Sometimes that seeking has been incredibly disruptive to my life and to my family and friends. Even when it challenges my deepest understanding of myself, even when it tests relationships and requires a reconceiving of my place and purpose, what has kept me comfortable in the seeking, is knowing that as long as I seek after truth, deep truth, I will never move beyond a place where this faith can't hold me.

That's how it's been for me, and my experience. But I can't tell you how to have yours. We each find our religion in our own most personal and intimate ways...our own circuitous journeys. I don't know what events in your life might be the decisive ones that kick started you on your journey, or generated a sharp twist or turn.

Else Baer, of the Unitarian Fellowship in Muttontown, NY, tells this about her spiritual journey:

This is about childbirth. It was in 1942, long before Lamaze or anything of the kind. It was not good manners to talk about

intimate things, and while I had all the technical information, I did not know what to expect. I was very happy about the baby, and I was not afraid. I thought if others can live through it, I can too.

The pains started and were quite bearable. The pains got harder, and for a few minutes I had the feeling, “Do you really want to go through with this?” And then, suddenly, I had no more time to think of my pain. I was taken along by something tremendous that was happening to me, in me, through me. It was an experience that does not compare to anything else...I don’t know why it happened to me, of all people.¹

Elsie, in that moment was not seeking her religion. She was not looking for God. She was a down to earth person, with no thoughts about the numinous, or the transcendent, about dwelling in a world infused with an essence so large, so all encompassing, so holy, that it could take her pain and her gripping experience and transform it into belonging, into knowing she was held.

She is not alone.

¹ Bruce T. Marshall, *A Holy Curiosity, Stories of a liberal Religious Faith*

Now we are ready to look at something pretty special.
It is a duck riding the ocean a hundred feet beyond the surf,
And he cuddles in the swells.
There is a big heaving in the Atlantic.
And he is part of it.
He can rest while the Atlantic heaves, because he rests in the
Atlantic.
Probably he doesn't know how large the ocean is.
And neither do you.
But he realizes it.
And what does he do, I ask you.
He sits down in it.
He reposes in the immediate as if it were infinity – which it is.
That is religion, and the duck has it.
I like the little duck.
He doesn't know much.
But he has religion.²

I love that little duck. He does what Elsie did in the grip of her
labor and the pain of giving birth. They both let go and rested in it.

² Donald Babcock, "The Little Duck," in *The Life Poems of Donald Babcock*

Probably he doesn't know how large the ocean is.

And neither do you.

But he realizes it.

And what does he do, I ask you.

He sits down in it.

He reposes in the immediate as if it were infinity – which it is.

Resting in the infinity that our brains cannot comprehend, and our souls know as home.

Before William Ellery Channing was a minister, (the minister who, at Jared Sparks ordination in Baltimore first articulated the principles of our American Unitarianism), he was a student at Harvard, struggling with loneliness, doubt and a crippling feeling of sinfulness. And then something happened to him. His nephew, William Henry Channing tells the story:

He was, at the time, walking as he read, beneath a clump of willows yet standing in a meadow...There burst upon his mind that view of the dignity of human nature which was ever after to uphold and cherish him...The place and hour were always sacred in his memory, and he frequently referred to them with grateful awe. It seemed to him that he then passed through a new spiritual birth and entered upon the day of eternal peace and joy.³

³ William Henry Channing, *Memoir of William Ellery Channing*

Channing too, like Elsie, and the little duck, at that moment, rested in the infinity that our brains cannot comprehend, and our souls know as home.

Dag Hammarskjold, the second Secretary General of the United Nations, and the youngest to ever hold that post, wrote in his famous journal *Markings*:

I don't know Who-or what-put the question. I don't know when it was put. I don't even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer Yes to Someone-or Something-and from that hour I was certain that existence was meaningful.

I know it is not like that for all of us. My friend and colleague, Rev. Fred Gillis used to say of us Unitarian Universalists, some of us are twice born and some of us are once born. He was speaking as one who had been born and raised a UU, and who had never had a cataclysmic awakening, but whose faith journey had unfolded somewhat seamlessly with meaningful learning and insights and deepening understandings...just without the drama, once born. Fred was a humanist from his birth until his death, remaining curious about the transcendent experiences his friends and congregants reported, while clearly enjoying a deep and meaningful religious life of love and service without it. There is more than one way to do your religion, your

Unitarian Universalist religion. Always seeking...remembering, as cautioned by Forrest Church that:

Every religion has its idols. When we grow too comfortable in our faith, there is always the danger that the God we believe in is too small. Yet nonbelievers fare no better. When we accustom ourselves to disbelief, the God we disbelieve is someone else's little God. In either instance, tripping along unmindfully from one day to the next, we need a prison breaker: rock over scissors, scissors over paper, paper over rock.⁴

That caution is well taken, but it is not sufficient. Yes, we must always be ready and willing to be challenged, to find ourselves wrong or changed, to be the rock, the scissors or the paper, found lacking and overtaken. And these moments are hard. But there is also a joy in this Unitarian Universalism that asks you to find your own religion.

Cassie Cromwell, ecology activist and Unitarian Universalist said it this way:

Be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the Universe no less than the trees and the stars. You have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. Therefore, be at peace with God, whatever you conceive (God) to be. And whatever your labors and

⁴ Forrest Church, *Bringing God Home, a Traveler's Guide*

aspirations in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul.
With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a
beautiful world⁵.

She is right, my friends. It is a beautiful world. Hold on to that.
May you, like the little duck, find your way to rest in that huge infinity
that our brains cannot comprehend, and that our souls know as home.
Its embrace is wide. It can hold you. And indeed, it is a beautiful world.

Amen, and blessed be.

CLOSING HYMN *Blue Boat Home* # 1064

BENEDICTION

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)

⁵ Quoted in Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart*