

Christopher: playing music as people enter to create a welcoming space...could be songs you invite us to sing or whatever you think would be fun and inviting...think campfire gathering maybe.

Announcements:

Come, Come Whoever You Are

Light the Chalice (Sarah) and Opening Words (Barbara)

Reading 502

Now is the accepted time, not tomorrow, not some more convenient season.

It is today that our best work can be done and not some future day or future year.

It is today that we fit ourselves for the greater usefulness of tomorrow.

Today is the seed time, now are the hours of work, and tomorrow comes the harvest and the play time

--WEB DuBois

Doxology and Mission

Choral Affirmation

Come Enter in this meeting house

*Give Heart, give Hand, give Love its way
Come hear the challenge of this hour
To call all people to one world.*

Mission Statement:

We come here to stimulate, support and empower each individual to honestly discover the spiritual, moral, and intellectual qualities necessary to live and act compassionately within the interdependent web of the human family and the environment.”

Bridging Ceremony for Emma

Introduction (Sarah): Today we honor one of the members of our community as she bridges from youth to young adult, leaving high school and entering college; Emma, will you come forward?

Words from Others to affirm Emma and her gifts (mom last): I invite each of you gathered to speak a word of affirmation that acknowledges Emma’s gifts and talents, shared in our community:

Words from Emma to the Congregation (Thanks;-)

Words for the Journey Ahead/Gift from congregation: Sarah Emma, as you move from the world of high school to college, into a new home with friends instead of family, know that there will always be a place for you here, and in any UU congregation where you may find yourself. This is a home can return to again and again... (give her the gift). We are grateful for the gifts you have brought to this community and we hope you will find new ways to engage in the life of this Fellowship and the work of Unitarian Universalism.

Reading: From Generation to Generation #649 (Sarah and Barbara)

In a house which becomes a home, one hands down and another takes up the heritage of mind and heart, laughter and tears, musings and deeds.

Love, like a carefully loaded ship, crosses the gulf between the generations.

Therefore we do not neglect the ceremonies of our passage: when we wed, when we die, and when we are blessed with a child;

When we depart and when we return; when we plant and when we harvest.

Let us bring up our children. It is not the place of some official to hand to them their heritage.

If others impart to our children our knowledge and ideals, they will lose all of us that is wordless and full of wonder.

Let us build memories in our children, lest they drag out joyless lives, lest they allow treasures to be lost because they have not been given the keys.

We live, not by things, but by the meanings of things. It is needful to transmit the passwords from generation to generation.

--Antoine De St.-Exupery

Music: Home, Philip Phillips (played by Christopher)

Slideshow begins to play while we listen to song and stays on through Offertory.

Candles of Community: Today as we move through a shortened service, I invite you to light a candle and share what's on heart in six words or less...or in silence.

“feeling grateful for community and possibility”

Offertory: Old Devil Time--Christopher

Sermon "Faith, hope and love"

Poet and speaker David Whyte has a book and lecture series on what he calls "The Three Marriages." These partnerships or relationships are:

- Marriage to a work/apprenticeship
- Marriage to life partner
- Marriage with yourself

I think there is a fourth marriage or partnership, and this is found in our relationships within communities; both our own particular relationship with a group or community but also the complex web of relationships that create particular communities such as this one; communities in which we have engaged an identity, a mission, a covenant and a vision that has both a context for the individual and for the community.

Paul tells his disciples in First Corinthians these lines (13:4-7), so often used in wedding ceremonies:

"love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices

in truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

This is spoken into community more than to married couples, however—it is about enduring in our commitments to covenanted relationships and to loving together, loving as a community response to difference and violence, as an act of salvation on each other’s behalf, on behalf of the whole community, all ages, all stages.

In the relationships we engage in community, we are invited to live through and into what is painful and challenging in order to manifest what is clear and healing; this is a different kind of learning that brings us to a deeper understanding of the world and our place in it, our role in shaping it.

Whyte says that all of these relationships, these partnerships and apprenticeships have influence and impact on the others; which is why when I marry people I tell them that the way they practice their relationship—the lessons and skills developed from this kind of partnership—brings tools to our lives in the larger context as well.

When we learn to be vulnerable and honest in a partnership with a person, we may be able to learn to be vulnerable and honest

with ourselves and a larger community, we may be able to more authentically engage the work we are called to do. And additionally, the qualities of love, commitment and generosity we engage here in this community will teach us lessons and hone our skills for sharing these in the wider circles around us.

This year, we have engaged the themes of: vision, evil, democracy, God, creation, religious authority and covenant, redemption, freedom and mercy. We have experimented with intergenerational services that are interactive and we have engaged with the wider community on issues such as genocide and human rights in Guatemala, basic needs for struggling families in and around Laramie, the history of divine right and its impact on American Indian communities, and global warming. We have also welcomed new members and said goodbye to old friends. We have attended trainings and conferences and read books together. We have engaged spiritual practices and washed dishes together. And in March, a group of members in hats came together to continue to build a vision for this community and how it will deepen its relationships and grow its connections.

Today as we prepare for our annual meeting, I want to invite you to help me sew some threads from our year together. Here are some of the ideas and insights we have engaged: We explored

courageous love. We learned from Brene' Brown that "Vulnerability is our most accurate measure of courage," it is the essential quality needed to access deep connection, to feel deeply and to acknowledge all of what life brings to our doorsteps. Courageous love comes from a place of vulnerability and mystery, where we don't know how things will turn out and we can't avoid suffering.

And as Marge Piercy tells us, we yearn to engage the world:

The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

We yearn to create a legacy, to shape our vision and leave something lasting behind. Legacy comes from vision—our vision for ourselves and our vision for our families and communities. We share a Fellowship; and within these walls we create a kind of wealth and abundance that feeds us in a particular way. This year we have considered--What legacy would you like to plant for this community? What legacy has been left for those of us arriving today? How can each of us contribute to this? And indeed, a former member has left us a loving legacy which we will discuss at our meeting; and each of you has a chance to offer something as well to the vision and future of this congregation, both in financial assistance as well as other kinds of gifts.

Margaret Wheatley asserts that “There is no power to change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.” We have begun to ask ourselves:

What can we do together that we cannot do alone?

The legacy we create together will be more potent and more deepening than the kinds of legacy we might create on our own. When we vision together, we harness new power. Poet Marge Piercy’s image of the garden mirrors this truth, telling us to “weave real connections, create real nodes, build real houses...keep tangling and interweaving and taking more in” (Seven of Pentacles).

When we make a spiritual practice out of our sharing, we find ourselves lovingly working together to make our space and the ministries that move through this space a vessel for transformation and healing. I remind you that there is a time for rest and renewal; and that there is a time for re-engaging and deepening; a time to re-evaluate your gifts and your calling; a time to step up and a time to step back.

We share the conditions of growth and flourishing as well as the conditions that cause us to shrivel and blow away—rain or

drought, sunshine or clouds, rich soil or leached and contaminated soil.

This work results in a rich harvest, says Rev. Rebecca Parker—this is an eschatology that says that “heaven [can] be found in this world wherever love prevails and the gifts of life are stewarded with reverence and respect” (Parker 10). How can we steward our gifts with reverence and respect; how can we insure that love prevails?

This community faces some challenges, for sure. These things are true: membership here at has not grown significantly in recent times, and pledging or financial stewardship has not shown growth either. We have leaders who have been doing the same job—wearing the same hat—for a long time and some of them are ready to pass their hat on to a new wearer. These are symptoms of a community in need of change. Emphasizing that there is always risk involved in transformation, Dr. Larry Graham says that “as indicators of crisis, symptoms are ‘dangerous opportunities’ for change and transformation” (93). Working for the integrity of one’s soul or one’s community means interpreting the symptoms and making an honest appraisal of where change needs to begin. When we are out of integrity in one area, there is usually a thread running through everything, connecting the symptom to a system.

It takes vulnerability and courage to face these truths and decide they are “dangerous” opportunities for something great to happen.

As Mary Oliver says:

and I thought

I am so many!

What is my name?

What is the name

of the deep breath I would take

over and over

for all of us? Call it

whatever you want, it is

happiness, it is another one

of the ways to enter

fire.

May we learn to practice this kind of breathing together, to embrace what is painful and challenging and create something stronger and healing.

In one of our opening stories this year we were asked to think about these three questions: “When is the best time to do things?” “Who is the most important one?” and “What is the right thing to do?” and we are told that the time is now, the important ones are

those standing next to us and the thing to do is stand next to them. In the story we find that we may be standing with someone unexpectedly-- someone whose work and life depends upon us to reach out and care for them. To me, this story tells us that we are in relationship as soon as our paths cross.

In fact, our presence with one another is the greatest gift we can offer each other, and we can start giving that gift right now, every day. When we shared bread at the Bread Service in November we shared these words:

BENEDICTION: Reading 727 (Rudolph Nemser)

SARAH: The bread we share this day is sacred.

Barbara: Grain, gift of the earth gives life.

SARAH: The friendship we share this day is sacred.

Barbara: All gatherings when people meet and touch, celebrate life.

SARAH: The laughter we share this day is sacred.

Barbara: Joy and Sorrow that rise from love are springs of life

SARAH: The stillness we share this day is sacred.

Barbara: In this peace is a haven for the spirit which nurtures life.

As we have journeyed together, we have explored the way in which systemic change is connected to change in our

relationships with one another and our theology as well. Building our own awareness and presence in the face of suffering and oppression, in the face of overwhelm and challenge, is about more than intellectually knowing that something is happening. This is why I have encouraged you to begin meetings with spiritual grounding—chalice lightings and spiritual practices, or personal check-ins. When we held our retreat, we began with brief worship. And today, before we meet and make decisions as a community, we engage the spiritual as well.

As UU minister and author Galen Guengerich tells us in his book *God Revised*, “worship is a discipline of opening our hearts to people we don’t fully know, our minds to ideas we don’t fully comprehend, and our souls to a divine experience we cannot fully name.” (144).

It seems to me that what’s right and what’s transcendent are that we must find ways to work in solidarity together, ways that sustain our spirits and renew us while also compelling us to speak truth to power, to advocate for change and to live the changes we hope will bring new life to our communities, to our planet and to us. And yet, it is so important for us to acknowledge what is happening to our own spirits as we face the truth and brokenness of ourselves and our communities. There are many ways to

engage in what's right, and many levels of engagement. Finding those responses that feel life-giving to you is part of this journey.

When we intellectualize problems without facing the spiritual costs in our lives, we set ourselves up for feeling ineffective and powerless. I invite you to consider that the way you take care of yourself has ramifications for how you will take care of each other, this community, and the planet.

In this frame, Rev. Holder explains that instead of “seeing issues as problems to be solved,” we might instead “see issues as a way of life to be transformed.” Instead of being “reactive” or “motivated by anger and fear” we might move into being “proactive” or “motivated by hope and creativity.”

UU theologian and writer, Rev. Thandeka, calls these practices learning to “love beyond belief,” and asks us as Unitarian Universalists to first be in community together, with spiritual grounding, before we undertake the work of the our communities and the world—organizational change, social justice and salvation in this life. This also involves developing what theologian Kathleen O'Connor calls a “hermeneutic of hunger” rather than just one of suspicion...we must allow ourselves to hunger for spirit, for community, for life-affirming change...for redemption.

At our Retreat, leaders were told: “Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and then do that thing. Because what the world needs is people who are alive.” Howard Thurman

This is because, as we are told by poet Mary Oliver,

“Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

We see that formation in the broadest sense, the formation of our souls and selves, is not ever individual work but always necessarily the work of community supporting individuals as they traverse the terrain.

Perhaps we are discovering, as Paul Rasor has, that “we don’t first exist as individuals who then form social groups. The **group always comes first**...We are social beings through and through.” Are we **shaping ourselves** and each other through shared meals cooked at home, sanghas and singing, prayer and praise, dance and delight? Are we shaped by loving circles of compassion that show up in the public square to open hearts and minds and demand justice? Are we shaped by deep **listening and presence**?

Yes. Yes. Yes, we are.

When it comes to justice work, there are many burning bushes, and yet some of us may be unmoved, we look away because we do not detect that our own freedom is intertwined with that of our brothers and sisters. As a community exploring justice, we may wonder: What will it take for us to be as inspired as Theodore Parker or Susan B. Anthony was? Moses did not want to speak, and yet he did. It is not enough that a few of us act heroically; we need each of us to take hands and work for change.

As I proclaimed in the words of Rev. Victoria Weinstein on Easter:

You are the resurrection and the life.

Parker Palmer teaches us, we each have an inner guide, a place of wisdom and depth that we can consult when we are stuck; we often find the space to heal and to forgive when we consult this inner wisdom and when we offer mercy and love to others, we give them the space to find and consult this inner guide. Being gentle with ourselves gives us space to be gentle with others, too. May we learn to breathe in and out together, finding love and peace; may we learn to ask for and offer forgiveness; may we

learn to find that holy place for our hearts and live into our relationships from that place.

These are echoes of some of the lessons we've lived this year. As we enter into a time of decision making and vision building, a time of planning and renewal let us hold these lessons of the year in our hearts and begin the work of building the future...together, with the courage and love and forgiveness necessary to speak truth, to listen and to live into new possibilities.

Closing Hymn: "Come and Go With Me" #1018

Invitation to food and break before meeting. We close this day's worship but not this day's work; I invite you to take a short break, find a snack, and return to this room by 11:00 so we may begin our congregational meeting.