

Nov. 26th, 2017
 FCPD
 “Preparing Our Hearts”
 Order Of Service

Centering Thought: Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s^[a] eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?
 ~ Christian Scripture, Luke 6:41

Prelude *Lullaby* Alexandre Tansman

Welcome and Announcements: Rev. Rali Weaver

Introit: Calypso Alleluia words and music from Thomas Benjamin, 1940

Opening Words:

Come, come, whoever you are
 Come with your hurts, your imperfections, your places that feel raw and exposed.
 Come, come, whoever you are
 Come with your strengths that the world shudders to hold come with your wild imaginings of a better world, come with your hopes that it seems no one wants to hear.
 Wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving we will make a place for you, we will build a home together.
 Ours is no caravan of despair.
 We walk together; Come, yet again come.
 ~ adapted from Rumi by Leslie Takahashi Morris

Unknown. *Voices from the Margins: An Anthology of Meditations* (Kindle Locations 239-242). Skinner House Books. Kindle Edition.

Chalice lighting:

Intern Search Committee: Geoff Tegnell, Susan White, Karen Donaghey, Kathy Elefterakis, David Calendrella

By Vanessa Southern

We light our chalice, symbol of our faith,
 For truth, sought through a questioning heart and an attentive mind;
 And for love, pursued through obstacles inside and outside our own human
 heart;
 And for forgiveness, and all it entails—
 The place where truth and love meet and merge.

Hymn: # 38, Morning Has Broken (grey)

Unison Affirmation:

Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law
 To dwell together in peace,
 To seek the truth in freedom
 To serve humanity in love,
 Is our covenant with each other and with God.

Joys and Concerns: *We Pray* (Tom Donaghey)

Offertory: *Under the Holly Bough*

Lyrics: Charles Mackay (1814-1889)

Music: Scott Henderson

Centering Time

Intergenerational Message Lessons on Forgiveness

Singing the Children to Classes

May your mind be open to new learning. May your lips bring truth into the
 world. May your heart know love, and your hands do the work of justice, as
 you go your way in peace.

Reading:

Forgiveness

By Amanda Udis-Kessler

Dave: It may be the hardest thing we will ever do,

Donna: Caught up in our self-righteousness, honing our pain.

Dave: The one who offended may not deserve forgiveness

Donna: And we are not obliged to offer it.

Dave: Why, then, should we forgive?

Donna: Because we have all caused pain.

Dave: Because we all miss the mark.

Donna: Because we can deepen our souls if we forgive.

Dave: Because restoring even one relationship heals many hearts.

Donna: Because we would be forgiven ourselves.

Dave: Because drawing closer to one another builds our communities.

Donna: Because the alternative is endless bitterness.

Dave: Because the world we seek to create is a world filled with forgiveness.

Donna: Because we need not remain caught up in our self-righteousness and pain.

Dave: It may be the hardest thing we will ever do.

Dave & Donna: Let us take the first step now.

Hymn: # 323, Break Not the Circle (grey)

Prayer/Meditation: Meditation on Compassion & Forgiveness ~ by: Rev. Erika Hewitt

(loosely based on a practice called the Examen by St. Ignatius Loyola)
&

Ritual of letting go...

We are surrounded by Mystery, and to it we surrender.

Let us meet together in stillness, in breathing, in being.

✿ As we linger in the silence and inside of ourselves,

I invite you to silently reflect on the following questions as a meditation of relationship.

*Think back on the past week, the days behind you:

Where did you encounter connection? With whom?

Did anyone express their love or pride or gratitude for you?

Did you say "I love you" to anyone?

*Where, in your past week, did you feel hurt?

Did you turn away from someone, too tired to see them or hear them?

If so, when did your feeling tired or spent begin?,

and what would restore your heart?

*If you made a mistake this week — a misstep big enough to really count — and if you couldn't say the words "I'm sorry," what got in the way?

*Have you been gentle with yourself lately?

~ These questions aren't invitations to feel guilt or blame; they're ways to find our power; our true agency

— not to redefine the past, but to use our story *about* the past

to move forward with more courage, more wisdom, and more love.

In this place of courage, wisdom and love; let us notice the places in our own lives where letting go of our own human failings and transgressions with compassionate understanding and self-forgiveness opens a place of freedom our hearts. ... I invite you now as you're so moved to come forward in silence placing your log (toothpick) on our alter of humanity where truth and love meet and merge.

(People come up...)

Closing Prayer of Ritual:

Spirit of Life, love and compassion, open our hearts to a new day, a new beginning. As we have placed our own human failings on this alter of hope, beckon us to those places that remain complicated, those places that remain unknown corners of ourselves, places of chaos and void. God of love and compassion, invite us now into a life of new beginnings, of rich, full and vibrant creativity. Help us in this community to understand that we are loved in our full humanity..... Amen

Anthem: We Begin Again in Love

Words by Robert Eller-Isaacs & Music by Les Kleen

Sermon: Preparing Our Hearts ~ Donna Dolham

Today's topic, forgiveness, is one I picked last summer because I thought it might be a fun challenge. It's my personality to lean into challenges; at 53 years old you'd think by now I might be alert to the possible consequences of this ~~ like a little bell might go off as a warning... "This is going to cause you to work hard!" but that bell doesn't go off, instead something like this happens... "This sounds REALLY interesting..."

If I was going to write a review of my relationship with forgiveness, it might go something like this: It was an up and down relationship, some obstacles she just kept bumping into and climbing over when moving them out of the way would have caused much less angst. This practice of

forgiveness is definitely a process for all of us. None of us is perfect. Richard Rohr, in his book, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* says: “If there is such a thing as human perfection it seems to emerge precisely from how we handle the imperfection that is everywhere, especially our own. What a clever place (he says) for God to hide holiness, so that only the humble and earnest will find it!” “A ‘perfect’ person (Rohr continues) ends up being one who can consciously forgive and include imperfection rather than one who thinks they are totally above and beyond imperfection.”¹

It’s uncomfortable in many ways to confess our own humanity. Some parts of me would rather hang out in a state of denial. As we talked about during the story for all ages; the carrying of the unnecessary become boulders in our red wagon of life, taking up room that joy, love, kindness and compassion could fill. Sometimes my mind is held captive to judging the past, when this happens I miss a beautiful sunrise, an opportunity to appreciate the gifts of family and friendship and ultimately I miss opportunities for kindness and love. It’s easy to see what needs changing in the world; all we need to do is open the internet to hear about horrific violence, injustice and oppression. These are all serious things. As Leo Tolstoy wrote, “Everyone thinks of changing humanity, and nobody thinks of changing [themselves].”² Do you ever find it easier to see what and how humanity needs changing while overlooking yourself? What gets in your way?

There are things that get in my way of self-reflection and forgiveness or what I also call compassionate understanding. Sometimes it’s a hollow self-righteousness weaved into my own self-doubt and at other times it’s been a more evident struggle with shame. There are times that the obstacle to forgiveness is a tangle in my own heart and mind that the things I’ve done and the things done to me will never BE OK and these **ARE** times when engaging the practice of forgiveness comes into play. Forgiveness is

¹ Rohr, Richard. *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011, xxii-xxiii.

² Jarvis, Cynthia A., E. Elizabeth Johnson, editors. *Feasting on the Gospels: Luke Volume 1, A Feasting on the Word Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, kindle edition, 2014, location 6068, original source, Leo Tolstoy, Letters to Friends on the Personal Christian Life (Christchurch, Hampshire, England: The Free Age Press, 1900), 29.

not saying that what happened or happened to us is ok. Instead it invites us into letting go when we can and letting it be when letting go is too far a stretch.

The consistent theme is one that we all encounter; regret, resentment, grudges, blaming and other judgmental ways are barriers to engaging in what Dr. Daniel Siegel, Neuroscientist and therapist calls transpirational awareness³. Now I'm pretty sure this is a word found only in Dr. Siegel's dictionary and he defines this as a sense of being a fundamental part of a larger world. The rest of his description goes like this, "Physical separations and differences become less paramount as we see that our actions have an impact on the interconnected network of living creatures within which we are just a part."⁴ That sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Our Unitarian Universalist faith engages us in this opportunity of transpirational awareness; beginning with our first principle; affirming and promoting the inherent worth and dignity of every person, including ourselves as well as our seventh principle, respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. These are practices of preparing our hearts for a living faith. It is both an individual and community practice.

Forgiveness changes our neuron pathways, releasing endorphins, serotonin and dopamine... the feel good chemicals.⁵ It's no great surprise to find that this act of compassion leads to improved health and mental health. Making room for forgiveness in community has benefits that go beyond our individual lives. As we practice forgiveness, it urges us toward a generosity of spirit and promotes an economy of abundance.⁶ It prepares our hearts to follow the spirit of joy, love, and kindness leading us into the dance of life with others. The Reverend Molly Phinney Baskette author of, *Standing Naked before God, The Art of Public Confession*; encourages us

³ Siegel, Daniel. *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation*. New York: Random House, kindle edition, 2010, 4430 – 4432.

⁴ Siegel, Daniel. *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation*. New York: Random House, kindle edition, 2010, 4430 – 4432.

⁵ Sitze, Bob. *Your Brain Goes to Church, Neuroscience and Congregational Life*. Herndon: The Alban Institute, kindle edition, 2005, 32.

⁶ Jarvis, Cynthia A., E. Elizabeth Johnson, editors. *Feasting on the Gospels: Luke Volume 1, A Feasting on the Word Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, kindle edition, 2014, location 6055.

to bring our confessions to a safe spiritual community where our individual stories can become weaved into a collective.⁷

As the winter holiday season begins its hyper consumerism lulling us into a false sense of connection to things and wants ~ we have a chance every day to wake up to our best selves. Most evenings I pray, you could call it setting an intention if the word prayer doesn't work for you. It is simple really, yet challenges me every day. I pray to be the best person I can be. And I do strive most days. When I reflect, I realize that I continue to make mistakes, missing deadlines, forgetting to post an announcement, being late in returning a call... the list could go on. And there are more heavy duty things too, having trouble working through grudges, not appreciating the gifts and people in my life. Maybe during the meditation some of these kinds of things came to your mind too. It's important to remember our faith, the faith that helps us to hold our humanity, the faith that ignites our awareness of our dignity when at times shame whispers in our ears that we are not good enough, faith that ignites our awareness of the dignity of others, and challenges us to into a state of compassionate understanding. If you have not yet laid down your own log, I invite you during the postlude to engage in this practice of letting go or letting it be; knowing you are held in this community of love. Let our practice of forgiveness free up our spirits to fully engage in life. Please join me now in singing hymn # 1024, When the Spirit Says Do in the Teal hymnal. Please share a hymnal with a neighbor.

Hymn: #1024, When the Spirit says Do (teal)
Verses: do, sing, dance, laugh, & last round "do"

Benediction

Postlude: *Little Gavotte* Alexandre Tansman

About the authors:

⁷ Baskett, Molly Phinney. *Standing Naked Before God: The Art of Public Confession*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, kindle edition, 2015, 193 - 195.

The Rev. Vanessa Rush Southern is the author of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) Meditation Manual *This Piece of Eden* (Skinner House, 2001) and served on the UUA Fiftieth Anniversary Task Force in 2010-2011.

Amanda Udis-Kessler is the Director of Assessment and Program Review at Colorado College. She is a contributor to the Unitarian Universalist Worship Resources website.

Leslie Takahashi Morris has been writing since she was five years old and her mother made her start a journal as part of a student teaching experience. She is the co-author, with Chip Roush and Leon Spencer, of *The Arc of the Universe Is Long: Unitarian Universalists, Anti-Racism and the Journey from Calgary* (Skinner House). Recently she has begun writing more about her experience as a multiracial person with Japanese-American roots. Her children, Garner and Liam, offer on-going inspiration.

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