

Roots and Wings: Annual Ingathering and Water Communion

Unitarian Universalist Society
Ingathering Sunday, August 25, 2013

Prelude

Prelude from Suite Bergamasque
-Claude Debussy
Nicholas Dold, Guest Pianist

Invocation

Rev. Lucy Bunch

We come together this morning to remind one another
To rest for a moment on the forming edge of our lives,
To resist the headlong tumble into the next moment,
Until we claim for ourselves awareness and gratitude,
Taking the time to look into one another's faces
and see there communion: the reflection of our own eyes. This house of laughter and
silence, memory and hope,
is hallowed by our presence together.

-Kathleen McTigue

*Hymn #347

Gather the Spirit

-Jim Scott

Welcome & Announcements

Rev. Roger Jones

Welcome to UUSS. I am Roger Jones, happy to serve here as the acting senior minister.

Whoever you are, and however you arrived here, and whatever you may be seeking, please know that you are welcome here. This congregation strives to be inclusive regarding the diversity of religious and spiritual beliefs and practices reflected among us, as well as of gender identity, sexual orientation, cultural background, economic situation, and political opinion. We strive to see diversity as a source of strength and richness.

With me today making the service possible: Rev. Lucy, Religious Services Committee members Deirdre Downes and Diane Kelly Abrams, and Erik Bailly, our Sound Manager Ian McMillan, our new Board President, Linda Clear.

Our two music staff members are not here today, so I am happy to introduce you to our guest pianist and a brand new Californian, Nicholas Dold. Read about him in Thursday's Ministerial Message email or in the order of service.

We also give thanks to the ushers, greeters, coffee and tea servers-- today and every Sunday. We offer special thanks today to the salad makers for the lunch of salad, bread and dessert that will follow the service. Thanks to Glory Wicklund and Keith White for planning and putting this on, along with her volunteer team. [Other groups will be invited to sign up to put on a Salad Sunday.]

This lunch is a mini-fundraiser for the church, with a sliding scale of donations ranging from 4 dollars per person to 4,000 dollars per person. Trust me, this lunch will be worth it!

Three important conversations after the service, for your salad-munching consideration. Please see the Blue Sheet.

Coming of Age orientation for youth interested in this special program for making friends across the generations, developing UU identity and building your own set of beliefs and articulating them.

There is an American Friends Service Committee presentation on the 49-day hunger strike in California prisons by prisoners protesting the widespread use of solitary confinement in our State.

Our Implementing the Master Plan team offers you a Master Plan Update – here in the Sanctuary. First part of our master plan is our outdoor Labyrinth. Diane Kelly-Abrams invites you to come Saturday morning till 2 PM on September 7 to help lay the bricks and finish the Labyrinth.

In two weeks, on September 8, we move back to a schedule of two Sunday services. Religious Education for youth and children will take place during the 9:30 service.

Today’s service is our Ingathering Service, when we kick off a new church year in our congregation. This is our welcome service.

If you have been away the past few months, welcome back. If you have been taking the summer off from church...I hereby forgive you. Almost completely. And I say, welcome back.

If you are just now visiting us for the first time, checking us out, looking for a spiritual home, we extend a welcome to you. Every person sitting here has been in the same situation as a first time visitor, and we have hung around and kept coming back. We invite you to fill out a Newcomer Form at the Welcome Table in the back after the service, and to make a nametag for yourself after the service. We invite you to please stay afterwards so we can get to know you.

Greeting with the Hand of Fellowship

Now please we ask you to put your cell phones on their most reverent setting for the rest of the worship service. It would be nice to have an awesome review on Yelp about our congregation or a happy Tweet about the service, but please wait until afterwards.

Now I’d like to invite you to reflect on the freedom and power that each one of you has. No matter whether you are a brand new seeker here or a long time church member, young or old, rich or poor or somewhere in the middle, you have the power to give an amazing and welcome gift to a few other people. And that is the simple gift of the words, “Good Morning! Welcome!” You could make it better if you introduced yourself by name. Let’s try that now. Please rise as you are able and reach out and greet a few other people.

***Hymn** (words on insert) Spirit of Life/Fuente de Amor
-Carolyn McDade; Spanish trans. Ervin Barrios

Our Mission, Values and Covenant

**We come together to deepen our lives
and be a force for healing in the world.**

We value the goodness in everyone,
the openness and curiosity that illuminate that goodness
and the love and courage that sustain us.

We, an intergenerational community, travel together
with open minds, open hearts, and helping hands.
We value justice, compassion, integrity and acceptance.
We seek spiritual growth, intellectual stimulation,
caring and laughter.
To these ends we pledge our time, talents and support.

Commissioning of Rev. Lucy Bunch, Assistant Minister

See separate attachment

Prayer and Meditation

Erik Bailly

Gift of Music

“Ondine” from Preludes, Book II

-Claude Debussy

Sermonette

Our song “Spirit of Life” sings: *Roots hold me close; wings set me free.* That’s what I’d like us to think about for a few moments. Roots and wings.

The writer Brian Nelson says:

People think of the roots of their lives as fixed, while their lives keep growing toward the sun. But roots keep growing, too, in unexpected ways and directions.... Your story changes as you grow and learn new truths about yourself. Even as your wings set you free, make sure that you keep track of the ... ways in which [you are] grounded.

One of the reasons we seek out religious communities, I think, is to put down roots and spread our wings. We practice new expressions of ourselves. We find opportunities to learn, reflect, put our gifts to use, and stretch ourselves. When we first get involved, we may not know what to expect, but if we stay engaged with anything for a time, opportunities for growth appear. Opportunities to stretch our wings appear.

I first became a member of a Unitarian Universalist congregation when I was 24, starting my first career, living alone in a new city in the middle of the Illinois prairie. People in the church were friendly, and after my first visit, some called me by name. It helped that I wore a nametag, of course, but as a new person in a strange town it was nice to hear the sound of my name.

After a number of visits, an usher asked me if I could help: to hand out the order of service, and receive the offering. A simple thing. But let me tell you, the first few times I walked the offering basket up and down the aisle, I felt as self-conscious as if I’d been singing a solo or giving the sermon. It was a small step, but I was exercising my wings.

The result? I began to learn that I could stand up in front of a group of people I didn’t know... and survive. And of course I would get quite used to standing in front of church people. It started in that congregation. One more thing: I felt useful, I sensed more ownership of the place. I started to grow roots.

Looking back, I find it odd that they asked me only to be an usher, but never to serve the coffee. Was it easier to trust a newcomer with collecting money than the making coffee? I don’t know, but I suspect all we had back then was *instant* coffee, anyway. After all, it was 1985 in the Midwest. The trend of really good, brewed coffee had not yet begun.

Also back in the 1980s, coming out as a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person was more daunting and lonely than it may be now for a lot of people. I had begun edging out of my own closet three years before, mostly to myself and my friends in college. I had little practice speaking my truth in other settings. Here I was, in a conservative city in a new job, and in a new church, in 1985. But in truth, most of the barriers were in my own mind, most of the fears in my own heart. I needed *practice* at being myself and feeling accepted. Our church had a series of Sunday morning discussions--a small circle of chairs bringing together all those who showed up on a given day for a given topic.

One Sunday a lesbian therapist from the church led a talk about homophobia. I found myself contributing to the conversation among these new people in a way I had not experienced before. I used the words “we” and “us” when speaking about LGBT people, rather than keeping my words at a safe, academic distance. Nobody shuddered; the walls did not fall in.

In that circle of kind people, I stretched my wings and hopped out of my nest of self-silencing. It was a subtle change, but also part of a lifelong transformation into a happier human being. Some time later, I began working on a committee, and became friends with a shy middle-aged woman. She spoke to the group about her brother who had died, but spoke only vaguely. Later she told me that he had contracted HIV, which was nearly always terminal back then. Having been married, he had remained in the closet through death, and the family was holding this great secret, adding to the grief of their loss of him. Yet for his sister, the burden lifted a bit when she spoke to me, because I had opened up. Thanks to that church, she and I both grew stronger wings. We both poked our heads out of the nest of our own fears and vulnerabilities.

A year later the Religious Education Committee asked me to teach Sunday school. First and second graders. *Who, me?* I had barely seen a first grader in years, let alone try to have a conversation with one of them.

Did that committee see the potential in me? Who knows--they merely might have been desperate. Of course, desperate was how I felt. Yet I had a co-teacher – a dad in the church. He was easy going and reliable. We had a book of lessons to guide us. Some props required, but the lessons were planned. We would talk every week in advance of Sunday: who was leading what, who should bring what. I survived that year, and so did they. I learned things, and left with fond memories.

Not all congregations help everyone spread their spiritual wings, of course. Especially when it comes to religious ideas and personal expressions of spirituality. Some discourage the stretching of wings.

On the other hand, there are plenty of ways beyond a congregation to stretch your wings in 21st century North America: hobbies, sports and cultural organizations, book clubs, Yoga studios, personal trainers, community colleges, website courses. But here in a congregation you may wander into a way to spread your wings that you had not been looking for. Rather than doing a methodical review of opportunities on local websites, and finding an opportunity that you choose, in a community like this one, in a congregation, the opportunity may find you.

You may grow in a way you were not seeking to grow. Learn lessons you were not looking for. A benefit of a larger congregation like ours is that we have diverse ways to participate, many opportunities to learn, grow, try out new things, serve, and help out. You can get involved here in one activity for a while, and if later you feel ready to try something else, we'll try to help you do that.

Outside of a congregation, if you drop out of a book club, you may not see the people again. If you give up Yoga class, you may lose your Yoga classmates. In a congregation, you might slip out of an activity, but you are still part of the community. You have roots!

Even better, you can use one commitment in order to decline another. *I'm sorry, I can't install paving stones in the labyrinth next Saturday out in the hot sun with you. I'm co-leading a workshop at the UU church in Davis, which by chance is indoors in the air conditioning. Sorry!*

[In truth, the Labyrinth is in a well-shaded area here.]

For some folks, the opportunity for growth provided by the church could be... just sitting in one place for an hour. For others, the stretching of wings could be the invitation to rise to your feet and sing with a room full of people. Or to greet a few others and say, "Glad to meet you." Even if you don't know for sure that you're glad about it, you do know it feels good to *be* greeted, so you decide you will reach out.

In this place, we can watch one another stretch and reach and spread our wings. We can encourage one another. If we stumble or flop, we can catch one another. If we are the ones flopping or falling, we might feel others easing us down to a soft landing.

And while all this is going on—the stretching of wings and the efforts at flight—something else happens. We get rooted! As we encourage others and receive encouragement, as we strengthen the wings, we deepen the roots. We ground ourselves. Roots grow as we add to our life story by the moments we spend with others. At a shared meal, we nourish the roots, not only by the food, but also by the fellowship *around* the food.

Roots grow as we let ourselves be known.

Most of us, I hope, begin to realize that we belong. We experience a deeper sense of connection and rootedness, not only to a community, but to Life and the spirit and the whole human family. As we stretch our wings, we deepen the roots of belonging to Life.

The presence of others makes a difference. All those with whom we invest our time and our gifts can support the roots as we dig deep into life. And we can do that for others. You can do that. Your smile, kind word, outstretched hand, your voice lifted in word and song, can do that.

On this Ingathering Sunday, I ask you to remember that your presence matters to others around you. Even to those you have not yet met.

We come together to receive encouragement for ourselves, but by showing up, we also extend encouragement to others. Just by coming together, you help others to dig deep roots into life and stretch out the wings of the spirit. What a blessing it can be, when we come together.

So may it be. Blessed be, amen, and Namaste.

Shared Offering

[sample words]

This congregation has a tradition of giving away half of every Sunday morning offering to an organization doing good work in the larger community beyond these walls. For this month, the month of August, we share the offering with Sacramento Family Promise. This is a program of hospitality and support services to homeless families with children, including school for the children and assistance in finding employment, stable housing and self-sufficiency for the parents. Several families will be staying overnight with us in our church buildings for a week starting next Sunday night.

Your generosity today will keep this important program thriving and successful. Thank you for making a difference. The shared offering will now be given and received.

Offertory

Cancion y Danza No. 1

-Frederic Mompou

Roll Call and Water Communion Ceremony—Rev. Roger

See separate attachment

In a congregation of our size, transitions are always taking place, even in years when we don't have a construction project in the works.

In addition to the good news of Lucy's joining our ministry here, we also have the sadder news that Eric Stetson has announced his resignation from the position of Music Director. He's held this job since 2011. Last week he wrote to our Board and staff members, and his letter to the congregation will appear in the Unigram. Next Sunday will be Eric's goodbye service with us—one service at 10 o'clock. The Music Committee is planning a farewell for him after that service, with cake. Please come. Also, if you would like to contribute money toward a gift, you can see Judy Lane today after the service. Next week, we will honor and thank him, and I bet he will sing to us.

Other transitions in the life of our congregation, every year, include the passing of a number of members and friends, and family members of congregants.

You will find an insert in your order of service *entitled In Loving Memory*. This is our roll call of those who have died since last year's Ingathering Service. If you think of a name that should be added, or if you have in mind others who died in years prior to the last one, we will take a moment after the roll call. As we conclude, our Board President will pour into this empty vessel some of the water that has been collected from Ingathering Rituals in years past. This jar includes the waters brought here by people we have known and lost over the years. And after today it will be mingled with the waters that you will pour into the vessel in a few moments.

Now please join with me in saying these names one at a time, with a brief pause to hear each name in our heart.

[Unison speaking of the Roll Call.]

At this time, if you are holding in your heart other loved ones who have died, we will take a few moments to hear the sounds of their names spoken into the space of our sanctuary. [PAUSE.] May their memory be a blessing.

[President Linda Clear pours about half of the tall jar into the cylinder.]

Water Communion Ritual—Rev. Roger

If you have brought a small container of water, this is the time when we will mingle the waters together. Whether you are bringing or just remembering waters from oceans visited, glaciers, lakes, local rivers, or a local tap, you are invited to mingle the waters.

If you didn't know about this ritual, forgot, or didn't read the newsletter, there are containers of

water up here for your use. Please line up on both sides, and when it is your turn, use the microphone, alternating between right and left sides, and speaking loudly. You may say “This water is from _____” or “This water represents _____.”
At the end I will say a blessing.

***Hymn** There’s a River Flowin’ in My Soul, and It’s Tellin’ Me that I’m Somebody

-Rose Sanders, arr. Kenny Smith

Led by Rev. Lucy

[words are at #1007 but we didn’t use the hymn supplement book]

***Benediction**

If you are comfortable, please join hands or just be with us for this Benediction. At the end, you may be seated for the Postlude, or you may come back to the Lobby.

In the days to come, take the time to consider when and how you are deepening your own roots and your own sense of belonging to life and to community.

Consider opportunities to stretch yourself and try your wings. And remember that your presence makes a difference. Your presence can help others to find a place to put down roots, and can help us all to try our wings.

As you go out beyond these walls, may you see blessings around you, and may you know that you bring a blessing into this world we share.

Postlude

Prelude in c-minor WTC vol. 1

-J. S. Bach