

“Parenting as Prayer”©
Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society, Woodbury, CT
The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, Minister
May 9, 2010

ORDER OF SERVICE
May 9, 2010

“Family and friends and strangers show us who we are . . .” (Hymn 317)

PRELUDE¹

(In the spirit of peace, we invite you into silence and quiet reflection while we listen to the prelude.)

CALL TO GATHER

Come, Come Whoever You Are, #188

MINISTER:

“Come, come, whoever you are;
Man, woman, parent, child
Whatever your religious journey,
Whatever your skin color,
Whatever your abilities,
Whomever you love-
You are welcome here this morning.
You are welcome at our table.
You are welcome in this religious home.”

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good Morning! Welcome to the Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society, affectionately known as MUUS. I am The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, and it is my great pleasure and privilege to serve this wonderful congregation. We welcome all of you.

- Later in the service newcomers will have an opportunity to introduce themselves and we hope that you will do so. It is optional, but we would like to give you a proper welcome.
- To parents – children are always welcome to stay in the service, or join the other children in our religious education classes at the point that we sing them out.

- Since our Sunday services offer a variety of worship experiences, including ordained clergy as well as brilliant lay speakers, we encourage you to come back often.
- If you are a newcomer, and haven’t signed our guest book in the entryway, please do so before you leave so that we may send you a newsletter listing our activities. Newcomers may look for people with gold nametags. These are members of the Membership Committee, and they will be happy to answer any questions you may have. If you have been attending our services for a while and would like to join the society please see me or a member of the Membership Committee.
- Our time together continues after the service with coffee, tea, and conversation after the service, and we invite you to join us. If you are a member, or even a long time visitor, please sign up to brew coffee and to bring and serve simple but wholesome snacks on the sign up sheet at the back table.
- So, too, when we have flowers they are donated by individual members, sometimes in honor of a loved one or a special event. Today’s flowers are given by _____, in honor of _____. If you would like to donate flowers in honor of something or someone special, you can sign up at the back table. Many hands and hearts make light work.
- As we explore the possibilities for finding a new Music Director, a Music Task Force has formed to help bring in a variety of different types of music initially on the Sundays I am preaching. Today’s special musician is Ray Nilson.
- So that we may maintain our spiritual space, please place your cell phone in a meditative state of being.
- Important parts of our community life are the invitations we give to one another for activities beyond our morning’s service. Please note the announcements in your order of service. I have these additional announcements:
- If there are any other MUUS related announcements, we ask that you line up to my left to share them now and please use the microphone.”

Here end this morning’s announcements.

“And, now: I invite everyone to relax your body, come into this space of community, faith and love. Take the next few moments to focus on your breathing. Breathe deeply. Relax. We welcome you into this place made more sacred by your presence.”

SOUNDING OF BELL

*** CHALICE LIGHTING & OPENING WORDS**

We gather this hour as people of faith,
 With joys and sorrows, gifts and needs.
We light this beacon of hope,
 Sign of our quest for truth and meaning,
In celebration of the life we share together.

CHILD DEDICATION SERVICE *Amy Linnea Byler*

Opening Words

It is an ancient human tradition that calls us together to welcome our children into the larger community of fellowship and faith. Many of us here today were ourselves so recognized and welcomed – in a service of baptism or christening, or the bar or bat mitzvah, or a Naming and Dedication ceremony like we’re having today. We, as Unitarian Universalists have agreed to hold one another in a covenantal relationship, wherein we respect and care for one another. In participating in this dedication service today, you, the congregation members, are extending your promise of covenant to a child of this congregation.

I would like to introduce to you: Julie Howell and Kevin Byler, our parents. And, Dolly Howell, Julie’s mother and Amy’s grandmother.

Naming and Dedication

Julie & Kevin, by what name is this child known?

Amy Linnea Byler

Address to the Parent

Julie & Kevin.

In presenting your child at this service, you invite all of us to share some of the joy and responsibility that is yours as a parent. You seek our support in your dedication to the task of fostering, with love and guidance, the fullest unfolding of the personality of your child. Your task may not always be an easy one. The time may come when you will be called upon to sacrifice ambitions, deny yourself pleasure, or set aside your own dreams

so that your child may tread more surely the onward path of life. But, you accept this service to another life, knowing that your own life will be fuller and richer in consequence.

Do you now promise that, to the best of your human ability, you will help this child grow to an appreciation of truth and beauty, uprightness of character, and love? If so, say, “We do.”

I give you these roses in honor of your promise.

Parent’s Letter of Promise to Child: (Rev. Lloyd reads parent’s letter at their request)

Charge to Grandmother:

Dolly, a grandmother also has a special responsibility in nurturing this child. As you love your grandchild, remember also your love for your own child and her partner in life. Respect Julie & Kevin for the choices they have made; support their work as parents, assist them so far as you are able, and above all trust them to do well the same work that you have also done, in your own time. At the same time, rejoice in the uniquely special & sacred relationship that exists in the love between a grandmother and grandchild.

If you are indeed willing to stand in love beside Julie & Kevin and your grandchild, please say, “I am.”

I give you this rose in honor of your promise.

Call to Children in Attendance

I invite the children present to come forward now.

You are closest in age to Amy and will be working and playing and growing in the same world together. It is good that at this time she should be surrounded by you and your good wishes. There is another reason for you to be here. In dedicating this child, we all rejoice and give thanks for the presence of all children in our lives. And while the words we say and the promises we make for Amy are meant especially for her, they are also meant for you.

Charge to the Children

Today we welcome Amy Linnea Byler. As she grows, she will look up to you. Will you be a friend to her? Will you speak to her with kindness and treat her with fairness? Will

you show her the best that is in you and help her to discover the best that is in her? If you will, please answer, "Yes."

(Children may return to their seats.)

I now invite the congregation to read your response, from your order of service.

***Congregational Response (said in unison)**

Through our faith and shared values, we acknowledge the spirit of each child. By this Service of Dedication, we commit ourselves to this child, to her nurture and her growth. We will love and cherish her always, in times of struggle as well as gladness. Together may we be worthy guardians of this young life. Together may we build a community in which our children will grow, surrounded by beauty, embraced by love, and cradled in the arms of peace.

Amy Linnea Byler, I touch your young brow with a rose, symbol of beauty and purity. In so doing I dedicate your life and thought to the good of all humankind and to your own true growing.

Amy Linnea Byler, as members of Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society, we commit ourselves to the unfolding of your promise. May this flower remind you of those who love you and of beauty, good, and truth, and of the infinite mystery of life."

[Turning toward the congregation, and walking her down the aisle and back], "I present to you **Amy Linnea Byler.**"

Amen.

*** HYMN #124** "Be That Guide"

*** COVENANT** (in unison)

*Love is the spirit of this society.
Dwelling together in peace,
Seeking truth,
Helping one another,
Serving human needs,
Honoring the Earth and all that is, this is our covenant.*

OFFERTORY

As we take our collection, we invite first time visitors to let the basket pass them by, you are our guests today.”

For this place of peace, and silence that heals our spirits, we give thanks.
For this place of memory and history that warms our souls, we rejoice.
For this place of prophecy and its vision that changes our hearts,
We offer our life’s treasure so that others, too, may know these gifts. ¹

SHARING JOYS AND SORROWS**

As we begin our time of sharing our joys & sorrows, one of our joys is in welcoming visitors among us. If you are visiting for the first time, or have come back after a long time, or if you are still getting to know us, we would love it if you would introduce yourself to us. It is purely optional, but we’d like to give you a proper welcome. Please raise your hand so we can bring you a microphone.”

PAUSE

Let the congregation say, “Welcome!”

As we begin the sharing of our joys and sorrows, please remember to tell us your name before sharing.

And, now, if you woke this morning with a sorrow so heavy that you need the help of this community to carry it; or if, in the spirit of thankfulness, you woke with gratitude in your heart that simply must be shared, now is the time for you to speak.

“Please wait for the microphone so that all will be able to hear.”

Sorrows & Joys

For the joys and sorrows that have been spoken, and the myriad of experiences, thoughts, joys, and concerns which remain in the silent sanctuaries of our hearts, we offer our presence & compassion. May, all of these joys and concerns weave us together in the fabric of community. Amen.

SINGING THE CHILDREN ON THEIR WAY

*As you go may joy surround you, as you go, go in peace;
know our love is with you always, as you go, as you go.*

¹ Adapted from Reading 429 (SLT) by William Schultz.

PRAYER AND MEDITATION

INSERT SORROWS & JOYS

In Words (510)

O Spirit of Life and Renewal

In this, the season of steady rebirth, we awaken to the power so abundant, so holy, that returns each year through earth and sky. We will find our hearts again, and our good spirits. We will love, and believe, and give and wonder, and feel again the eternal powers. The flow of [all of] life moves ever onward through one faithful spring, and another, and now another. May we be forever grateful [that we have some small part in it]. Alleluia. Amen. (Jane Rzepka)

In Silence

In Song—Spirit of Life, #123

Homily

“Parenting as Prayer”

Rev. Lloyd

Before I start, I would have you take special note of the title of this sermon, “Parenting as Prayer.” Notice that it speaks of the practice of parenting, not necessarily of being a biological parent. And, toward that end, I want each of you to realize that any one of us, no matter what age, can practice parenting. The word parenting can mean, “the process of promoting and supporting the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development of a child from infancy to adulthood.”² But it can also mean teaching or guiding, and so, I would ask that you consider the possibility that parenting is a process that can be easily understood as our walking together with another person, no matter what their age, and by our presence to and with them, creating the opportunity for them to become fully their most whole selves.

If you remember my sermon on James Luther Adams’ Five Smooth Stones, you will recall that one of the essential ingredients of a theologically liberal religion is that revelation is not sealed. Or, as our friends in the United Church of Christ say, “G*d is *still* speaking.” It means that we do not have to get stuck in language written centuries ago, and it means that we believe not only that greater wisdom is always out there but also that we have the capacity to use our reason to understand it. In short, we believe change can be good and that people are capable of change. We are therefore committed, as a people, to the practice of creating opportunities for and living through

² <http://www.answers.com/topic/parenting> May 8, 2010

transforming moments in our lives such that each of us and others can realize our full potential.

It is on this core belief that our first principle and many other of our principles rest. Take a look at them.

How many of them would be possible if we did not first believe in the capacity of the human spirit for personal and institutional transformation? The reason we believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every individual is because we believe their fate is not sealed and that each of us can grow in wisdom and compassion for one another. Our faith practice is to extend this belief, as best we can, in human terms to other adults we may meet in life. It is not always easy. Sometimes it is a challenge. But, in our best moments, we recall to ourselves our desire to be treated and respected as capable of growth and change. And, in our best moments we seek to offer that same recognition to others.

Our purpose in coming together as a religious community is to offer these opportunities for transformation and growth within a safe environment. At first, we receive this gift. Later, we offer it to others who cross our threshold. So, too, we seek to offer the same opportunities to our children.

It was William Ellery Channing, who lived in the 18th & 19th centuries, who said then that our purpose as Unitarians is:

- “Not to stamp our minds upon [others], but to stir up their own;
- Not to make them see with our eyes, but to [have them] look inquiringly and steadily with their own;
- Not to give them a definite amount of knowledge, but to inspire a fervent love of truth;
- Not to form an outward regularity, but to [have them] touch inward springs;
- Not to bind them [with permanent] prejudices to our particular sect or peculiar notions, but to prepare them for impartial, conscientious judging of whatever subjects may be offered to their decision;
- Not to burden the memory, but to [nurture in them the] . . . power of [thinking];
- Not to impose religion upon them in the form of arbitrary rules, but to awaken [in them] . . . conscience, [and] moral discernment.”³
- He says, “In a word, ***the great end is to awaken the soul*** . . . ”⁴

³ The Great Purpose of Religious Education” by William Ellery Channing. (1780 - 1842).

⁴ The Great Purpose of Religious Education” by William Ellery Channing. (1780 - 1842).

<http://hunterdonuu.org/wpmu/minister/2009/06/08/the-great-end-in-religious-instruction/> May 8, 2010

Likewise, in this century, our purpose is to recognize first a person’s essence and then to awaken it, allowing it self-expression and illumination. In our role as parents and guides in this religious society, we have the power to draw out a person’s essence and to create safe sanctuary in which it can blossom into its fullest expression.

John O’Donohue says: “the word ‘essence’ has mystery, heart and luminosity. Your essence is the utter ‘isness’, and utter ‘youness’ of you. The essence of a thing is always elusive and hidden. It [is like] the way a cloud can open over a dark . . . lake and turn it into a shimmering mirror of silver brightness; [and] for a few moments the lake illuminates. [In dreams] of art and prayer [we seek] . . . to come nearer, even to slip through to dwell for a while in the vicinity of the essence.”⁵

He says, “[For the most part, we manage merely to live in the neighbourhood of things, not in or near their essence.] [Most often] their essence remains beyond our reach . . .”⁶

He continues, “A . . . friend in London, an eminent philosopher and psychotherapist, told me once that when his second child was born he was granted, for one moment, a pure glimpse of the child’s essence. Often during his child’s life, there have been such moments and even now in the dark-lands of adolescence, where conversation is scarce and where monologue frequently dims into single syllable glowering, the father is still given the occasional clear view. Through the blurred, awkward surface the beautiful radiance of his son’s soul becomes briefly visible. This view always recalls him to a sense of the hidden eternal light of his child’s life.”⁷ “To be a parent [or guide] is to be invited into the natural depths of divine creativity. [The guide] . . . [can] open a sacred door in the soul for a most vulnerable and intimate stranger to enter and inherit the earth . . . From the infinite and unknown Nowhere of the invisible world, someone is brought into Being.”⁸

It is in the practice of drawing forth the essence of a human being and allowing them to express their souls that we as Unitarian Universalist spractice our faith. I believe it is, indeed, how it is that we pray. When asked if she prayed, Susan B. Anthony said, “I pray every single second of my life; not on my knees, but with my work . . . Work and worship are one with me.”⁹

⁵ O’Donohue, John. **Beauty, The Invisible Embrace.** (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005) 172

⁶ O’Donohue, John. **Beauty, The Invisible Embrace.** (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005) 172

⁷ O’Donohue, John. **Beauty, The Invisible Embrace.** (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005) 172.

⁸ O’Donohue, John. **Beauty, The Invisible Embrace.** (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005) 164.

⁹ http://www.atheists.org/susan_b_anthony May 8, 2010

O’Donohue says similarly, that “the work of parenting is profoundly blessed work. Some people pray in words [but] in the work of raising children, parents [who are themselves transformed by the art of parenting] pray every day with every fibre of their being.”¹⁰ He suggests that though the practice of parenting is fraught with obstacles and misguided intentions, “deep behind the visible surface of our society there are incredible, unseen people who give everything they are and everything they have to their children. [Some may be parents, others may guides who walk the journey with us. Whatever called] they are the secret priests and priestesses who work away . . . in the vineyards of soul-making. Although often arduous and painful, ultimately it is tender, vulnerable work, a work of fragile yet wondrous beauty.”¹¹

Ours is faith tradition grounded in the belief that greater truth exists, that we are each capable of understanding it by our reason, and ultimately, that prayer is the act of each soul acting individually and in community to create opportunity for the fulfillment of our own spirit (and others) toward its fullest blossoming.

Let us live everyday in prayer as though worship and work were one.

May it be so.

* **HYMN #317** *“We Are Not Our Own”*

* **CLOSING WORDS**

Responsive Reading 444 “This House”

● **EXTINGUISHING OF THE CHALICE**

“Please join hands for the extinguishing of the chalice.”

“We extinguish this flame, but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again. Let the congregation say AMEN.”

Minister: The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, M.Div., M.A.
Director of Religious Education: Denise Pedane
Guest Musician: Ray Nilson

¹⁰ O’Donohue, John. **Beauty, The Invisible Embrace.** (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005) 164.

¹¹ O’Donohue, John. **Beauty, The Invisible Embrace.** (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005) 165.