

“Gilbert’s Wheel”©
Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society, Woodbury, CT
The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, Minister
March 14, 2010

“We are more when we are together than when we are alone – alone we are individuals, and we honor our uniqueness. But together we are members, one of another. We rise to meet, to encounter one another, because no one of us has enough wisdom, enough energy, enough courage to face our fate alone. We are meant to be companions. Our lives are embedded in the community. Theologically speaking, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

~ Rev. Richard S. Gilbert

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

“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.

- 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 with coffee, tea, and conversation after the service, and we invite you to join us.
- To parents – children are always welcome to stay in the service, or join the other children in our religious education classes.
- 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.
- 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
- So that we may maintain our spiritual space, please place your cell phone in a meditative state of being.
- The flowers this morning are given in honor of _____. Please consider making an offering of flowers for this sanctuary for various Sundays throughout the year, in honor of a special event or in memory of a loved one. You can sign up at the back table.
- Our fellowship time after the service is an important time for all of us, and food and drink always make that time ever so much more nourishing to the soul. Please sign up to bring and serve simple but wholesome snacks on the sign up sheet at the back table.
- 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**

No. 447

At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person.
Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lit the flame
within us. – Albert Schweitzer

*** HYMN #307 *"The Human Touch Can Light the Flame"***

*** 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 No. 429 (adapted)

"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.

SHARING JOYS AND SORROWS**

"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. 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.*

PRAYER AND MEDITATION

In Words

These words from [Edward T. Atkinson](#)

*At This Quiet Time*¹

At this quiet time and in this place of worship we would seek to know more deeply what it means to love one another.

We know so well our own needs. We know that we, ourselves need understanding, affection and recognition. Why is it then that so often we hesitate to extend these precious gifts to others? The cost of a kind word is small. The moment that it takes to listen could hardly be better used. A gesture of forgiveness can mark a new beginning. An embrace or note of appreciation can convey crucial encouragement and comfort.

INSERT JOYS & SORROWS

O Spirit of life and of love, strengthen our faith, increase our resolve to give more generously of ourselves. We pray for the courage to take the risks of love. We pray for the insight to see ourselves and others in perspective. We pray for humility and understanding that we may always stand ready to forgive and begin anew. Amen.

In Silence

In Song—Spirit of Life, #123

¹ <http://www.uua.org/spirituallife/worshipweb/meditationsand/submissions/5617.shtml> March 13, 2010

WITNESS

Tracy Johnson, President

Stewardship. ‘Tis the season, I guess, when we again think about things financial in preparation for the coming year. But is there really a season for stewardship? A separate time when we consider what this means – what value we put on what we hold dear about this place? I tend to disagree with this approach. Last year when I put those giant post-it notes on the wall for committee members to express their interest and commitment, I put one up that was labeled “Stewardship.” I described it as a group of people who would explore the larger concept, beyond canvass and finances. And I actually got a few takers who were, in my mind, already over committed in other areas. But the Growth Team and the Finance Task Force have picked up the concept and have done some study and I believe they have the right idea. I am excited that a group of people here at MUUS is interested in year round exploration and education on the topic of stewardship in congregations.

But, it is that season after all and I am here to talk about what stewardship means to me. I touched on it in my newsletter article. Stewardship is about caring for something that we have been given – the dictionary says it is more like management over something we have responsibility for – this is too administrative for my liking in terms of our setting. We have been given each other and this place. That’s the bottom line, I think. So, why is that important – important enough that we would care for it in a variety of ways, including financially.

We all come here for different reasons. I come because my friends are here. When I have time to hang out with people, the people at MUUS are my first choice. I come because I learned early in life to be faithful to ritual and the ritual I find here is meaningful to me. I call this place a refuge because no matter what is going on in my life – good or bad – I can bring it here and find unconditional love and acceptance; people to celebrate with me and people to console me. I come here to be nourished spiritually and to be encouraged on the seeker’s journey by people who are familiar travelers on that same path.

MUUS is my springboard to other areas that are important to me – justice making in our community and our world – an educational path that fulfills my deepest desires. I am who I am in part because of all of you – because of the relationship that we have developed over these past nine years.

MUUS has a role to play in the larger community that I think is yet untapped, but I believe we are on the brink of something exciting and new. The liberal religious voice is so necessary in these times and we have the potential to be that voice. We need to continue to prepare ourselves for that task and that takes stewardship, too. It takes all

of us caring enough about what we have to offer that we are empowered to share it with the larger community; to take what we consider so valuable beyond these walls. It means that what we affirm in our principles has a value in the real world and that we believe that what we espouse can make a difference. Stewardship is about a depth of caring that transcends self and this community alone.

So, do I value this place? Absolutely! The question I ask this morning is, “Do you value this place?” and if the answer is, “Yes!” then take some time to consider why. Make a list like I did. I think you will be pleasantly surprised. And because this is that “financial” time of year I would ask you to begin to translate that value into dollars and cents. But don’t lose the thought, because I want you to also translate the value you find in this place to other kinds of commitment, to new ways of caring for what we have been blessed with in our coming together. We are stewards of all that MUUS is and can be – the sum total of all of our lists. We are called to ensure that what we have is sustainable – that it is here for the generations that follow us. That is stewardship.

May it be so.

***HYMN #288 “All Are Architects”**

SERMON “Gilbert’s Wheel” Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

While I was in seminary, I found myself confronted with a provocative question. I had grown up using traditional religious language, but as my understanding of religion grew beyond that language, I was stuck on what to call that which cannot be named. In some way it was suitable, in that even the great “I am” refused to be named by the labels we’ve assigned it. And, it is no wonder that most UUs struggle with finding language that suitably describes their spiritual needs and relationships.

So, I tried on different titles, in particular, G*ddess and Shekinah, as I was profoundly influenced by my Hebrew classes and its feminist theologian. Shekinah, like Spirit, holds some resonance for me, still. In hindsight I realize that my dilemma was that I was shifting from an externally focused language to one that sought to describe something bigger than g*d, representative of the great Spirit of Humanity and descriptive of the soul within. It was a tall order for a long time.

Today, I want to give you a glimpse into Process Theology, and my interpretation of it. To start off it is grounded in the scientific practice of empiricism, meaning that in our religious seeking, we are informed by observation, experiment and reason. This was not a new concept to me. My undergraduate degree was in experimental psychology, which resulted in a couple of published articles. My first job after graduate school was

teaching statistics and research methodology at the University of Maine. From there, the shape of my career often included a focus on behavioral psychology and analysis, as well as quality assurance. Yes, I have done numbers.

But, my training also includes clinical psychology, and sometimes I had trouble reconciling the two. One being numbers focused, the other being more language focused, more abstract and case study oriented. There came a turning point in my life, when working as the Director of Emergency Services at a mental health clinic, that in observing the combined clinical and insurance dissection and labeling of the people we sought to help, that I said to myself, there has to be something more. When and how do we address the whole person, not just their weaknesses? Where do we acknowledge the spirit within? Is there a profession that will nurture and give voice to the aspiring soul?

Not surprisingly, my attention started shifting toward ministry, because in it I see the promise of viewing each person as a whole person, raising up the value of their gifts and strengths, and loving their growing edges, such that they can find their full humanness.

My changing perspective was not one that was inclined toward hard and fast judgments or labels. Much of the old religious language of ‘power over’ and patriarchy would not work anymore for me. Neither would mere numbers or clinical labels that failed to represent the whole human being. I needed to find a new way of looking at people and a new language.

Enter the work of Henry Nelson Weiman, and his colleagues Charles Hartshorne and Alfred North Whitehead. Radical theologians for their time, from the 1930s-1960s, who took traditional Christian theological language beyond its boundaries and into a new land. Today, I will only have time to tell you about three of Weiman’s most important concepts. [1] The process of becoming & perishing; [2] cosmic creativity; & [3] creative interchange.

1-Reality is a process of becoming and perishing . . .

As process theologians, they proposed that “reality [is] a process of becoming and perishing” with new becomings building on that which has perished.² This is what creativity is often about. Our lives are built on chaos and hope. Something is formed, and then perishes, and then a new thing is formed often building on experiences of the past. Thus, g*d is not a noun, it is a verb by which we are continuously transformed as our lives move through the many joys and sorrows we experience. In each moment, we

² Miller, David. “Empiricism & Process Theology: God is What God Does.” *Christian Century*, March 24, 1976, pp. 284-287. <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1837> February 22, 2010.

are creating once again a new path based on the experience of our last journey and based on relationships held now and in the past. “Reality [is] a process of becoming and perishing.”

2-Cosmic Creativity

In process theology, g*d is described as “the power of cosmic creativity. [Richard Gilbert³ says] that creativity is manifest in nature as creative evolution; it is observed in history in those prophets of the human spirit who have tried to bend the arc of history toward justice against all odds; it is manifest here as now we are co-creators of the Beloved Community. [He says,] that work I know will not be completed in my lifetime, but I wish to lend the ‘stubborn ounces of my weight’ to the task. It is [Gilbert says] my mystic identification with this creative process that prompts me to continue . . . There is a reality greater than ourselves, a ‘creating, sustaining, transforming reality’ of which we are a part. While it transcends us . . . we are also part and parcel of it—co-creators with it, in a limited but vitally important way . . . [He says] the deeper that I delve into the innermost recesses of my soul, the more intensely I identify with other human beings. The further inward we explore, the more we see our common humanity. The more the unseen moves in, the more we understand the hidden bonds of community . . . The deeper I probe spiritually, the more I identify with others and cast my lot with them in battling all that keeps us from celebrating our mystic [oneness]”⁴ such as that described by Ryse Williams⁵, who said, “We are joined together by a mystic oneness whose source we may never know, but whose reality we can never doubt . . . This mystic oneness . . . has been glimpsed by nearly all the great seers and leaders of humanity. We are our neighbor’s keeper, because that neighbor is but our larger self . . . Behold, thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself, because they neighbor is thyself.”⁶

What may or may not be obvious is that when g*d is a verb, as David Miller says, “the future is open. There are no guarantees that [a superbeing] in the sky will take over . . . Great responsibility is thrown on human beings. If chance and novelty are operating

³ Unitarian Universalist Minister.

⁴ Gilbert, Richard. “Confessions of a Militant Mystic: Spirituality & Social Action.” Delivered at the UUA General Assembly, Indianapolis, IN, June 20, 1996.
<http://www.uuma.org/BerryStreet/Essays/BSE1996.htm> March 11, 2010.

⁵ Unitarian Universalist Minister. Obit at
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4071/is_200311/ai_n9307189/ March 17, 2010.

⁶ Gilbert, Richard. “Confessions of a Militant Mystic: Spirituality & Social Action.” Delivered at the UUA General Assembly, Indianapolis, IN, June 20, 1996.
<http://www.uuma.org/BerryStreet/Essays/BSE1996.htm> March 11, 2010. (from David Ryse Williams, “Thy Neighbor Is Thyself,” *We Sing of Life and We Speak of Life*, Vincent Silliman, ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), #79.

principles and if human freedom is a crucial factor, the future is not known.”⁷ From an empiricist’s point of view, as process theologians are known to be, it is only by how the verb called g*d is **evidenced** in our daily lives and relationships that we can impart unto anything spiritual meaning. It is what I call faith in observable action. And it leads to hope that by our actions there may be “liberation for the oppressed, . . . strength to achieve values, . . . comfort in the face of unsurmountable obstacles, and . . . wisdom.”⁸

3-Creative Interchange

It is in the sharing of the oneness that Gilbert, and Williams describe, that Weiman’s second principle of “creative interchange” evolves. As David Miller says, creative interchange is “that process by which we are made new, strengthened, directed, comforted, forgiven, saved, and by which we are lured into feelings of wonder, awe and reverence.”⁹

“Creativity occurs when individuals engage in a kind of interchange with one another which is distinguished from every other interpersonal and social process by [these] two features:

- (1) This kind of interchange creates an appreciative understanding of the unique individuality of the other; and,
- (2) Each individual who attains this appreciative understanding integrates into [their] own individuality what [they] . . . acquire from others.

Upon these concepts of creativity, Weiman builds a theology based on “the human [and] spiritual longing” for relationship, connectedness, and friendship. My colleague, Paul Beedle says, “Why do we hope for friends? Because in friendship we are comforted. And in friendship we are changed.”¹⁰ This process of how we care for one another and exemplify that which we find reverent, and awesome, is also known as relational theology.

How we practice this theology as well as others is seen every week in this congregation.

⁷ Miller, David. “Empiricism & Process Theology: God is What God Does.” *Christian Century*, March 24, 1976, pp. 284-287. <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1837> February 22, 2010.

⁸ Miller, David. “Empiricism & Process Theology: God is What God Does.” *Christian Century*, March 24, 1976, pp. 284-287. <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1837> February 22, 2010.

⁹ Miller, David. “Empiricism & Process Theology: God is What God Does.” *Christian Century*, March 24, 1976, pp. 284-287. <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1837> February 22, 2010.

¹⁰ Beedle, Paul. “Shared Ministry & Faith-in-Action.” <http://homepage.mac.com/paulbeedle/EFE300.html> February 21, 2010.

If we look at Gilbert’s wheel in your Order of Service, you will find that Worship or our coming together in Sunday Services is the large center from which all creative interchange arises in the congregation. Indeed, “one of the most important empirical anchors [of Weiman’s theology] is the shared experience of worship.”¹¹ With grace, a Sunday morning experience can help you touch the numinous, ethereal hem of the garment of mystery, inspire you to deeper reflection, and compel you, in gratitude, to act on your faith in the larger community. Such moments are the hub for all our other ministries we experience.

Radiating out from there are the opportunities for the expression of one’s faith: pastoral care, teaching, and social justice. Each is grounded in one’s own spiritual reflection, and the creative interchange between friends and others to bring substance and meaning to each type of ministry. What is interesting, I think, in this diagram, is that the practice of ministry within the congregation is (A) not limited to just ministry within the congregation. The bottom of the wheel shows literally where the rubber hits the road, where community outreach is an expression of faith in action. (B) More interesting to me, is that it is not just about social justice action in the larger world; it is also about the shared ministry of caring and educating those who are longing for connection and support.

And at the center of the hub is the spoke around which all else circles. Two elements of every congregation, representing shared ministry. (1) Administration, which includes all the leaders of the congregation, including staff, and (2) The Congregational Culture which will by its personality and tradition, as well as vision, significantly turn the direction of the wheel.

Let’s go back for a minute to Tracy’s witness. Stewardship is an expression of gratitude that names the obvious of why we are here and what is important to us. It’s something we should do year round. It is in the places that Tracy finds creative interchange that she is transformed and transforms others, that is: (a) With her friends here at MUUS; (b) in practices of ritual; (c) in this place of unconditional love and acceptance, solace and comfort; (d) and in this place where she can with others, touch the hem of that which brings reverence and awe to our hearts and minds. From this place of creative interchange, she moves on to put her faith into action.

I don’t know about you, but I observe and experience moments of creative interchange and mystery, when I observe nature and when I open my eyes long enough to notice how it is that we grow by and through each other’s presence in our lives. For me,

¹¹ Beedle, Paul. “Shared Ministry & Faith-in-Action.” <http://homepage.mac.com/paulbeedle/EFE300.html> February 21, 2010.

process theology is very much about relationship and shared ministry. And, the best crucible, imperfect though it may be, for the creative interchange between our spirits is when we choose to be in community with one another, sparking new ideas and ways of being, in the other.

Paul Beedle says, “Shared ministry is about our way of being religious, our processes for living our faith. In our relationships with other persons – human and corporate – we have companions for our journey through life. We have witnesses to our struggles and our successes, our brokenness and our integrity. We have mentors and guides, students and followers. We find help and give help for the problems of human living. Shared leadership and shared ministry mean that the problems of human living are faced and talked about in the dailiness of congregational life, that their urgency and ubiquity are recognized and appreciated, and that responsibility for dealing with them is accepted by and distributed among the members of the community,”¹² including making sure we create, together, a secure financial future for MUUS.

May this community be one that inspires in you creative expressions of the heart and soul, and may your life be one by which others are likewise inspired. If g*d is the very essence, the very power behind cosmic creativity, then I wish for each of you a lifetime of sharing your special gifts, talents, and joys, as well as your sorrows and difficulties, with one another. In doing so, you will see in one another the face of g*d.

May it be so.

PERSONAL REFLECTION (congregation)

(In these moments we share a common responsibility to offer safe space for those reflecting on today's topic. We therefore encourage speakers to make "I" statements--speaking only for oneself--and to avoid language that is argumentative or critical of other viewpoints.)

I invite you to share with us any moments of creative interchange you may have experienced at MUUS.

*** HYMN #295 ‘Sing Out Praises for the Journey’**

*** CLOSING WORDS/READING**

These words from Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker . . .

¹² Beedle, Paul. “Shared Ministry & Faith-in-Action.” <http://homepage.mac.com/paulbeedle/EFE300.html> February 21, 2010.

“... the unfolding of the soul is an increase in relationality and engagement. The more the soul has unfolded, the more the person is making it a priority to ‘improve the neighborhood,’ and to find meaning in life in relationships and in creativity and activism. Our interest in spirituality and social justice is present in our own heritage, which holds these two together in an integrated way. The illuminated, unfolded soul is a presence of creativity and blessing and engagement in the world.”¹³

- **EXTINGUISHING OF THE CHALICE**

Books by Richard Gilbert

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/search-handle-url/103-5621920-5268606?%5Fencoding=UTF8&search-type=ss&index=books&field-author=Richard%20S.%20Gilbert>

Process Theology & Unitarian Universalist Thought

<http://www.ctr4process.org/publications/Biblio/Thematic/Unitarian.html> March 17, 2010 (Cobb is recommended)

Unitarian Universalist Theologies

<http://www.uua.org/leaders/leadership/ministerialcredentialing/110035.shtml>

Note – As with all theologies, a wide continuum exists in personal interpretation. (JWL)

¹³ Blessing the Peacemakers. **UUSC Covenant Group Gatherings**, Overview. www.uusc.org/congregations