

“Your One Wild & Precious Life” ©
Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society, Woodbury, CT
The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, Minister
June 14, 2009

PRELUDE

CALL TO GATHER

Come, Come Whoever You Are, #188

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

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

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

"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.

- Ask congregants to share their flowers, so that everyone has one.
- If you are a newcomer, and haven't yet signed our guest book in the entryway, please do so before you leave so that we may send you a newsletter listing our events. If you have questions about Unitarian Universalism or are thinking about joining this congregation, we invite you to join us for coffee/tea after our service today and to speak with me or a member of the Membership Committee who wear gold nametags.
- Later in the worship 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.

- If you like to have sweets to eat and coffee or tea . . . to drink after our services, please sign up at the back table.

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."

MEMBER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

SUNDAY SERVICE

And, now: I invite everyone to relax your body, come into this natural space in beauty & light. 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 & 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.

***RECEIVING THE FLOWERS**

(You are invited to bring your flower to the chancel while we sing our hymn, or you may raise your hand to have it brought forward)

*** HYMN #8 "Mother Spirit, Father Spirit"**

***CONSECRATING THE FLOWERS - UNISON READING**

Flowers unfold slowly and gently, bit by bit in the sunshine.

A soul, too, must never be pushed or driven but unfolds in its own perfect timing to reveal its true wonder and beauty. Our work is to be gardeners of the souls, wherever we are. Everywhere, seeds are beginning to germinate. Let us tend them with the greatest care. They are very tender and delicate. Let us water them with love.

~The Findhorn Garden

OFFERTORY

Let there be an offering to sustain and strengthen this place which is sacred to so many of us, a community of memory and of hope, for we are now the keepers of the dream.

~ Brandoch L. Lovely

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 mic.

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.

SINGING THE CHILDREN ON THEIR WAY

(Children & teachers may come forward to take a flower at this time)

*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

In Silence

In Song—Spirit of Life, #123

SERMON "Your One Wild & Precious Life" Rev. Jeanne Lloyd
(based on the poems of Mary Oliver)

We are on the threshold of summer solstice, the changing of the seasons, the in-between place hanging for a moment in time, between who we were and who we will be. If theology is meant to offer a glimpse as to the meaning and purpose of life, then I offer you, this morning, the theology of Mary Oliver; observer of life, its purpose and its meanings. As you listen to her poems, I ask you, specifically, to breathe into your hearts and minds the meaning of *beauty* in our lives.

SUMMER MORNING¹

Heart, I implore you, it's time to come back from the dark,

It's morning, the hills are pink and the roses whatever they felt in the valley of night are opening now their soft dresses, their leaves are shining.

Why are you laggard? Sure you have seen this a thousand times, which isn't half enough.

Let the world have its way with you, luminous as it is with mystery and pain – graced as it is with the ordinary.

PEONIES²

This morning the green fists of the peonies are getting ready
to break my heart
as the sun rises,
as the sun strokes them with his old, buttery fingers

and they open ---
pools of lace,
white and pink ---
and all day the black ants climb over them,

¹ Oliver, Mary. **Red Bird**. Summer Morning, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008) 30.

² <http://www.flickr.com/photos/28608307@N03/3549317432/> June 8, 2009

boring their deep and mysterious holes
into the curls,
craving the sweet sap,
taking it away
to their dark, underground cities ---
and all day
under the shifty wind,
as in a dance to the great wedding,
the flowers bend their bright bodies,
and tip their fragrance to the air,
and rise,
their red stems holding
all that dampness and recklessness
gladly and lightly,

and there it is again ---

beauty the brave, the exemplary,

blazing open.

Do **you** love this world?

Do you cherish your humble and silky life?

Do you adore the green grass, with its terror beneath?

Do you also hurry, half-dressed and barefoot, into the garden,
and softly,
and exclaiming of their dearness,
fill your arms with the white and pink flowers,

with their honeyed heaviness, their lush trembling,
their eagerness
to be wild and perfect for a moment, before they are
nothing, forever?

THE SUN³

³ <http://cla.calpoly.edu/~SMARX/courses/380/maryoliver/maryoliverpoems2.htm> June 8, 2009

Have you ever seen
anything
in your life
more wonderful

than the way the sun,
every evening,
relaxed and easy,
floats toward the horizon

and into the clouds or the hills,
or the ruffled sea,
and is gone—
And how it slides again
out of the blackness
every morning,
on the other side of the world,
like a red flower
streaming upward on its heavenly oils,
say on a morning in early summer,
at its perfect imperial distance—

and have you ever felt for anything
such wild love—
do you think there is anywhere, in any language,
a word billowing enough
for the pleasure
that fills you,
as the sun reaches out,
as it warms you
as you stand there . . . empty-handed . . .

or have you too
turned from this world—

or have you too
gone crazy
for power

for things?

THE JOURNEY⁴

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice—
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
“Mend my life!” each voice cried.
But you didn’t stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.

It was already late enough, and a wild night,
and the road . . . full of fallen branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only [thing] that you could do—
determined to save
the only life you could save.

⁴ <http://www.morning-earth.org/DE6103/POETRY/Mary%20Oliver%20Poems.pdf> June 8, 2009

THE SUMMER DAY⁵

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean-
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and . . . floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention,

how to fall down
into the grass,

how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed,

how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

⁵ <http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/133.html> June 8, 2009

THE PONDS⁶

Every year
the lilies
are so perfect
I can hardly believe

their lapped light crowding
the black,
midsummer ponds.
Nobody could count all of them—

the muskrats swimming
among the pads and the grasses
can reach out
their muscular arms and touch
only so many,

they are that rife and wild.
But what in this world, is perfect?

I bend closer and see
how this one is clearly lopsided—
and that one wears an orange blight—
and this one is a glossy cheek
half nibbled away—
and that one is a slumped purse
full of its won unstoppable decay.

Still, what I want in my life
is to be willing
to be dazzled—
to cast aside the weight of facts

and maybe even
to float a little
above this difficult world.

I want to believe I am looking

⁶ <http://cla.calpoly.edu/~SMARX/courses/380/maryoliver/maryoliverpoems2.htm> June 8, 2009

into the white fire of a great mystery.
I want to believe that the imperfections are nothing—
that the light is everything—that it is more than the sum of each flawed blossom rising
and falling.

And I do.

LITTLE SUMMER POEM TOUCHING THE SUBJECT OF FAITH⁷

Every summer
I listen and look
under the sun's brass and even
into the moonlight,

but I can't hear anything,

I can't see anything –

not the pale roots digging down,

nor the green stalks muscling up,
nor the leaves deepening their damp pleats,

nor the tassels making,
nor the shucks, nor the cobs.

And still,
every day,

the leafy fields
grow taller and thicker --

⁷ From **West Wind: Poems and Prose Poems**, by Mary Oliver. Published by Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston. Copyright 1997 by Mary Oliver. Reprinted by permission. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/style/books/features/19980823.htm>

green gowns lofting up in the night,
showered with silk.

And so, every summer,
I fail as a witness, seeing nothing --
I am deaf too
to the tick of the leaves, the tapping of downwardness from the banyan feet –

all of it
happening
beyond any seeable proof, or hearable hum.

And, therefore, let the immeasurable come.
Let the unknowable touch the buckle of my spine.
Let the wind turn in the trees,
and the mystery hidden in the dirt swing through the air.

How could I look at anything in this world
and tremble, and grip my hands over my heart?
What should I fear?

One morning
in the leafy green ocean
the honeycomb of the corn's beautiful body
is sure to be there.

THE SWAN⁸

Did you too see it, drifting, all night, on the black river?
Did you see it in the morning, rising into the silvery air -
An armful of white blossoms,
A perfect commotion of silk and linen as it leaned
into the bondage of its wings;

a snowbank, a bank of lilies, biting the air with its black beak?

⁸ <http://www.poetrymountain.com/authors/maryoliver.html> June 8, 2009

Did you hear it, fluting and whistling
A shrill dark music - like the rain pelting the trees - like a waterfall
Knifing down the black ledges?

And did you see it, finally, just under the clouds -
A white cross Streaming across the sky, its feet
Like black leaves, its wings Like the stretching light of the river?

And did you feel it, in your heart, how it pertained to everything?
And have you too finally figured out what beauty is for?
And have you changed your life?

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.)

What is the intersection of beauty and theology? How does beauty help us understanding the purpose and meaning of our lives?

FLOWER COMMUNION

(You are invited to retrieve a flower while we sing our hymn)

***HYMN #21 "For the Beauty of the Earth"**

CLOSING WORDS

Who Said This?⁹ by Mary Oliver

Something whispered something that was not even a word.
It was more like a silence that was understandable.
I was standing at the edge of the pond.
Nothing living, what we call living, was in sight.

⁹ Oliver, Mary. **Red Bird**. Summer Morning, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008) 58.

And yet, the voice entered me, my body-life, with so much happiness.
And there was nothing there
But the water, the sky, the grass.

Amen

Ask each congregant to raise their flowers high, and then to join hands as the wish . . .

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
Choir Director and Pianist: Charlie Batchelder