

"The Fury of the Dove" ©
Mattatuck Unitarian Universalist Society, Woodbury, CT
The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, Minister
January 25, 2009

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 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.

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.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Important parts of our community life are the invitations we give to one another for events beyond this morning's service. Please note the announcements in your order of service. If there are any other MUUS related announcements, you are welcome to share them now.

I have these additional announcements:

(1) I want to invite you to consider make 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. If you sign up at the back table, we will be able to share the memory of the event in the Order of Service.

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

(3) Today at 1 pm, we will be holding a conversation about the "Meaning of Money" in our lives. We will be discussing the economy and its effect in our lives, looking for companionship and inspiration on this challenging journey.

(4) Small Group Ministry Workshop on February 7, 2009, Saturday, 9 – 4:30. Its not just for facilitators – its for all of us, to help establish a pervasive culture of small interpersonal covenant groups as a form of spiritual practice that will ground this congregation in ways that that deepen each person's connection to that which brings intimacy and ultimacy to their lives. This is your chance to put this congregation on solid grounding by learning the principles of Small Group Ministry, and thereby creating, with other members a culture that creates opportunities for deeply meaningful conversations about that which touches our lives most. Currently, we have 12 people who have registered for this workshop, at \$35 each. We need at least 24 people in order to conduct this workshop. Please sign up.

Testimony from Betty Bazin . . .

Here ends this morning's announcements.

And, now: "I invite everyone to relax your body, come into the room in spirit & mind. 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

These words from Rev. Sue Ayers . . .¹

Spirit of life and love,

We have gathered here in search of answers to hard questions.

We have come in search of understanding, in search of community.

We have some in search of hope and healing.

Let this be a place not only of searching, but of discovery.

Let this be a place not only of learning, but of wisdom.

Let this be a place not only of meeting, but of connection.

And, let this be a place where healing fosters giving and hope fosters service . . .

Amen and blessed be.

*** HYMN #113** *"Where is Our Holy Church?"*

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 plate/basket pass them by, you are our guests today.

On the last Sunday of each month, we dedicate a portion of our collection, that which is placed in a separate envelope, to a social justice cause needing our support. I invite Drew Morton to speak to this month's cause, Americas:

Let us now take an offering to sustain and strengthen this [congregation], which is sacred to so many of us; [this] community of memory and of hope, for we are now the keepers of the dream. (Braddock Lovely)

SHARING JOYS AND CONCERNS**

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

¹ <http://www.uua.org/spirituallife/worshipweb/openings/submissions/5376.shtml>

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!"

And, now for our Joys and Concerns:

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.

May all that is shared at this time be seen as holy.

RING BOWL

Sharing of Joys & Concerns

Ring bowl.

Many joys and woes live in the heart. We recognize their presence, even when they are offered in silence. We hold these spoken and unspoken joys and sorrows in tender care in our hearts and by this community.

May it be so.

STORY FOR ALL AGES

Denise Pedane

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

In Silence

In Song—Spirit of Life, #123

SERMON "The Fury of the Dove"

Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

I was 12 years old when I found myself riding my bike up the long bluff that overlooked San Francisco Bay. It was a beautiful day with crystal blue skies and sail boats scudding across choppy waters. Out in the middle of the bay was Alcatraz Island, still in use in the 60's, and to the left was the majestic Golden Gate bridge. All this and a lush green forest in the foreground could be seen from that hill, upon which the General's house perched.

I had ridden there from our quarters on the Presidio of San Francisco. I had a letter to deliver to General Brown, on which I had written, "Private" several times, in my still childish handwriting. I rode up to his quarters, marveling at the luxury of the home in which he lived, and I left my letter to him in his mailbox. And waited.

The Presidio is a beautiful post. It was the fourth assignment we'd had in three years. Third grade had been in Maryland, 4th & 5th in Monterey and Daly City, California, and for the last three months, 6th grade had been off post in the city of San Francisco. My father had come home the day before, and said to my mother, "How's your Presbyterianism today?"

She said, "Oh no, we've got orders. It must be God's will." Later, I saw her crying.

The orders were to Korea. Family could not go. And, we could not stay at the Presidio either - rules you know - We needed to move somewhere else to wait for him to return from Korea. Seventh grade would be at another school, and since he would be in Korea for 1 year, eighth grade would be somewhere else, yet again. And, as it turned out that would be a 1 year assignment, so there would be a different school for 9th grade, too.

This had pretty much been my life - an army brat - with few if any rights in the matter. I'd become someone rather used to chaos, and comfortable with change. A chameleon in my new environments.

But, even so, this was little too much. Without thinking - I acted for the first time in my life and said in my own way, "No." Of course I didn't say it to my father, I said it to the General! In the form of a letter.

Years later, in seminary I would learn about an abstract concept, called "internalized oppression." I remember the author describing it as a cage within which a bird lives. But, it is a special kind of cage. It's bars are invisible, and the bird doesn't know the bars are there. So, no matter how hard the bird tries to fly out - it's wings get caught by

those invisible bars. And, after a while - although it doesn't know why its so hard to get out, it just knows it is - and doesn't try anymore - and never finds the door.

“Internalized oppression”. Big words. In my own way, I was trying to get out of my cage - only to find out it was not possible. In secret, I wrote my letter to the Commanding General of the post. As best a 12 year old could do - it was a polite letter requesting that we be allowed to stay on post, while my father was overseas. The word “private” written on the envelope tells me now that unconsciously, I knew I shouldn't be doing this. I knew that in my heart, but not my head. One day, my father came home to talk to me. The General had compassionately taken my father aside one day, handed him the letter, and said to him, “I think you want this.” As far as I know there was nothing more said between them - though certainly there must have been. When my father came home he gently explained to me that I must never write another letter like that again. The reason? Because it would go on his performance record.

Now, it wasn't clear to me exactly what a “performance record” was, but I understood that somehow, I had threatened the family by threatening my father's job. Later, I found out that it was the practice of the military at that time, to include in a serviceman's performance evaluation, a report on the behavior of his wife and children. I learned that his career could be effected by my behavior. Later, I would understand that we could even lose our army housing over my behavior.

What I really came to understand was that getting angry could have serious consequences.

---PAUSE---

Years later, I heard a song called, “The Fury of the Dove,” by Carolyn McDade. The lyrics that caught my attention were:

*“I am enraged . . .
that “peace” can mean the threat that millions die . . .
that we invoke the voice of God
to bless our gold, our guns and rod . . .
that women, cast aside unheard,
are robbed of our word.
So thus in rage,
my heart doth leap,
my hands do rise
and I must choose*

*to care or despise.
If dare we see the fury within the dove,
then dare we . . . labor, friend, with love, with love." (McDade, 1991)*

Carolyn McDade's songs have inspired this movement for decades. But, this song was one I simply couldn't get my head around. I couldn't "translate" the meaning of the words "fury and dove," "anger and love". They didn't make sense to me - they seemed anti-religious - and therefore somehow inappropriate. I asked myself "How could this great songwriter have gotten something so wrong?"

PAUSE

Decades pass and childhood memories come bubbling up to the surface when I least expect them. Last year, I worked with a community minister in Chicago. Together we visited the neighbors and children of one of our few inner city Unitarian Universalist congregations. The people living in the neighborhood were nearly all African-American. Mostly I met with the women. They knew anger well enough to know they needed to defend their homes. I watched as one neighbor kept an eye out on the street corner to make sure it was free of drugs. If the young men she watched grow up in the neighborhood were selling drugs on "her corner", she went out and set the record straight with them. She was conscious and deliberate in her action.

We talked about whether she was afraid to act this way. And, she admitted that fear sometimes overcame her. But, she said,

"fear is not as important to me as living my faith."

Her understanding of faith, of God, of Jesus, allowed her to step outside that cage trying to entrap her.

While there, I also met one too many African Americans suffering from multiple strokes, and was conscious of the disparity between our lives. High blood pressure was just a concept, until it happened to me. Of course because I am white, and because I do not live in poverty, I knew I would get treatment. I didn't have to make the same difficult choices others make.

On my trip, I found out that others don't problem-solve the same way I do. One can only solve problems when one has choices. Instead others make different choices, such as medicine or food, treatment or housing. Choices within a closed system, within a birdcage.

Or, they simply don't think about treatment, because there is no perception of "choice."

I was struck with how young they were. Maybe in their fifties - not much older than me. And, too many had had strokes. Many many strokes. I saw the evidence in one woman's eyes as she wandered outside of her house looking for someone or something she couldn't articulate. I saw it in the man who always sat in the same place watching TV in the dark - partially paralyzed. I heard it in a woman's voice, as we talked about her strokes in 1972 and 1986 and 1998 and . . . I don't remember all the dates.

And then, I understood the song. I felt anger. I am angry that systems exist that shorten the lives of whole classes of people, simply because of their skin color, poverty, or heritage. I am angry because we live in a system, where some people feel entitled to medical treatment - while others do not. That sacred life is sacrificed under the dual swords of differential economics and racism. Mostly, I am angry that some expect life to be this way. That some find that being caught in the web of oppression, is all that life is.

PAUSE

I was also humbled by these neighbor's sense of community and commitment to G*d. They live out their faith, in their relationships with each other. They take action where they can. Their goals are to keep their community together. To watch after their children, to watch after the ones standing on the street corner, to watch after the lost woman walking down the street - and to invite her in for tea, to watch after others because they feel watched over by God.

They feel the presence of God, with whom they have a personal relationship. It is a God that empowers and protects them.

PAUSE

I'm not sure if my stories are very remarkable or unusual. I only know they are remarkable in my life. There is something about our Unitarian Universalist principles that call me outside of myself, even when I would prefer to stay inside myself.

Though the systems under which I struggled were not as oppressive as those of poverty and racism, I understand what it is like to be caught in a bird cage where the bars are invisible. I have some sense of the value of anger, and how it helps you understand the limits of your patience, before you can act to change something.

I now realize, that unless one has the capacity to recognize anger, one cannot act on it constructively, one cannot change things. Without the recognition of anger, one ends up simply being a cog in the machine that perpetuates the system denying your voice and being.

PAUSE

I have thought about why McDade chose the “dove” for her subject. Why not choose a lion, or a tiger, to be “furious”? Partly, I suspect it is because a dove often stands for peace. Partly, it may be because some believe that a dove was G*d’s symbol of reconciliation with the world. But, I think perhaps it is because by using a dove she presents to us a paradox that we must sort out for ourselves.

A dove seems to be such a passive creature, a symbol of peace, incapable of rage. I think she wants to shake up our sense of what it means to be a peaceful people. To internalize the possibility that even a normally peaceful and passive creature will need to draw on their anger to defend themselves, and to create change.

Ghandi, King and many others knew that human systems are not changed through passivity. They can only be changed by the concerted action and reflection of many many people.

To do so, is not without risk to ourselves! When people come together to fight systems that dehumanize others, we can anticipate change for ourselves as well. For to do this work we must also be willing to come into authentic relationships with others who live in different life circumstances.

We must be willing to listen to the painful truths experienced in each other’s lives, homes, and souls.

We must stay in the relationship even when someone’s Truth is uncomfortable.

And, in so doing, we risk what we are for what we may yet become. Oppressive systems will only change when we come together to say, “Fear is not as important as living our faith.”

Our Unitarian Universalist values call us to identify and untangle ourselves from systems and habits that claim to protect us, but that really entrap us. They call us to forge ahead in our world, to encounter the difficult to understand, hard to accept Truths that will undoubtedly change our identity. To call us to find the Truth that lives between us and upon which we can act together.

They call us to work together to change our corner of the world, so that no one . . . no one needs to sacrifice themselves to the whole.

They call us to be impatient with that which is unreasonable, that which cages our souls. They call us to live out our faith together.

May it be so.

SUNG RESPONSE

Prayer to Friends" by Carolyn McDade

(see insert –congregation remains seated)

We are standing on the threshold of history, between the past and the future. On Tuesday, January 20th, for the first time ever, a man, who is not white, assume the office of President of the United States. I can well imagine that on that day, he too, may have said words similar to the prayer we have just sung:

"To this day I bring my life, born of hope, born of sand;
Yearning joy where now there's strife;
All I have, all I am.
Help me to see what I must see,
Help me to be where I must be.
Restless faith, abide till all are free;
Fill my life, turn my hand."
May it be so.

What I wish to say is that our new President is only a man. He is only a man. He is only a man, and that institutionalized oppression and racism still exists. We, whose skin color is white are the ones who hold the invisible bars of the birdcage in place, and it will only be when we, as a people, act to remove those bars, that racism and oppression will, once and for all, cease to exist. Let us remember that we have a joint responsibility to make this President's term, every President's term in office, for the sake of the whole of humanity . . . successful. It is . . . a shared ministry. It is our ministry.

A BLESSING FOR ONE WHO HOLDS POWER

by John O'Donahue

I offer these words by John O'Donahue as a blessing for our new President.

A Blessing For One Who Holds Power²

May the gift of leadership awaken in you as a vocation,
Keep you mindful of the providence that calls you to serve.
As high over the mountains the eagle spreads its wings,
May your perspective be larger than the view from the foothills.

When the way is flat and dull in times of gray endurance,
May your imagination continue to evoke horizon.
When thirst burns in times of drought,
May you be blessed to find the wells.

May you have the wisdom to read time clearly
And know when the seeds of change will flourish.

In your heart may there be a sanctuary
For the stillness where clarity is born.

May your work be infused with passion and creativity
And have the wisdom to balance compassion and challenge.

May your soul find the graciousness
To rise above the fester of small mediocrities.
May your power never become a shell
Wherein your heart would silently atrophy.
May you welcome your own vulnerability
As the ground where healing and truth join.

May integrity of soul be your first ideal,
The source that will guide and bless your work.

Amen.

REFLECTION AND RESPONSE (congregation)

* **HYMN # 121** "We'll Build a Land," v. 1-2

² John O'Donahue, from *To Bless This Space Between Us*

*** CLOSING WORDS**

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!

*** EXTINGUISHING OF THE CHALICE**

Minister: The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd
Director of Religious Education: Denise Pedane
Choir Director & Pianist: Charlie Batchelder