

## Home Worship for August 9, 2020

The following material is offered for those who want to create a common at home service this Sunday with your families, a few friends, or individually. We wish you all good health, and we look forward to the day when we can greet one another in person once again.

The Worship Committee

### **CENTERING THOUGHT: Adapted from *We Gather Here to Worship* by Gary Kowalski**

We pause here to worship:  
to seek our truths, to grow in love, to join in service;  
to celebrate life's beauty and find healing for its pain;  
to honor our kinship with each other and with the earth;  
to create a more compassionate world,  
beginning with ourselves;  
to wonder at the mystery that gave us birth;  
to find courage for the journey's end;  
and to listen for the wisdom that guides us  
in the quietness of this moment.

### **CHALICE LIGHTING**

At the beginning of our services we join Unitarian Universalists throughout the world to light our chalice, the symbol of our faith. It's flame reminds us that we are part of something much greater than ourselves.

This morning, we dedicate our chalices with ***Open to Unexpected Answers* by Julianne Lepp.**

We seek our place in the world  
and the answers to our hearts' deep questions.  
As we seek, may our hearts be open to unexpected answers.  
May the light of our chalice remind us that this is a community of warmth,  
of wisdom, and welcoming of multiple truths.

### **MEDITATION: Adapted from *Holding Reality and Possibility Together* by Samuel A. Trumbore.**

We recommend that you follow our worship practice of reading the meditation aloud, then follow it with silence for contemplation, meditation or prayer according to your own spiritual practice.

I invite you now into a time of gratitude, reflection, renewal and hope.

What an unearned blessing to delight in the calming peace of silence;  
to hear the robin's song again at daybreak;  
to feel the warmth of the sun,  
and to enjoy the promise of summer.  
Each moment of wakefulness has so many gifts that offer energy and delight.

Yet, too often they seem unavailable  
as the weight of our troubles press down on us.  
The threats to our well-being, real or exaggerated,  
feel like mosquitoes in the night looking for a place to land.  
Minds become captive to rising flood waters: forceful, murky, threatening and ominous.

Even in moments of great danger, the direction of attention is a choice.  
Fear can dominate the mind, binding it like a straitjacket.  
Or love can unbind it and open it to resource and opportunity.  
The soil of the mind can be watered with kindness.  
The thorns can be removed one by one to appreciate the buds ready to flower.

Great possibilities await us even if all we can see is the cliff before us.  
The grandeur of life, of which we are a part,  
scatters rainbows in every direction, even as the deluge approaches.  
Holding reality and possibility together is the holy, hope-filled work of humanity

If...we choose it, again and again, in love.

### **STEWARDSHIP OF OUR CHURCH:**

Heather Christensen reminds us that “every congregation depends on each of its members by your commitment of time, energy and resources” to help make the Unitarian Universalist vision of a world filled with peace and justice, love and joy a reality.

Even though we cannot meet together at our church building during this time, our expenses are ongoing. Please remember to continue to honor your pledges, and if you are able to donate as you would have to the offering plate and First Sunday Lunch basket.

### **COMMUNITY—Joys and Sorrows. “Circle of Care” by Lisa Bovee-Kemper (adapted).**

In religious community, we share our joys and our triumphs, our sorrows and our broken places. In this circle of care, we make space for the complexity of life, the myriad experiences that bless and break our hearts. The truth of human experience dictates that on any given day, we each come to the table with hearts in different places. It is especially so during this period of isolation from one another.

We set aside this time for the private concerns of our members and friends. Together in silence we send wishes of joy, comfort, and courage to those celebrating joyful events, or struggling with loneliness, loss or illness.

If you are able to please drop a stone for each of these in a bowl of water and let the ripples remind you that what affects one of us affects us all.

**SERMON/HOMILY: *Unspeakable Speech* by Andrew Davis**

Once upon a time before I woke up old, I remember not disliking hard, physical labor, at least not completely. I could work up a sweat while getting something done that needed to be done, and I felt better for the effort. Some days, I even became so lost in the rhythm of my work that the world beyond the task itself went away. Earth vanished. Sky vanished. Time vanished. I vanished. Nothing remained, but the mystery of the moment—until I'd hurt myself. Then all of the painful details came rushing back at me. From the mundane, to the mysterious, and back again. I had no idea what I'd just experienced, but I knew that I not only liked it, I was better for it.

Sadly, I haven't been surprised by this journey nearly as often as I'd like, but often enough that I know the feel of it by heart: a moment of intense confusion, a leap into mysterious clarity, followed by a soft landing in peaceful comfort. The mystery never lasts long, merely a moment, yet the memory of it keeps me going until the next leap comes—but as I said, I'm old now and can't work myself into mystery like I once did.

Today, I have to get there in other ways: by sitting quietly, walking slowly, listening to the sun rise or dancing with the moon. In other words, I've come to love the language of unspeakable speech, and fool that I am I'm going to use my words to speak about it today. More likely, I'll just be able to talk around it, but I'll talk nonetheless.

Now, we know we're close to the land of unspeakable speech when the boundaries between self and non-self, blur. There are many ways to describe this rather indistinct boundary, but I especially like Ted Kooser's description of it.

Walking beside a creek  
In December, the black ice  
windy with leaves,  
you can feel the great joy  
of the trees, their coats  
thrown open like drunken men,  
the lifeblood thudding  
in their tight wet boots.

Think about what Kooser asks us to consider in this poem. How can we *not* be the tree, but feel the joy of the tree, the life-blood of the tree? Are we the ice, the man by the ice, or one and the same? Are we the leaves that scrape their way across the black ice in search of meaning, or are we the ice scraped by the leaves? Are our boots the roots of

the tree squeezed tight by the earth surrounding them? Where do we end? Where does winter begin?

This is the mystery of unspeakable speech: our words fail miserably *and* hit the mark perfectly—simultaneously. It's the fleeting mystery of leaping stillness: our heartbeats still, our minds still, our desires still, and then we suddenly explode and find ourselves outside of ourselves, which might seem a bit crazy until we remember that our word ecstasy comes from the Greek word *exstasis*, which literally translates as “to stand outside of oneself.” Kooser isn't crazy and neither are we, but it's even clearer now than before that I can't talk about such moments directly; I can only talk around them. So, I'll borrow another poem, this time from Pablo Neruda. It's one of a hundred love sonnets he wrote for his wife, Matilda. Yes, he was an underachiever.

There where the waves shatter on the restless rocks  
the clear light bursts and enacts it rose,  
and the sea-circle shrinks to a cluster of buds,  
to one drop of blue salt, falling.

Oh bright magnolia bursting in the foam,  
magnetic transient whose death blooms  
and vanishes—being, nothingness—forever:  
broken salt, dazzling lurch of the sea.

You and I, Love, together we ratify the silence,  
while the sea destroys its perpetual statues,  
collapses its towers of wild speed and whiteness:

because in the weavings of those invisible fabrics,  
galloping water, incessant sand,  
we make the only permanent tenderness.

Most permanence is hard and still. Neruda's rocks are restless. They stand outside of themselves, break light into rainbows, burst flowers into foam. They cry out in the raging silence of tenderness. Neruda's rocks speak the language of unspeakable speech; they speak the language of stillness leaping: we leap outside of ourselves to find ourselves; we leap through love to receive love; we leap into now to find eternity.

*That's* a lot of leaping. It's also a lot of mystery, not the least of which is that as the clarity of our love increases, the boundaries between ourselves and those we love fade away. We walk through a gate alone, but return together.

So let's walk with these ideas as we wander through one of Wendell Berry's fields. Just before the turn of this century, Berry published a collection of poetry titled *A Timbered Choir: Sabbath Poems*, and about them he wrote, “These poems are about moments when heart and mind are open and aware.” An appropriate comment, I think, for poems connected with the sabbath. Here is his ninth poem from 1979.

Enclosing the field within bounds  
sets it apart from the boundless  
of which it was, and is, a part,  
and places it within care.  
The bounds of the field bind  
the mind to it. A bride  
adorned, the field now wears  
the green veil of a season's  
abounding. Open the gate!  
Open it wide, that time  
and hunger may come in.

At first read this seems to be a poem I could talk about, rather than around. There don't appear to be any leaps to negotiate, and the small steps we are asked to take seem safe enough even for old men. But then I reconsider what I read and discover a field of boundless bounds. The field is both itself, and everything beyond itself. And if this leap weren't enough, when I open the gate, I find that time and hunger saunter in to stand beside me. Time and hunger. Everything and nothing.

We enter the field in order to leave it. We lose the field in order to find it. Berry's poem shows us that the biggest leaps we take come when we're standing still. We speak loudest by falling silent. We create clarity by embracing mystery. The paradoxical quality of this experience suggests that there's a mythical element to mystery that emerges unexpectedly from the fields we wander through. Their secrets *seem* to be shrouded in mysteries that dwell beyond our understanding, but I think it's really the opposite that's true: mystery dwells within us, as does our understanding of it.

In other words, handing over our brains to others in the face of mystery, so that they can interpret the mysterious for us, is not only unnecessary, but guarantees that we'll banish mystery from our lives forever. Maybe the Buddha had it right. When asked what he was, he rejected saint and savior, before telling his questioners that he was, "Awake." More to the point, the Buddha never bothered waking up anyone else because he knew he couldn't. Rather, he reminded us that we have to wake up ourselves and then showed us how to do it. Of course, so did every other religious leader, as opposed to charlatan, throughout history, not to mention most people who are willing to think carefully when confronted with mystery. Seamus Heaney put it this way.

Had I not been awake I would have missed it,  
A wind that rose and whirled until the roof  
Pattered with quick leaves off the sycamore

And got me up, the whole of me a-patter,  
Alive and ticking like an electric fence:  
Had I not been awake I would have missed it,

It came and went so unexpectedly  
And almost it seemed dangerously,  
Returning like an animal to the house,

A courier blast that there and then  
Lapsed ordinary. But not ever  
After. And not now.

The voice of this poem could be your father or mother, you or me. Who among us hasn't been glad that we were awake when something out of the ordinary happened, glad that we experienced it first hand, that we were ready to respond sooner rather than later, that we didn't have to read about it in the morning paper?

Whether reading about our fathers, our mothers, or even ourselves, at first read this poem seems less mysterious than the others, as if it required no leaping to get from beginning to end. And then we read it again, pretending that the voice of the poem is actually Heaney himself. Listen, if you will, one more time.

Had I not been awake I would have missed it,  
A wind that rose and whirled until the roof  
Pattered with quick leaves off the sycamore

And got me up, the whole of me a-patter,  
Alive and ticking like an electric fence:  
Had I not been awake I would have missed it,

It came and went so unexpectedly  
And almost it seemed dangerously,  
Returning like an animal to the house,

A courier blast that there and then  
Lapsed ordinary. But not ever  
After. And not now.

What would Heaney have missed had he not been awake? Since he said it twice, surely these words are important. Was it just the wind or more than wind? Is the electricity running through his body just static built up from wind rubbing against the roof, or is it more than that? I can easily see wind as a dangerous animal: I do, after all, I live in Kansas. But is the house to which the wind returns its own, or Heaney's? And is Heaney telling us that we are forever ordinary, extraordinary, or neither?

But before I can answer any of these questions, I know I'll have to wade neck deep back into mystery, and if I don't want to drown, I'll have to leap my way out of it. So I do, leaping up and grabbing hold of the wind, letting it carry me home where I sit for a while, pondering how my words both fail and save me once again.

Then, at last, I remember: there is no one more fluent in the leaping stillness of unspeakable speech than Robert Bly. In 1970, Bly was known to read his poetry in Minnesota barns and then lead his audience in marches on the closest town square to protest the Vietnam War. Buried deep inside *Sleepers Joining Hands*, one of his most overtly anti-war book of poems, I found one that I'd like to read to you now. It leaps its way through unspeakable speech to shine light on mystery, then guide us to and through it. Please leap with me through the words of "The Tao de Ching Running."

If we could only not be eaten by the steep teeth,  
if we could only leap like the rough marble into the next world,  
if the anteater that loves to rasp its tongue over the rough eggs  
of the lizard  
could walk into a room the carpenters have just left,  
or if the disturbed county commissioners could throw  
themselves like a waved hand up into the darkness,  
if the fragments in the unconscious would grow big as the beams  
in hunting lodges,  
then the tiny black eggs the salmon lays in the luminous ears of  
nuns would be visible,  
then we would find holy books in our beds,  
then the *Tao de Ching* would come running across the field!

If, if, if. If only we could make the "if" of our lives the "is" of our lives, then regardless of how surreal or insane it seems we could learn to speak unspeakable speech. We could drink mystery like water and leap over the moon while standing perfectly still.

What's the crazy "if" about yourself that you want to embrace? What's the impossible leap you'd like to make? What's the mystery you want to drink? What do you want to say through unspeakable speech? It's hard to imagine the unimaginable on command. Lucky for us, we're surrounded by holy books to help us imagine ourselves into being, if only we're willing to chase after them as they run across the field. To close, then, I'd like to turn to one of those holy books that ran through the wilderness for nearly two millennia before we found it hiding among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

*The Gospel of Thomas* leaps through time and bids us join in its unspeakable speech. Verse 77 tells us that Jesus said, "Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there." *The Gospel of Thomas*, it seems, runs hand in hand through the wilderness with the *Tao de Ching*, and apparently, Jesus and Lao Tzu aren't far behind, or ahead, or perhaps they're just wandering around, drinking wine and laughing, while they wait for us to catch up with them.

It's been said before, and will surely be said again, but Peter Mayer was right when he wrote, "*everything* is holy now."

(This last line is/was followed by a screening of Peter Mayer's song, "Holy Now." The music video can be seen at the link below if you would like to view it.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KiyPaURysz4>

**CLOSING: Adapted from *The Seasons of Life* by Mary Frances Comer**

We are grateful to mark time with seasons,  
to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries,  
or to gather as family to remember our loved ones.

In all these seasons, may we give thanks for the breath of life,  
ever mindful of the fragile nature of existence.  
May we live fully in each moment.

From summer to fall and winter to spring,  
we gather in mystery and in the bonds of beloved community.

May we radiate love both within and beyond these walls,  
this day and all the days to come,  
caring for those we love and for those we have yet to meet.

Amen, and Blessed be.