

WELCOME TO THIS FRIENDLY CHURCH

September 26, 2008

“We shall not cease from exploration, And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started *And know the place for the first time.*”

T.S. Eliot in “Little Gidding”

Our mission, as we live our historic, liberal faith, is to nurture spiritual growth, honor diversity, and offer service with love”

PRELUDE(s) Heather

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

OPENING WORDS ‘We Need One Another’ # 468

We need one another when we mourn and would be comforted.

We need one another when we are in trouble and afraid.

**We need one another when we are in despair, in temptation, and need
to be recalled to our best selves again.**

*We need one another when we would accomplish some great purpose
and cannot do it alone.*

**We need one another in the hour of success, when we look for
someone to share our triumphs.**

**We need each other in the hour of defeat, when with encouragement
we might endure, and stand again.**

**We need one another when we come to die, and would have gentle
hands prepare us for the journey.**

All our lives we are in need, and others are in need of us.

INTROIT Heather and the Choir

CHALICE LIGHTING WORDS “ Wild Geese” by Mary Oliver # 490

You do not have to be good.

**You do not have to walk on your knees for a hundred miles through the
desert, repenting.**

You have only to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain are moving across the landscapes, over the prairies and the deep trees, the mountains and the rivers.

Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again.

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting – over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

COVENANT

Love is the spirit of this church. These are our goals.

To worship God in Freedom,

To affirm the dignity of all people,

To dwell together in peace,

To serve one another,

And to seek the truth in love.

HYMN

Enter, Rejoice, and Come In

361

RESPONSIVE READING

“An Optimistic Perhaps”

464

by Judy Chicago (retitled)

And then all that has divided us will merge

And then compassion will be wedded to power

And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind

And then both men and women will be gentle

And then both women and men will be strong

And then no person will be subject to another's will

And then all will be rich and free and varied

And then the greed of some will give way to the needs of many

And then all will share equally in the Earth's abundance

And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old

And then all will nourish the young

And then all will cherish life's creatures

And then all will live in harmony with each other and the Earth

And then everywhere will be called Eden once again

CANDLES OF JOY and CONCERN

OFFERING, OFFERTORY, and Sung Response

*From you I receive, to you I give
Together we share, and from this we live.*

ANTHEM Heather and the Choir

SPOKEN and SILENT

PRAYER, MEDITATION, REFLECTION

**Let us this morning think on, feel, offer our gratitude for the deep things.
The deep things of life that we have now, whether in small or large
measure,**

**The deep things we can imagine and which therefore bring their own
pleasures even if we do not know if they will occur,**

**Even if we have not yet managed to make many of these our dreams actual
parts of our days.**

**Let us feel gratitude for relationships once tender and close, though gone
now because of death or become tenuous because of distance; for
relationships currently uneasy because we have not opened ourselves to
opportunities to explore the reasons why – nor spoken to the person with
whom we would repair – whatever breach or break has caused one or the
other of us to doubt or distrust the feelings of the other.**

**Let us awaken to our inborn gratitude for nature, including human nature,
that like the winds and fields and waters, is diverse enough to create
manifold harmonies – one color, one mystery, one personality, one
kind of love, one quickness to judge, one stand of trees, one dream,
one shadow cast by the sun, – each balancing another. And in so
doing helping us to realize our salvation comes to us from complexity
more than it does from sameness.**

not to describe failed relationships, but offering a nifty program to marital bliss through sixty-second solutions. I know there is a market, but I have only been able to think of one thing that could be confined to the current cultural attention span of a minute. Just one, and that's if I talk fast.

There are some weighty obstacles. For one, in a marriage, unlike the world of business and management, you cannot delegate the hard work. You have to do it yourselves. And second, the key elements to happiness in any relationship are always changing. Today we need a great sense of humor. Tomorrow what's required is forgiveness. The day after that, maybe a spirit of playfulness. And on and on. At weddings I often feel couples expect me to offer some sage advice that will enrich their marriage. The fact is, I haven't a clue what it is they'll need. Most of the time I'm not sure what I need in my most intimate relationships.

I often leave my counsel to this: Do more than simply keep the promises made in your vows. Do something more: keep promising. As time passes, keep promising new things, deeper things, vaster things, yet-unimagined things. Promises that will be needed to fill the expanses of time and love. To keep promising you won't need a license, you won't need witnesses, you won't need a minister. You will only need what you already have: each other.

Keep Promising ...

HYMN

All Are Architects of Fate

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SERMON

“Seeking and Finding Depth”

Mr. Beal

My remarks today are prompted by a concern I hear voiced from

time to time on both public radio and television. Perhaps its more widespread, but I don't read as many newspapers and magazines as I once did. The concern is the continuing decline in the kind of physical proximity to family members and other people, such as other students in a school. We've heard for many years now about many families no longer sitting down to eat together. More recently alarms were raised about the great deal of time people, particularly children and adolescents but really people of almost all age groups, are spending at their computer consoles playing computer games. Current news items report that larger and larger numbers of people, adolescents and younger adults, are communicating via Twitter, Facebook, blackberries, droids, I-Phones and similar kinds of devices. The thought is that there are fewer and fewer face to face meetings than once was the case, and when the communications are texted (sp?) they are compressed to fit on the small screens and the spelling and grammar necessarily takes a back seat to speed.

I acknowledge that there have been prophecies of doom – or semi-doom – with every innovation in communication. Including the telephone. And I recall, I think in Hardy's "Return of the Native" a long complaint that prior to teaching the lower classes to read and write there had been no graffiti! Be that as it may, there is at least some justification in the concerns about less face to face, and therefore less "human" interpersonal contact, with the advance of communications technology. There was less face to face contact as a result of the widespread adoption of the telephone – though perhaps not immediately any less "communication" if the click of

earpieces being picked up on the party line [4-2 ring 1-2]we were on in East Vassalboro was any indication. But again, be that as it may.

I believe there should be a level of concern if ever more sophisticated communications technology results in a lowering or absence of “depth” in what we are able to say to each other and, consequently, in the kind and quality of our relationships. Overall, I think it is fair to say that over time – and each of us is free to choose whatever span of time makes sense to us – there has been a gradual increase in superficiality in the presentation of news and opinion. Whereas all of the Lincoln and Douglas debates were published as near to verbatim in the papers of the day, and Roosevelt’s fireside chats were listened to by nearly everyone who could get to a radio, few of us today have the time and many of us do not have the inclination to sit through long speeches or addresses. We hear only short, edited versions of what was said ... versions that by their nature are necessarily superficial. Even David Brooks and Mark Shields can do only so much with the amount of time they are given to share their impressions. There is, it seems to me, a lessening of a “depth dimension” in a wide range of communication.

What’s of more interest to me, however, is the degree to which, as Unitarian Universalists, we are seeking to descend below the surface to investigate the depths of our religious faith. David Blanchard spoke of continuing “to promise new things, deeper things, vaster things, yet-unimagined things. Promises that will be needed to fill the expanses of time and place.” He was speaking of what he might say to couples he was

marrying, but what he says applies to each of us as individuals and each of us as members of this church community. Each of us know that we have times that need filling. Times in the night when we can't get to sleep. Times some afternoons when the minutes and hours pass very slowly. Times we set aside for meditation or contemplation, sometimes with a book on which we find we can't focus or an expectation that what is most important will rise to the surface as we wait to welcome it, but which doesn't come or doesn't make it through the distracting thoughts we seem unable to turn away. Likewise each of us have inner room ripe for the deeper places of the spirit. The lonely places. The places that hurt. The places too filled with bitterness, or resentment, or envy and disappointment. Those places and the places similar to them which are in need of healing, are in need of the purifying waters from the deepest springs within us. Which are there in us. Which, tapped, can heal ourselves and others. Which can lift depression. Which can assuage anger. Which can assist us in owning our own portions of blame, or guilt, or responsibility. Cooling waters to help soothe the sting of failure to be sufficiently self-aware or self-controlled.

There are likewise times and places in the lives of groups, of communities and congregations, in which a depth dimension is needed. As in an individual, the depth must be sought, elicited from within. [Here] In West Paris there's the beginning of a discussion as to whether to designate a portion of the property in front of the church as a memorial garden. It could be a very simple decision, based on where to place it, how to set

parameters for its use, what kind of markers, if any, in the garden itself or only memorials on a plaque in the church. Or it can be examined more deeply. Why do this? What would its meaning be to the congregation? To individuals who would plan to have their ashes interred in it? What would instituting it symbolize about the church and its meaning to its members?

For almost everything we do it seems to me there is a depth of meaning if we're prepared to dive deep to find it. For every question, even as seemingly simple a question as "How are you?" there are innumerable layers and levels of meaning. What do we mean when we ask? Merely a politeness? How full an answer do we want to give? How much do we want to share, to reveal?

To the couples David speaks with he says: "You won't need a license, you won't need witnesses, you won't need a minister. You will only need what you already have: each other." And that's true for all of us. For the experience of a deeper level of meaning we will need only ourselves and another. A person. A community. A sense of the spirit, or of a God or Goddess. Perhaps that there is a basic order or balance to the universe. Perhaps a faith that at the deepest of levels there is a fundamental unity or creativity or purpose that links us with everything else that is. Beyond the existence of some "other" nothing else is may be required. But anything can be that other. A poem. A painting. A song or hymn. A sonata or a ragtime. A sacred text. A sudden moment in time that interrupts the ordinariness of our days to reveal an ecstasy imbued in everything we can – at least for that moment – see, hear, touch, smell, feel, experience as

overwhelming mystery or the sublime made manifest before us.

There are states of being and degrees of meaning beyond our ordinary experience, and they are accessible to us when we make ourselves ready to receive them. Sometimes, perhaps, when we seek them out with friends, or other members of a group or congregation, or with people we love. Perhaps when the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are seen or heard heading home, again.

HYMN

Turn Back # 120

CLOSING WORDS

**The world, in addition to beauty and nurture and life itself, gives us challenges and conundrums.
May we, in our turn, for the grace we receive, give to the world our sense of meaning and an indomitable courage.
Let us go forth from this place of holiness and community ready to lend the fruits of our faith to all who need our help and all who would benefit from our commitment to freedom and reason and depth. So may it be.**

PARTING CIRCLE

“Carry the flame of peace and love until we meet again.”

POSTLUDE(s)

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