

WELCOME TO THIS FRIENDLY CHURCH

October 3, 2010

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

I don't think anyone should write an autobiography until after they are dead.
Samuel Goldwyn

PRELUDE(s) Heather

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

OPENING WORDS “All Souls” by May Sarton # 718

Did someone say that there would be an end,
An end, Oh, an end, to love and mourning?
What has been once so interwoven cannot be raveled, nor the gift ungiven.
Now the dead move through all of us still glowing,
Mother and child, lover and lover mated,
are wound and bound together and enflowing.
What has been plaited cannot be unplaited –
Only the strands grow richer with each loss
And memory makes kings and queens of us.
Dark into light, light into darkness, spin. When all the birds have
flown to some real haven,
We who find shelter in the warmth within, Listen, and feel
new-cherished, new-forgiven,
As the lost human voices speak through us and blend our complex love,
our mourning without end.

INTROIT Heather and the Choir

CHALICE LIGHTING from Numbers 6 # 711

May the Eternal bless you and protect you!
May the Eternal smile on you and favor you!
May the Eternal befriend you and prosper you!

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

Bring Many Names

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RESPONSIVE READING

“Freedom” by John Milton # 671

(Many years after his death, in papers he had kept secret, it was found that Milton had been, very quietly, a Unitarian in his theology.)

Our faith and knowledge thrive by exercise, as well as our limbs and complexion.

If the waters of truth flow not in a perpetual progression, they sicken into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition.

The light which we have gained was given us not to be ever staring on, but by it to discover onward things more remote from our knowledge.

Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions.

Give me liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.

And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so truth be in the field, we do injuriously to misdoubt her strength.

For who knows not that truth is strong, next to the Almighty; she needs no policies, no stratagems, to make her victorious.

Let her and falsehood grapple; whoever knew truth put to the worst in a free and open encounter.

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

Our gardens are being emptied, for the season for harvest has come.

We heap up our baskets with produce and gather the vines and stems and remaining weeds to pile for composting during the winter.

But some fruits and vegetables we leave behind and gather up for what at first we think is the refuse of the season, because they are too small, or seem too misshapen, or not worth the labor of collecting and storing away.

How like our lives are our gardens.

We gather into the storehouses of our memory those things that are grown pleasingly big and bright, seemly in shape, the things which the world would think fitting,

And let fade from recollection the small things that have been as much a part of who we have become as any of the things considered of note by the opinion of those we would impress.

But the things we leave behind to decompose and sink into the soil, the things which make us who we are and account for what we do and fail to do – impressions, experiences, the small and seemingly ordinary revelations, the dreams left unpursued and hopes left given-up-on,

Are as much or more-so a part of the richness of who we have become as anything we choose to tell ourselves of who we are and from whence we come.

Let us, in the silent moments we will share together now, recall all the many gardens we have planted and tended and which have made our lives what they have been,

Remembering them in their fullness, their colors and their drabness, the

**things which ripened in them and the things which never germinated,
or faltered in their growth or failed
because of weather, wilting, insects, deer or disease ...**

**Knowing that in all the things that produced the good we sought, and the
things which did not ripen and were not given thanks for in looking
at what brought us satisfaction ...**

**Are not just the fullness of our gardens, but the fullness of our larger
selves.**

SILENCE

CHORAL RESPONSE

READING (s) Our first reading, titled “Where I’m From” is by
George Ella Lyons, a poet from the mountains of Eastern Kentucky

**I am from clothes pins,
and the smell of Clorox bleach.
I am from the dirt under the back porch
(Black and glistening it tasted like beets.)
I am from the big bushes by my house,
And the Oak tree whose long limbs I remember
as if they were my own.**

**I’m from making fudge, and from eyeglasses,
From Uncle Earl and Aunt Helen.**

**I’m from the know-it-alls
And the pass-it-ons.**

From perk up and pipe down.

**I’m from “He restoreth my soul”
With a cottonball lamb
and ten Bible verses I can say myself.**

**I'm from dirt roads and cold houses,
Fried corn and strong coffee.
From the finger my grandfather lost to farm equipment.
The eye my father shut to keep his sight.**

**Under my bed was a dress box
Spilling old pictures,
A sea of lost faces
To drift between my dreams.**

**I am from those moments –
Snapped before I budded –
A leaf falling from the family tree.**

our second reading is from pupils in the Breckinridge School
read for us by their teacher. It's titled "Where We're From."

**We're from telling jokes and pranks,
We're from writer's notebooks of poems and doodles
From playing kickball on the school blacktop,
We're from compliments and oohs and aahs
From teachers in our lives.**

**We're from city fairs, watching big races, and river bats,
From roses with sweet smells.
We're from dark places where we play hide and seek,
We're from loud music and police everywhere,
And big long fields where we run in circles,
The park around the corner filled everyday with friends,
We're from hiking in the woods near Highway 64.**

**We're from the smell of macaroni and cheese cooking in the kitchen,
From gooey cheese on pizza, spicy cheesy pizza and
A stormy night of Grandma's chili.**

I love to listen to the stories told here ... oftentimes it seems to me without any special awareness that a story is being told. Just someone recounting an event from the past that receives some of its power solely by being remembered. I like to tell stories, and have told a good many of them from this pulpit. Some of them from friends, some picked up from places all around our world, some my own. My purpose today is to see if I can provide a framework, a foundation, a fabric from which the personal stories I've told can be provided a context I hope will lend what, perhaps has been too unrelated, some greater order and therefore meaning.

As you know, I was a preacher's kid. At first a Universalist and later a Unitarian Universalist preacher's kid. I grew up primarily in small towns where my father served small churches which could not pay their minister's very much. I remember us being in 9 different churches before I was twelve, because back then pretty much the only way a minister could get an increase in salary was to move to another church. But the moves we made never prevented us from being poor. Usually my mother worked and my father would have a second job. I think I've mentioned waking up early one morning because men from the mill where my father worked the third shift were bringing him home from an accident that prevented him from working for almost a year. My mother was a church organist, gave piano lessons, and got up early every morning during that time to fry doughnuts, which I delivered around town before school to make us a little money.

The owner of the mill, in many ways a philanthropist, who had given the town a library, a public theater and brought from Germany a musician

who taught a number of different instruments and was subsidized by the mill owner to raise the town's cultural level, was also anti-union. So despite the fact that my father was working alone – which was illegal – and the machine into which he was drawn had no safety switch – which was required by the State – and the regular supervision that was supposed to take place regularly did not take place, and therefore my father was so badly injured by the machine pulling on him for several hours before he was found that he died, relatively young, some years later. Because we were living in Rhode Island, which at that time was known for the corruption of its practices, and we did not have the money to pursue the kind of justice that rarely took place there, there was never any workman's compensation or money settled on my father as a result of that accident. As soon as he could he went back to ministry. We increased the size of our garden to grow as much as we could manage and my mother could put away for winter. I took on a larger paper route and as soon as I could found whatever jobs I could get as a youngster, everything from being a haberdashery stock boy and clerk, to soda-jerking, to haying on a farm that had changed very little from the beginning of the century, to earning a dollar a week carrying scuttle-fulls of coal up from her basement for an old lady whose house was near the school and where I could stop by on my way to classes.

I have, rightly or wrongly, never had much confidence in the ability of large businesses and corporations to treat workers or the poor with the magnanimity sometimes claimed for them, and later on, working as a

spinner in woolen mill myself, I saw no great generosity being extended by the owners of the mill or any acknowledgment of the demanding and debilitating piecework labor required of the workers. Nor do I today have much faith in the claims of public spiritedness of those who seek to make money from those too poor to adequately defend themselves from the fraud perpetrated against them. I have encountered over the course of my life extraordinary generosity. But often, though not exclusively, it has been from people of moderate or very few means.

My father died leaving no assets of any kind, owing me the savings I had put away to go to college and which I'd had to lend him to help meet his medical costs. So it took me eight years to do four years of study. But those were wonderful years. I'd grown up in small and very small-town New England, and though that was training for which I'd not trade for any other place to be raised, there was a great deal that such a life did not include or prepare me for. So Goddard College, a small, very progressive college in Vermont, was an eye-opener. I encountered people and ways of thinking I had not imagined existed. I was in classes with the sons and daughters of labor organizers, artists and writers; architect Aero (sp.?) Saarinen's son, the son of the editor of the Daily Worker, sons of Pete Seeger's and Woody Guthrie's, Congressman Manny Celler's granddaughter were my classmates, all students who had seemingly lived lives totally different from my own. One of my room-mates was the grandson of Standard Oil of California, and with Peter I hitch-hiked from Vermont to Mexico City, taking only four and a half days to do so. While there, staying

in the Quaker hostel, the Casa de Los Amigos, we read a note from a woman who wanted someone to drive her car back to Los Angeles. It turned out that, married to an abuser, she wanted someone to drive her, her two children, her dog, their luggage, and a large ceramic mosaic she could not be separated from (all packed into her far too tiny car, across the border without her husband, a Mexican citizen who legally would have custody of the children if the couple parted, without her husband knowing. Naturally, faced with a lady in distress, we said “of course,” as long as we could go through Guadalajara to visit the Orozco murals. So, driving by night, avoiding roads we thought the police might be watching, and heading for the border crossing that appeared the least likely for her husband to wait at to confront us, we blithely (and successfully) helped kidnap two Mexican-American children.

I worked a variety of jobs to get through college. One was as a dishwasher. For a summer I dug marine worms and clams and raked blueberries with Penobscot and Passamaquaddy laborers. Another job was as a male governess for the two small children of a stripper in San Francisco. Also in San Francisco I was a mail clerk at Insurance Securities Inc., a company headed by the treasurer of Goldwater’s campaign in California and where everyone who wanted to get ahead in the company wore huge Goldwater for President buttons. I wore a small HHH button, which stood for Hubert Horatio Humphrey. I don’t think that was the reason I was summarily fired. I think it was, because in exploring some abandoned building on the Embarcadero, I’d found some amazing murals of

fat capitalists in cut-away coats and top hats and grinding down the laboring classes – murals painted by Jack London's son, and which I thought should be rescued and preserved. I stopped in at the office of a vice-president of the company who was a trustee of the San Francisco Art Museum to persuade him (there were no female vice-presidents in that company in those days) to preserve this national treasure. The next day I was called to the personnel office and told 1) they now doubted my claim that my ambition in life was to climb the company hierarchy and 2) they no longer required my services. So I retreated to the house of a friend's mother, Faith Petric, who was the chief songstress and spaghetti maker of the San Francisco Folk Music Club, who was delighted I needed a place to stay. She moved me in to a basement room with her daughter and her boyfriend. They immediately left. Faith was pleased with the result of her generosity, and I had a place to live rent free for months, as well as meeting an incredible number of folk singers just as the folk music revival really got underway.

I was also, for six months or so, the male figure in the Presidio Hill School in San Francisco. I was paid twenty dollars a week, and saved eighteen dollars a week for going back to school, because I managed to find a way, by reaching into the refrigerator the Japanese cook, who resented there being another male employed at the school, had chained up so I couldn't get at the leftovers it was alright with the headmistress of the school if I subsisted on. It wasn't easy to reach into a locked refrigerator, I had to lie on the floor and reach up and in to grab handfuls of leftover

macaroni and cheese. It was sometimes kind of messy, but I didn't lose too much weight working there.

I've mentioned before that Joan and I worked for a number of years with emotionally disturbed and delinquent children and teenagers. We actually met at a camp, Camp Wediko, for emotionally disturbed boys run by Mass. General, McLean Hospital, and the Judge Baker Guidance Center, all in Boston. I had been doing voluntary alternative service on the adolescent unit at Metropolitan State Hospital in Waltham, rather than be drafted into participation in the War in Vietnam, in which I did not believe. Actually I was a draft card burner and a member of the New England Resistance, having given up my Conscientious Objector status when it became obvious Catholic men who were at least – or more – conscientious than I was, were being drafted. I worked at Met. State for three years, fulfilling the requirement my Selective Service Board might have imposed had I been willing to let them impose on me. When that alternative service ended I had saved enough money to take a container ship from Boston to Livorno, in Italy.

I did not last long in Italy because it cost too much of the three hundred dollars I had available to finance my stay in Europe. I visited Florence, Rome and Venice, but then headed east – where I knew it would not be as costly.

In Montenegro, then still part of what used to be Yugoslavia, I arrived at night in Titograd, without a word of Serbian and no one at the little bus station seemed to speak English. I noticed a very striking looking woman,

tall, statuesque, with flowing black hair. She was smiling at me. She gave a kind of come-hither look. But I was having none of that. Who knew how much it would cost, and I was still running through too much money. She gave up and went away. No too much later she was back, with a little boy who had a few words of English. “Rent room. Good room.” And it was, and I spent a good night and she made me a good Montenegrin breakfast of bread and sheep cheese and red wine.

Looking at my map I saw that if I went through Belgrade I would not be far from Koloszvar – in the Transylvania part of Romania – where I remembered there were Unitarian churches. So I did that and, finding no warm welcome from the Unitarians – who I think thought I was some kind of agent provocateur or strange American beatnik, and certainly didn’t look like the neatly-gotten-up son of an American Unitarian minister as I claimed to be – would have nothing to do with me. So I roomed for a couple of months with some Romanian students who wanted to practice their English.

Leaving Koloszvar I made my way to Istanbul, where, finding that a penniless American - which I had become – could expect no comfort from the American Consulate, I called on the good offices of the psychiatrist who had been my supervisor for the therapy sessions I had conducted at the Children’s Unit. He sent me enough money to take the Orient Express to London, where I met up with Joan and, on a walking tour of the Cornish coast, we agreed that if I could find us both jobs back in the States she would join me. I did. She did. And after some months working in a

residential treatment center in Parsonsfield, our son Barney announced his willingness to be born. We were married in the Unitarian Universalist church in Kennebunk, taking just enough time for the wedding and a dinner at the Gristmill in Kennebunkport, and returned to Merrymeeting Farm in time to milk the cow and feed the chickens and do our other chores, with no one the wiser.

The three of us subsequently spent four and a half years helping found a residential treatment center in Hancock County for adolescents who needed counseling and a supervised living situation, but for whom it was neither necessary nor advisable to separate them from the area in which they had grown up and would very likely spend their lives, or separate them from the parents with whom they had issues on which both the parents and their teenagers needed to work together. It was both a very difficult and demanding period in our lives, living with ten male and female adolescents who needed a wide range of interventions, but it was also highly rewarding. We left the Homestead Project because we burned out, finding that tutoring, counseling, teaching the kids to take care of sheep, goats, pigs and chickens, growing an extensive and largely organic garden, as well as teaching them what we knew of foraging for foods in the fields and woods and to fish and find foods along the seashore, working with their parents and the friends they brought home from school, tracking them down when they took off, keeping the girls out of the boys rooms and vice versa, or discovering that they were aware that one of them was on heroin ... all of it took a toll.

So we made our way to Boston, where we ran a twenty-five person half-way house for ambulatory schizophrenics. Joan returned to school at Leslie College to get her masters in Special Ed and I went to Harvard Divinity School. Following our graduations we ministered and taught first in Dexter and Sangerville, here in Maine, then in Louisville, Kentucky, and in my case I did short ministries in New Zealand, Michigan and back in Maine, in Brunswick, while Joan continued to teach in Louisville and our son Barney attended Bates. A bit over three years ago we accepted the call to these two churches in the Oxford Hills, where both of us are pleased to be and feel at home again.

There are things both interesting as well as extremely pedestrian that I have skipped over, not just because of lack of time, but because over the course of the lives we've lived what has most often been of the greatest meaning has been the very everyday things we have experienced, and from which we've learned as much or more than the odder stuff we've done. Like from the black and glistening dirt under the back porch, that tasted like beets, spoken of by the Kentucky poet, there have been lessons both intellectual and spiritual learnings. Intellectual in the sense that nothing we learn, however rarefied or exotic it may seem, is fundamentally different from what all of us can learn without traveling very far from home or doing more than adding a bit of spice to what is true for all people everywhere, namely that what is important is not how we live our lives but whether we live our lives. And spiritual in the sense that there is nothing truly deeper or of more saving or meaningful import than to accept our own particular

strengths and weaknesses and insights for what they are and not constantly look for some way to be someone other than who we've become. All religions and all spiritual teachings point away, to the sacred and the holy, then back, to what we can know as real and to the wholly human.

The stories of all our lives are the stories of being human, writ small perhaps, but written in the languages of the aspiring and the hopeful heart. We are all seekers, explorers and journeyers; and our stories, our biographies and autobiographies, are all human stories, and they bless and grace us as we tell them and as we listen to them being told to us by others.

HYMN No Number Tallies Nature Up # 79

CLOSING WORDS

our closing words are these:

Our memories are products of our lives. But so too are our lives products of our memories. We live in an inner dialogue with our past, and on the basis of what we share in that dialogue is the direction our future will take, and the meanings it will have for us. May the conversations we have with ourselves about the ways the experiences of our lives, and the fullness with which we collect and recollect them – as well as the conversations we have with our friends and loved ones – be gifts of meaning we offer to ourselves and to each other.

PARTING CIRCLE

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

POSTLUDE(s)

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Last Weeks Attendance **32**

Last Weeks loose offering \$64.00