

WELCOME TO THIS FRIENDLY CHURCH
November 14, 20010

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 “Commitment” 560 and 561

INTROIT Heather and the Choir

**CHALICE LIGHTING “Unto the Church Universal” by
Keshar Chandra Sen # 474**

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 Life of Ages # 411
RESPONSIVE READING “Religion” # 466

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

**Freedom is more than the ability to say what we think,
or believe what we can; more than to do as we please and
be who we are.**

**Freedom is also being heard and being respected for our choices
even, perhaps especially, by those who strongly disagree
with us.**

**And freedom is not just the liberty accorded us, but the liberty
we accord to others and the generosity with which we offer
it.**

**Freedom is an obligation and a responsibility, first to ourselves,
for it requires us to learn what we can about the world and
our place in it, and to listen carefully to whatever is
proposed that is new, and then evaluate its implications.**

**Freedom, to be freedom, involves reaching out to others to
include them in the same circle of safety we enjoy
ourselves, so that they, like us, feel protected by hearts and
minds and hands that value them, whatever the particular**

conditions or extremities of their lives.

For freedom is a shared, a communal, an interactive way of being, in which isolation is not possible, or the lack of freedom others suffer from impinges on our own pretense at individual independence and renders it null and renders it void.

Freedom is a blessing which must be earned, and we pray, O Spirit of Liberty and Liberation, to find the courage true freedom requires and the resolution in ourselves to extend it to all who are in need of it.

Stir our hearts, O Gods and Goddesses of untrammelled rights, O Inner Motives of the Sacred and the Holy that careen through all that exists and lists like the wind that blows where it will, and inspire us to accept no chains of conformity to mass opinion, no subjection to the siren song of go along to get along. Make us, Great Spirit of Freedom, apostles and exemplars of humankind's ancient longing to know and be itself .

SILENCE

So may it be. So may it ever be. Blessed be. Amen.

CHORAL RESPONSE

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

READING (s) from "C Street' The Fundamentalist Threat to American Democracy" by Jeff Sharlet

The book I'll be reading from, "C Street" The Fundamentalist Threat to American Democracy, came to my attention when I heard the author, Jeff Sharlet, being interviewed on National Public Radio. I'd listened carefully because I worry about our democracy, both in the sense of Thomas Jefferson's advice that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," in which democracy is always in a certain danger from its enemies ... but also in the sense that democracy itself is dangerous, subject to the fickleness and sway-ability of the crowd, of the propensity of people to accept things they're told without thinking them through for themselves or taking as the truth the most manipulative falsehoods without going to the trouble to seek out the facts or the balance of informed opinion.

The passages I'm using for the reading are not sequential. I've skipped about, picking up a piece here and a piece there. But I've done the best I could to do no violence to the author's argument or point of view.

"In 2008 I published a book called *The Family*, which took as its main subject a religious movement known to some as the Fellowship and to others as the family and to most only through one of the many non-profit entities created to express the movement's peculiar approach to religion, politics and power. One of these entities is C Street Center Inc. In Washington ... a three story red brick town house on Capitol Hill maintained by

the family ... “to assist [congressmen] in better understandings of the teachings of Christ, and applying it to their jobs.”

Among the men thus assisted by the Family have been Sen. Tom Coburn [“who has proposed the death penalty for abortion providers”], Sen. Jim Inhofe, [also an Oklahoman who was a defender of the Abu Ghraib torturers and who hosts regular foreign policy meetings at C Street, Sen. Jim DeMint of South Carolina, who insists that the Bible teaches we cannot serve both God and government, and Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas who says that through meetings of his Family ”cell” he receives divine instruction on subjects as varied as sex, oil, and Islam.

... the first serious report [in the press], in decades came on 2002, when Lisa Getter, a Pulitzer Prize winning reporter for the Los Angeles Times, published an expose in which she revealed that the family dispatched congressmen as missionaries to carry the Gospel to Muslim leaders around the world - and did so with a “vow of silence.”

In a letter about the family’s penchant for secrecy a leader of the movement wrote ”Usually [our programs] have to do

with some commitment or covenant [we] have made and are almost always invisible.” Sharlet comments:

That’s a spiritual term, not a conspiratorial one. American fundamentalism resists the idea that it is political because its ambitions, ultimately, are not. Or at least not conceived as such. Evangelicalism, from which fundamentalism grows, emphasizes the salvation and transformation of individuals. And on an individual basis, that transformation most often really isn’t political. But applied to power as it already exists, the recruitment of elites, it becomes what another Family leader called “benevolent subversion.” A means of achieving political transformation without conflict. ... Inasmuch as the rest of us cling to the myth of harmony at the cost of democracy, we become collaborators. Not in the rise of fundamentalism, but in the exchange of democracy for stability.

HYMN **Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing** **# 126**

SERMON **“Democracy, Danger and C Street”** **Mr. Beal**

C Street is the headquarters of the Fellowship, sometimes

called the Family, of a far-flung network of ultra-right religious groups operating secretly at the highest levels of our government and our military. Brigadier Generals, Rear Admirals, Commandants and former members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff describe themselves as warriors for Christ, our military chaplains, which until the 1990s were apportioned according to the religious demographics of the military as a whole. If ten percent of personnel were Baptists then ten percent of chaplains would be Baptist. And all chaplains under article 10 of the official Chaplain Corps policies pertaining to chaplains were instructed that the primary responsibility of a chaplain is the protection of the free exercise of religion for all service members regardless of religious tradition. Since changes in regulations affecting chaplains went into effect the Pentagon has accredited hundreds of new evangelical and Pentecostal chaplains, and today more than two thirds of the military's chaplains self-identify as conservative or evangelical. "The most zealous among them didn't join to serve the military, they joined to save its soul" writes Jeff Sharlet. A UU Chaplain, a blogger, writes that he received a letter from a fellow

Unitarian Universalist who is concerned by incidents and attitudes he perceives among some military chaplains, where they seem to understand themselves as “government-paid missionaries for Christ.” The letter-writer detailed research he had done that seemed to show some chaplains in the military placing a higher value upon spreading the tenets and practices of their own faith tradition over protecting the free exercise of religion.

The Air Force, more than any other branch of the service has been noteworthy for evangelical piety. Major “Chappie” Watties, an Air Force Chaplain of the Year, took up a bull horn during basic training to warn that those not “born again will burn in the fires of hell.” General David Petraeus endorsed a book called “Under Orders: A Spiritual Handbook for Military Personnel.” To have done so, since this is a book of Christian exceptionalism, was an apparent violation of Uniform Code of Military Justice.

These kinds of actions were not necessarily prompted by the Family, but conform to the Family’s belief that they, like God, will best operate through the “kings” of humankind, those

possessed of the most power, whether they be ethical or moral. Leaders of the Family have pointed to Hitler, Stalin, and Bin Laden as exemplars in the use of power and control.

To move briefly to another area of influence by C Street is to discover a particularly pernicious intervention in the affairs of another country. Uganda has been the recipient of many visits by C Street arranged congressional delegations, some paid for by taxpayers and others by the extensive network of shadowy front organizations supported financially by wealthy corporate members of the Fellowship who attend the Family's seminars and it's major Washington undertaking, the National Prayer Breakfast. The Family has poured millions of dollars into "leadership development" there, more than it has invested in any other country. Influenced by the family, according to a family leader, the United States has given Uganda, one of the world's most corrupt countries, billions.

One result is that Ugandan leadership has become amongst the most virulent of anti-homosexuals, and a leader of the Ugandan Fellowship modeled on the American Family's

Fellowship and the organizer of the Ugandan National Prayer Breakfast, introduced a bill requiring the death penalty for what it called “aggravated homosexuality,” but in fact means simply any discovered homosexual relationship. The few Unitarian Universalist churches in Uganda have been outspoken in their opposition to the bill and their advocacy of LGBT rights. In this, like the opposition between the Family’s goal for an autocratic/religion centered/plutocratic state here in this country and UUism’s commitment to democracy, our small UU churches in Uganda well represent our own presence internationally.

Let me use another passage from Jeff Sharlet in closing:

“The threat isn’t theocracy, an idea nearly every fundamentalist denounces as the province of mullahs and the Middle Ages, but the conflation of democracy with authoritarianism. Not the jack-booted kind or even the iron fist in the velvet glove, but rather the “Father knows best” variety, trickle-down Paternalism, the authority of the Father-God descending upon us through his chosen servant leaders, men and even occasional women who are to society as

fundamentalists believe fathers should be to their families, both loving and stern.

...consider the re-purposing of language that is the real art of fundamentalism: *democracy* redefined as rule by a class of the anointed; *religion* reduced to the (mistaken) beliefs of other people; *law* a euphemism for scripture; and *scripture* itself not just malleable but liquid, poured into any politician who will serve as a vessel – fuel for the long march toward *freedom*, which will be just another word for no questions asked.”

For me, at least, there is inevitably a question at the end of such a book. It's what should I, what can I do? Continue to hold and act on my values is part of an answer. To find other venues for affirming and promoting them is another. To speak up when possible. To support individuals and movements, actions and programs that represent democracy and I can hope will preserve and extend it. To support and when I can represent this faith that embodies not only my values but democratic principles. Your answers, if you share my concerns about our country's mood and the politics it creates, will be your own. But I invite you to express your values, your

principles, and your opinions here. For here we can make a difference.

Preserve us, Great Spirit. And give us the courage of our closing hymn:

HYMN For All That Is Our Life # 128

CLOSING WORDS

We have been part of great experiments. Our country. Our church. Our system of education. Our beliefs in freedom, liberty, and the inherent worth and dignity of all people everywhere. In some respects the American experiment seems to be faltering. The challenge is great. Let it spark an answering faith and an answering strength in and among us.

So may it be.

PARTING CIRCLE

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

POSTLUDE(s)

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attendance last week: 33