

"The Theology of Enough"©
Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society, Madison, CT
The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd
March 5, 2017

*As we enter this sacred space together in fellowship and holiness, please turn off your
electronic devices and respect others' need for silent reflection.*

Gathering Music *Sonata in F major, Allegro, Mozart* Carol Wright

Sounding of the Gong

Welcome Jennifer Swenson, President
Board of Trustees

Prelude First Loss, Schumann

Chalice Lighting & Bell
(The flaming chalice is the symbol of our free faith)

Opening Words Rev. Lloyd

We gather this hour as people of faith,
With joys and sorrows, gifts and needs.
We light this beacon of hope,
Sign of our quest for truth and meaning,
In celebration of the life we share together.

#*Opening Hymn #389 *Gathered Here*

A Story for All Nate Pawelek, Director of Religious Education

#Sing the Young People Out #413

‘Til we meet again (2x)

May peace go with you (2x)

Honoring Our Joys and Sorrows

Pastoral Reflection

In Words: These words from Mary Oliver . . .

Wild Geese

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 only have 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.

So may it be.

Musical Meditation: *Traumerei*, Schumann

Offertory Words *by Rev. Lloyd*

We are the stewards of this religious faith
We are the stewards of this religious community
Helping one another
Caring for one another
Working together to fulfill a common vision
Thankful for our connectedness to one another
Grateful for our shared ministry.
Humbled that we are so much more together than we are apart.
Awed by the Spirit that holds us together.
May our stewardship reflect the gifts so freely given to us.

Offering & Offertory Music *Rondo in D major*, Mozart

Sermon *The Theology of Enough* Rev. Lloyd

Hartford Seminary is where I first started my path toward ministry. Only at that time, professional ministry wasn't on my radar screen. What I was interested in then, was what Hartford Seminary uniquely offered: the development of each student's spiritual practice and skills as a lay person, no matter what your religion. For me, it meant the development of my spiritual practice and skills as just an ordinary person, practicing Unitarian Universalist values in the larger world every day.

You see, Hartford Seminary prides itself on not preparing professional ministers, but on developing the spiritual practice of lay persons. And, in one of the first classes I took, I read a book by William Diehl, called "The Monday Connection." In that book was the concept of the "theology of enough." It is a concept that has provoked me since I first heard it. It is a concept wherein Diehl tries to shake the notion that practicing one's faith is only done on Sundays, and usually in the pews. Hence the title of his book, "The Monday Connection," as in, how do we live our lives on the days between Sundays?

This may or may not seem like a provocative question to you. I think Unitarian Universalists may lean in this direction anyway. But, the idea of practicing your faith every day, it runs head-long into the secular world, a world where it is easier to talk about sex, than to talk about faith and living up to one's ideals.

And, so there is in his teachings this concept of the 'theology of enough'. You may wonder why he uses the word, "theology" in this context? It goes back to the time of Moses, to the golden calf. It goes back to a worship practice we human beings fall into, time and time again, century after century. You see, how we spend our time, is what we worship. What we put at the center of our lives is what we worship. But, if we can say to ourselves, I will be a good steward of my time and money, such that they are spent on those things that really matter to me, then what we do will be what we are.

Diehl puts the need to do so in perspective by citing a book called, "The Cynical Americans: Living and Working in an Age of Discontent" by Donald Kanter and Phillip Mirvis. It was originally published in 1989, almost 30 years ago. But, somehow it seems to me their observations then just might still be relevant now. They painted a disturbing picture of how Americans had come to mistrust people in general, and institutions in particular. Their broad study revealed that in the late 1950s more than 80% of Americans trusted the government. Yet, 1989, barely one in four did so. In the late sixties public trust in business and its leaders stood at 70%; but in '89 it was only at 15%. In '89, 60% of Americans believed that most people will lie if they can gain from it; 72 % believed there is a growing loss of basic trust and faith in other people. Cynicism was then the highest among those age 24 and younger and least among those over 35. From those findings they concluded: "There has been an institutionalization of greed in this country."

Privately, I wonder if this is what the American Dream has come to mean? Has it turned into a belief that everyone has a birthright to get whatever they want? To spend credit cards on things they can't afford. To buy houses, whose debt they can't sustain. We are barraged every day by a marketing machine luring us on to buy more things for ourselves and our children, as though somehow our possessions will make us happy.

This is not only a consumer-focused society, it is all too often an impatient society, where we have gotten used to living in an "instant" world. A remote control will switch the channel a hundred times a minute. How often do we sit hours on end flipping TV channels, searching in vain for something worth watching. Just clicking the remote, over

and over again, spending our life's moments, scrolling through images that have little if any meaning to us. I am surprised you are here, since there is no remote to switch this channel. [smile]

Of course, now some of us can pay for the privilege of having custom fitted channels that show only what we want.

The fact is, not everyone is going to get the material things that they want. Not everybody gets the opportunities to climb that ladder. And, for those who don't make it, there will be more disillusionment, cynicism and hopelessness.

Public cynicism is not new. It is healthy to maintain a bit of cynicism, because it presses one toward the truth. But the kind of deep pervasive cynicism in which employees don't trust their bosses, voters don't trust their elected officials, and people cease to be civil with each other, is gradually destroying the fabric of our society and will do so unless it is reversed.

You will not often hear me speak overtly of politics from this pulpit, but, I will give you one quote from George Bush, Sr. not "W". From his inaugural address, he said, "We are not the sum of our possessions. We cannot hope only to leave our children a bigger car, a bigger bank account. We must hope to give them a sense of what it means to be a loyal friend; a loving parent; a citizen who leaves his home, his neighborhood and town better than he found it."

So, what must we do? What must Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society do to leave a legacy, to leave this part of Connecticut and the larger world better than we who are sitting in the pews or preaching in the pulpit, better than we found it?

The answer is simple. We must match the order of our affections, with how and where we spend our time, talent, and treasure. We can do this. We have enough.

We can exert some control, over how we spend our lives. Whatever we give, if we give it together, to the best of our ability, we have enough. We have enough to live lives filled with purpose and meaning. We have enough to sustain and grow a congregation that creates and finds the time, place, and people, to help us be our best selves, to help us give of our best selves to the larger world. There is enough.

Can I hear an Amen?!

What is the order of your affections? If you were to list them, who or what would be at the top? Who or what would be at the bottom?

Do the moments of your life reflect those priorities? Are you spending the hours of your life, doing what matters most to you? In any given moment, you have choices on how that moment is spent. Spend it well, beloved. Spend it well.

If I had asked myself this question, "What is the order of my affections?", prior to starting seminary, I would have said, "I love my husband and son, dog, family, weaving and probably our house." Perhaps a few other things. But for sure they would have been things. I, and whole lot of other people, were caught, and have been caught, in that consumer-focused society, where our behaviors are shaped to be constantly wanting more, buying more, and as a consequence investing enormous amounts of our life and energy in the possession of things. And, then we are strangely dissatisfied, when those things do not fill the hole in our hearts. Perhaps not realizing that they never could. The more we try to fill those holes with "things" the more the hole gets bigger, because it is not the right fix. And, the longer it is allowed to continue, the more likely a person will lose hope, because "the fix" is not working. Not only is it not working, but when we choose jobs focused on merely generating income so that we can buy the next possession, we get further and further away from our true selves, from knowing what it is that will sustain us, and from living a life grounded in hope.

Before I went to seminary, I had lost my way, I had left a job that was going pretty well but paid poorly, for a job with much more prestige and better money. I thought to myself as I made this transition from a small non-profit to a large corporate one, let's see if I can play with the "big guys." I soon found out that this new job was at a place where people were treated as machines and money was the most important end-goal, not people or mission. What I discovered, within days of arriving at that job, was that the fit was poor, and I was miserable. Even so, I stayed there for 3 years.

PAUSE

That may seem odd that I stayed that long. Though I made a poor choice in choosing that job, it forced me to do some really hard reflection about how I spent my time and therefore my life. Before that job, I was a consumer, eager to buy the next thing that Madison Ave. would gladly sell me. Eager to spend my life earning the money to do so,

eager to deposit the hours of my life into possessions that someday someone would most certainly give or throw away.

But, here was the real revelation: None of that self-examination would have happened, if, in my emptiness, and misery, I hadn't joined a Unitarian Universalist congregation at about the same time. I didn't know what was wrong. I just knew something was wrong. Eventually, I would realize that my idealism, and therefore my heart, was broken.

I was looking for something, a place, where I could safely ask questions that frankly scared me. I was looking for a place to ask them in a safe community, one that encouraged idealism and my growth as a human being.

With time, and because of Unitarian Universalists like you, my soul was gradually healed. Better than healed, my soul found its voice along with new purpose and meaning for my life. In short, I was saved by Unitarian Universalism."¹

Can I hear an halleluiah?

Do you know that 70% of visitors who seek a spiritual community the first time, do so in a moment of crisis? I ask you, can we be the community that helps them find their heart, strength and idealism again? Can we be the ones that provide them a safe sanctuary in which to do so? How will we continue to exist and thrive so that others can learn that when you place people above money, caring above careerism, selflessness above self, and giving above getting, you find our true self?

And, if we can be that community, what must we do to help them find us when they are looking for answers?

There are many ways to give your love, and your faith, away. You can give of yourself, and your time and talents, to create a place where idealism thrives. You can give money to also create a space, a community, where hope abounds. It is an indivisible tri-une package: Time, talent, and treasure. One without the other weakens the whole.

I want you to imagine for a moment, that you aren't sitting here in this congregation, right now. Instead, imagine, that 20 of you, are not living here in this part of

¹ Adapted from: Rev. Jeanne Lloyd, "Theology of Enough", April 29, 2007, All Souls Church, Unitarian Universalist.

Connecticut, but in a country, far away and remote. Imagine feeling isolated, a stranger in a strange land, perhaps living with people who do not share your view of life.

Have any of you ever been there?

Then, imagine, that by some miracle of luck or of Grace, the twenty of you found one another, and discovered you had similar beliefs, you discovered you were Unitarian Universalists, together, and you vowed, "Let us gather together, regularly, to be in fellowship, because we want to!" And, then after a while, you say to yourselves, "We have to find others, others who need this saving message. We have to have a place, and a way of being that is predictable and caring, that provides a place of sanctuary, that invites the stranger in."

And, some one of you might say:

Into what?

And, another would say: to be in fellowship, to foster idealism, to foster hope. To promote reason, freedom and tolerance, in a world that is too cynical, in a world that thrives too much on the exploitation of others, in a world that is falling too much on hard times.

And, then someone would add, and . . . to help others discover the purpose and meaning of their lives, and to offer to them respect, love and compassion, just as we have found here.

And, then someone else, someone older, would say, to have a place to spend our later years – a place where our lives, at the end, will be celebrated.

And, so, my friends, I ask you:

What is enough?

When will we have had enough of the hard-times?

When will we stop accepting that that is the way things must be?

When will we say, these are the things that matter to me: My soul, this person close to me, these beliefs, and, this place that supports me in finding out what is important to me and discovering the order of my affections. This place that gives me opportunity to

find my voice, that gives me space to struggle to say what I mean. That calls forth from me, the very best I have to offer.

Can I hear an Amen!

What is enough?

What is enough?

What can I give of my heart to the people of this faith community? What can I give of my talents to this congregation? What can I honestly afford to give this beloved community, once I've figured out what really matters in my life, and where those things that matter are most likely to thrive?

How much can I afford to give a Unitarian Universalist community that ***seeks nothing more than to give me hope for all the days to come.***

How much is enough?

It is not an economic question. It is a spiritual question. Only you know. Only you know.

But, whatever you decide – your place is secure here. We want you here, and, we will celebrate your life with us, because it is the one life you have to give. Who you are today, is enough for us. Who you will be tomorrow, will be enough for us. Who you bring to this faith community next week (or next year) because you want them (like you) to live a life free of cynicism, a life that believes in dreams, and ideals, and hope, matters to us.

They will be enough – just as they are and as they will grow to be.

Can I hear an Halleluiah?

Together, we have enough to make it. Together, we have enough talent to create a faithful community devoted to reason, faith, tolerance; respect, compassion and love. Together we have enough time – to be together and to do the work. Many hands make light work.

And, together, dear ones, if we really look at the order of our affections, and adjust our lifestyles accordingly, there is enough for this congregation to grow and to blossom into a sanctuary for all who come.

Come, come, whoever you are.

You are welcome here.

May it be so.

***Closing Hymn #347** *Gather the Spirit*

***Closing Words**

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we hold in our hearts until we are together again.

So may it be.

Extinguishing the Chalice

Closing Music *Kleine Prelude in C, Bach*