

"Common Fire"©
Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society, Madison, CT
The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd
January 28, 2018

Gathering Music *Selections from Debussy*

Nick Stanford, pianist

Sounding of the Gong

#Welcome

Bill Townsend, Member
Board of

Trustees

Prelude *You Raise Me Up, Secret Garden*

Chalice Lighting & Opening Words

(The flaming chalice is the symbol of our free faith)

by Lisa Doege¹

You might ask . . .

"Why a flaming chalice?" . . .

[We answer . . .] It's the cup of life, we answer.

A cup of blessings overflowing.

A cup of water to quench our spirits' thirst.

A cup of wine for celebration and dedication.

The flame of truth [and education].

The fire of purification.

Oil for anointing, healing.

Out of chaos [and] fear . . .

thus . . . [this symbol of our faith was] crafted, a generation ago.

So may it be for us, in these days of uncertainty . . .

. . . a light to warm our souls and guide us home.

¹ <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/chalice-lighting/challenging-times> 1/27/18

New Member Ceremony

Alice Fleming, Cong. Life Co-Chair
Jenny Lee, Vice President

#*Opening Hymn #317 *We Are Not Our Own*, David Hurd

A Story for All Nate Pawelek, Director of Lifespan Religious Education

#Sing the Young People Out *Children's Recessional (see back of Hymnal)*

Honoring Our Joys and Sorrows

And, now, if you woke this morning with a sorrow so heavy that you need the help of this community to carry it; or if, in the spirit of thankfulness, you woke with gratitude in your heart that simply must be shared, now is the time for you to speak.

Please come forward to the mic as you are able. Or, we will bring a mic to you, as needed.

PAUSE

Let us reflect with reverence in our hearts for the joys and sorrows spoken and unspoken today.

Musical Meditation: *You'll Never Walk Alone*, Rodgers & Hammerstein

Offertory Words

We attribute to Jesus the saying that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). This idea is based on the human truth that the more you give away in love, the more you are. It is not just for the sake of other people that Jesus tells us to give rather than get, but it is . . . for our own sakes, too.

Please give with an open heart for the sake of this community and those we support.

Offering & Offertory Music *One Little Candle*, J. Maloy Roach & G. Mysels
Amy Buckley, Soloist

Reflection

Common Fire

Rev. Lloyd

A story: A certain pastor felt very keenly the absence from the regular Sunday service, of a once faithful member. After some time [of waiting] the pastor went straight to the home of the absentee and found them sitting before an open fire. Somewhat startled by the intrusion, the member hastily placed a chair for the pastor before the fire, and then [waited for] the expected rebuke. Not a word did the minister say. Taking a seat, the minister took the tongs and lifting a glowing coal from the midst of all the other coals, [she] laid it by itself on the hearth . . .

Remaining painfully silent, they watched the blaze die out . . . The member got the message, and was at service the next Sunday.²

Why bother? Why come on a Sunday or any other day of the week, to join with others, when the world offers so many other lusciously beautiful or disarmingly destructive reasons to stay away? Ranging simply from sleeping late and having a leisurely breakfast in robe and slippers . . . to walking along the shore . . . to mindlessly watching some screen . . . to urgently running errands. There are plenty of reasons to stay away, some real, some contrived, // some healthy, some not.

Why come?

PAUSE

Among others, these definitions exist for the word "commitment": (1) "an agreement or pledge to do something in the future," and, (2) "a state of being emotionally impelled" to act on something morally compelling.^{3 4} Attached to this word, "commitment," is movement, action, an urge to move from one way of being to another that is more connected, to move from one place of solitude to a place of relationship.

I believe that in our best moments we recognize our need for relationship, to be cared for . . . and in turn to care for others. But, in so many ways too numerous to name, and sometimes unnamable, we are distracted from this urge, this calling, often by those seeking our attention and dollar. (Now, others have every right to want to earn a living, a dollar, your dollar, but it comes at a double cost to us. Not only might we spend our hard earned dollar on material items we may not truly need, but the act of paying

² Adapted from *A Harvest of Sixty Years, Gathered by Wallace Fiske*, 1992 (printed privately by the Universalist Church of West Hartford, CT).

³ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/commitment> January 27, 2018

⁴ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/impel> January 27, 2018

attention to such temporal matters also costs us the time we might have spent in a place of relationship with others.)

PAUSE

Commitment: an agreement, a pledge, a moral calling to something beyond yourself. Have you ever wondered what experiences provide the foundation for us as children to become in later years, committed leaders with generous hearts?

Developing Lives of Commitment in a Complex World

In their book, ***Common Fire, Living Lives of Commitment in a Complex World***, the authors, Parks & Daloz describe the tangible guideposts to developing lives of commitment to the common good.

They use the word “commons” to identify that place that marks the center of our shared world. For them, “the commons” is a place where the diverse parts of a community can come together and hold a conversation within a shared sense of participation and responsibility. It is a place. // They use the word “fire” to describe the degree of commitment people develop to pursue the common good. Thus, their title “Common Fire”. The place, the foundation, that generates the environment from which you and others will pursue the common good.

To figure out what that starting place looks like, they interviewed dozens of people who had grown to be community leaders with sustained long-term commitments to work on behalf of the common good. They asked questions like: “What are such people like?” “How do they become that way?” “What keeps them going on in spite of inevitable discouragement?”

Obstacles that Erode the Commons/Community

They asked these questions even though and perhaps because they recognized the significant obstacles of poverty, racism, classism, and a variety of other inequities from which this world suffers. By definition, with inequity comes loss of control and choice, compared to someone or a system that is more powerful than you. Systematic and institutionalized oppression dehumanizes and objectifies people. It breaks authentic relationships, and in doing so undermines the health of individuals, families and communities.

And yet, and yet, there are those who do rise to address the needs of friends, neighbors, and others. This rising, this emergence of committed leaders, is the phenomena that

Parks and Daloz studied. In systems of inequitable opportunities, they sought to understand how it is that people do grow into leaders who challenge inequity. How is it that they develop lives of commitment to the commons and its common good)?

Well, it turns out that such leaders have the following experiences in common:

1. They had a mentor or several mentors that established for them a home base that held them and nurtured them in their growth. Their favorite memories were when their mentors worked alongside them.
2. This village of mentors encouraged them to reach for their dreams, and,
3. The village helped them: to develop critical thinking habits, // to practice lives of action, // and to take risks.⁵

So, too, as we and our children grow in this space, in this Commons, here, we are mentors and co-travelers to others and can provide each other the proving ground, the place necessary for all of us to risk, to make mistakes, to learn, to risk again and then to . . . move forward . . .”⁶ We can do this when we have a certain generosity of spirit that surrounds our spiritual home in much the same way a beautiful red satin ribbon circles a precious gift. The generosity we draw upon when we take the time to help another person find their own voice and fulfill their own dreams is contagious. Done together it creates a generous community with a tireless spirit.

Can I hear an “mmm, mmm”?

Principles of Scarcity & Abundance

A question:

Seventy-five years from now, in 2093, when this congregation is 131 years old, and most of us are gone, will it have been a contributing force along the shoreline, known for being a congregation that led by faith and generosity, modeling to others both a humble willingness to learn from others and a willingness to act on humanity’s needs?

Will we choose scarcity thinking of abundance thinking?

⁵ Parks Daloz, Laurent A.; Keen, Cheryl H.; Keen, James P.; Daloz Parks, Sharon. ***Common Fire: Lives of Commitment in the Complex World***. (Boston, Beacon Press, 1996).

⁶ Tim Sanders, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DeYQrTdORc&feature=related> January 27, 2018

Ya see, within every community one finds self-fulfilling prophecies that assure that a community will reach the level of accomplishment it expects to reach. For every person, and every community, we get to choose which prophesy controls our lives.

For those caught up in scarcity thinking, the response to any suggestion to a problem, is phrased in different ways, but it often sounds like, “we can’t do that,” “it won’t work,” “we tried that before,” “it’s the way we’ve always done it,” “why should we?”, and, so forth. When that happens dreams fall flat; they fail to get traction; they never move into action. Needless to say, it doesn’t promote commitment toward the commons, or our own common good.

There is another way of thinking, however, that does promote commitment to the commons. Who knows what it’s called. It is challenging though because it requires a communal generosity that promotes action and dream-making. It’s called “abundance thinking.” With abundance thinking there is not only the birth of new ideas, there is active **community** support and generosity of spirit to help visionary ideas succeed. This kind of thinking **assumes** (dare I say presumes?) that there will be a **collective will**, that there will be a **collective way**. It places faith in one another. And, when that faith is justified, trust and confidence develops that holds the community together **even in** the challenge of risk-taking, **even in** the process of growing wisdom through the experience of making mistakes. Trust and confidence builds as a people make a point of keeping the pledges they made to one another. It builds in their reaching out to others in the congregation, to solve mutual problems. It builds when speaking to one another gently and with compassion when working through issues of conflict. It builds when members go the extra mile to make sure that sufficient information is shared and that personal and collective resources are directed to the accomplishment of mutually established dreams. All this faith, risk-taking, forgiveness and beginning again, builds that generosity of spirit that gradually and ever so imperceptibly winds itself around this congregation and our individual hearts, thereby sustaining us in the present and far into the future. And before you know it, it allows this congregation and others to intuitively risk, to forgive, and express our values for the common good . . . vibrantly, charismatically, and effectively.

Can I hear an Amen?

Let our commitment find expression in how we care for one another. Let our vision be seen in our deeds.⁷

So may it be.

⁷ Rev. Wallace Fiske

***Closing Hymn #1028** *Fire of Commitment*, Jason Sheldon

***Closing Words & Extinguishing the Chalice**

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

Sung Benediction *Love Will Guide Us*, Sally Rogers

*Love will guide us, peace has tried us,
hope inside us will lead the way
on the road from greed to giving
love will guide us through the hard night.*



A Moment of Silence

Announcements

Bill Townsend, Member
Board of Trustees