

“Coming Home”©
(Samhain)

Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society, Madison, CT
The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd
October 27, 2019

Sounding of the Gong

Gathering Music *New World Symphony, Mvt. 1* excerpt by Dvorák
Nick Stanford, Pianist

#Welcome Neil Schultes, Treasurer
Board of Trustees

Prelude *Träumerei* by Schumann

Opening Words Rev. Lloyd

The chalice lit amongst us is a beacon by Debra Faulk¹

The chalice lit amongst us is a beacon.
A beacon of hope, in a world in crisis.
A beacon of possibility, made manifest in community.
A beacon of warmth through our interconnections.
A beacon of light illuminating our shared wisdom.
A beacon of connection by our being together.

Chalice Lighting Jennifer Farmer-Etzel & grandson, Jack Fitzgerald
(*The flaming chalice is the symbol of our free faith*)

****Opening Hymn 83** *Winds Be Still*
As we prepare to sing our hymn, you will find the hymnals under the seat in front of you, unless you're in the front row where they were on your seat. We invite you to share hymnals.

Story Briana Benn-Mirandi

¹ <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/chalice/submissions/151324.shtml> November 3, 2012

Offertory Words

October Share the Plate

IRIS, Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services

Since 1982, IRIS has helped refugees and immigrants establish new lives, regain hope and contribute to the vitality of Connecticut communities.

Here, we share with generosity what treasure we have with others whose needs are greater than our own. Each week we donate 50% of our total cash offering to a designated non-profit program that serves others. This month your cash contributions will go to: IRIS, Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services. Since 1982, IRIS has helped refugees and immigrants establish new lives, regain hope and contribute to the vitality of Connecticut communities. Please give generously.

Offering & Offertory Music

Litany for the Feast of All Souls, Schubert

Amy Buckley, Soloist

*May all souls rest in peace;
those whose fearful torment is past;
those whose sweet dreams are over;
those sated with life, those barely born,
who have left this world:
may all souls rest in peace!*

*And those who never smiled at the sun,
who lay awake beneath the moon on beds of
thorns, so that they might one day see [G*d]
face to face in the pure light of heaven: may
all who have departed hence, may all souls
rest in peace!*

Message/Candles

#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.

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

Musical Meditation

Variations on a Theme by Chopin - Epilogue by Mompou

All Souls Remembrance Ritual

This is the time of year, *when we reach out across time*, to remember loved ones who have died. This is our time for *connecting our spirits and our souls, to loved ones lost*. In honor of loved ones, family members, friends, mentors, and others who have died, you are invited to bring forward a picture, or other remembrance of who you've lost. Or you may take a flower and place it on today's altar.

Reflection

Coming Home

Rev. Lloyd

As some of you know, before we moved here, Bob and I lived on a pond in Canton with my father. The pond was, on the whole, relatively small.

Not a lake certainly. About the size of 3 football fields, I think? So it was big enough for some big birds (not from Sesame Street) to land and take off. Geese were its most frequent inhabitants, and ducks.

In the summer, there were herons, green ones and one Great Blue Heron. He liked to perch on a dead tree that had fallen into the water years before. He shared it with several turtles that liked to climb up on it to sun themselves.

We lived there for 21 years. My parents owned it before we did. They moved here from Virginia to be closer to me, their only child, and our son, Brenton, their only grandchild. Our son was about 10 years old when they were looking for a place, and as a boy he had trouble sitting still for more than a minute or two. He went with them when they were looking for a house, and at this house, he quickly gravitated to the pond, and amazingly, sat still at its edge, watching the pond life below the surface, for a very very long time. Unusual for him. At last he got up and ran to my parents, exclaiming, "You have to buy this house!" And, so they did. Even at 10 years old, he had the wisdom to see and feel the grounding this place of nature provided.

We were truly blessed to live on this remarkable natural symbol of life. It reminded us better than most things of the turning of the seasons, the transcendence of life and nature, the inevitable passage of time and the mile-posts that mark our way through life. We experienced the changing iconic symbols of each season: the bright green of fragile new grass; the delicate yellow of budding forsythia in spring; the deeper green of summer along with the flush fullness of trees and flowers and garden vegetables; the paling grays, oranges, and browns of autumn, with gray squirrels and chipmunks ravaging the birdfeeders; and, the crisp cold blueness of the sky and water, ice and snow, as winter ever so gradually deepened . . . forcing the river otter and swans into one corner of unfrozen water on the pond.

PAUSE

The swans arrived each year as the earth leaned away from the sun. They arrived about this time of year, after the Great Blue Heron had left. They shared the pond with the other birds, but, seemingly never at the same time as with the Great Blue Heron. There seemed to be an unspoken understanding between them. A capacity to live and let live. The pond was big enough for both 'Great Blue' and white Swan, but not at the same time.

PAUSE

For years there had always been at least two swans return to the pond each fall. Sometimes as many as five, but more often adults with their raised their cygnets. By this time of year, the cygnets would be adolescent, marked by graying feathers, not fully white, and slightly smaller in stature.

PAUSE

Swans usually mate for life, so it's not hard to imagine that our couple knew each other well. It is not hard to imagine that they had their preferences, their understandings, and deep knowledge of each other. That they were accustomed to each other, and took some comfort in each other's presence. It is not hard to imagine that they may have held some affection for each other, though surely some of you will think I am projecting human emotion onto them, and that may be true. Still, it's not hard to imagine that two who knew each other so well, took comfort in their familiarity with one another whether in loving or cranky ways.

Swans are among the largest flying birds, with wingspans of about 10 feet (mark out 10 feet). In the fall, when they returned to us, they arrived on the water with their feet outstretched, as though sharply putting on the brakes, while at the same time pulling in their huge wings, and landing with a great splash in the water! Only then, did they assume the stately composure with which we are more familiar as they glided about the pond.

Each morning they took a constitutional, evidently aware that they needed some exercise. They lifted their relatively heavy bodies awkwardly from out of the water to fly, circling the pond once, twice, sometimes three times, before simply, gently, gliding back down to the pond.

PAUSE

When the swans left the pond for a daytrip or a season, they'd have to fly a bit higher to clear the trees . . . so they again climbed in ascending circles around the pond. Once around, twice, three times, wings spread while soaring upwards – they'd get enough height about the trees . . . and . . . they were gone. They were magnificent to watch in full coordinated flight, for they almost never flew alone. Flying together in their exercise or adventure, seemed to be their preferred nature.

Until one particular year.

One autumn as leaves turned from lush green to red, yellows, and browns, the parents (as a couple) didn't return. Only one swan arrived and gently glided on the water. After my mother died, my father called him "lonesome George."

PAUSE

It's the transitions in life that are most difficult, aren't they? Like going from flying to gliding and coming back down to earth again, gently or otherwise . . .

The seasons of our lives change in mostly predictable ways, if we pay attention, and if we do not, they change nonetheless without negotiation. It is part of the condition of life, part of our "deal" with life. The late Rev. Forrest Church says that "Life draws death in its glorious train."

If we are lucky to live a full life:

- we are born;
- we toddle into adolescence, bold, full of wonder and hopefully idealism;
- we grow into adulthood and self-sustainability, caring for ourselves, our partners, our children;
- we grow further in skill and wisdom, hopefully bringing some small good to humanity;
- and, we grow into life's full wisdom and maturity in later years.

At the end we rest at the threshold between life and death, reflecting on the trajectory of our lives and wondering – did we do good? Did we spend it wisely? Are there things left undone that still need to be done?

One of my most sacred and privileged duties is to walk with you in your last years and days. There is perhaps no more life-filled moment than those I share with you when together we take a reckoning, and chart a course into those final days and moments of life, even while loved ones gather close to share the last mile with love.

This year, we shared this journey with Janet Poss, and yesterday, Jim Lindsay. For those of you who have been here for a long time, you will remember many other SUUS members and friends. Each passing is significant in their own way not only for life’s ending, but also for the potential of new beginnings, of reconciliation, of forgiveness for oneself and others.

In our last days, only a few moments remain to adjust the trajectory one last time. May we use them well.

Though we all experience loss, our common experience of grief may not make it any easier when the next season of our life arrives at our doorstep, forcing itself upon us, whether we are ready or not.

Today’s service is in honor of ancient traditions around Samhain, which, in Celtic tradition, was that moment when the veil between the earth and the afterworld was thought to be thinnest; it was thus thought to be the precise moment when we could reach across the veil and touch, *if only for a moment*, the souls of loved ones lost.

Loss comes to us all in life, in small and deep ways, but *each time* there is the potential to ‘make right’ the next moments. For, if we are aware, and present to the transient nature of life, the changing of the seasons, the unrelenting passage of life through its milestones, and, the relentless march of time . . . If we pay attention, we can adjust the trajectory. Not the inevitable trajectory of life, but the trajectory of life’s outcomes. In our awareness and attentiveness, we can, while we are able, adjust how it is that we leave life. We can look into our own hearts and ask the question, “Are there regrets?” And, if there are, “What is there yet time to do? How can I yet adjust the trajectory of my life’s outcomes? How do I grow into leaving life well, leaving the best of what I yet have to offer . . . ?”

PAUSE

Each year, the swans returned to our pond. One year, lonesome George, in his solitude returned to the shelter and sanctuary of that which he knew and in which he took comfort. For whatever reason, known only to him and his, our small patch of water surrounded by graying leafless trees called them together, and then called him to return alone. There was a bond there that even he (could he speak our language) couldn’t name, and certainly we can’t do for him. But, I think it’s fair to assume that he took comfort in being in familiar and wholesome surroundings. In ways neither we nor he could explain, he came home.

In our lives, we have those places that we return to in joy and in sorrow. They are places that give us grounding when the ground seems to have fallen out from under us. They are places to which we have a bond, that carry our spirit when we are least able to carry it by ourselves. These may be places of natural beauty? I know that for many of you the shoreline is such a place, and holds this special meaning.

This congregation, this place of sanctuary, is such a place for many. It is a place where the lilt of laughter, the touch of a hand, a warm hug, a knowing glance can be all we need to steady us in the midst of the unexpected. It is a place that can call you to keep growing into life even at the end of life. A place of comfort that gives you the courage to ask the deep questions, and to act in such a way that at the beginning, middle or end of life, ***your life's outcomes*** become worthy of your life. Treasure this place. It is a precious and rare place of both challenge and comfort. It is a place where, upon arriving for the first time and for the last, you can say, "I'm coming home."

May it be so.

Responsive Reading 720 *We Remember Them*

***Hymn 123** *Spirit of Life*

***Closing Words & Extinguishing the Chalice**

Please remain standing as you are able and join hands as you are willing.

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

Please be seated to sing our closing song.

Closing Song 131 *Love Will Guide Us*

Silent Reflection

Let us sit together in silence as we reflect on the message and meaning of today's service.

* Please stand as you are able and comfortable.

Latecomers may be seated.