

“New Beginnings, Part II” ©
Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society, Madison, CT
The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd
January 12, 2020

Sounding of the Gong

Gathering Music *Look at the Sky*, Hollman Nick Stanford, Pianist

#Welcome Mary Strieff, President
Board of Trustees

Prelude *Is Anybody There?* Edwards

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

Opening Words by Erika A. Hewitt Rev. Lloyd & Amy Buckley, DFF

Last week, we started Chalice Quest. What that means is that for seven weeks, in recognition of our seven principles, we invite you to return home or to some other special place, to light a chalice and reflect on each Sunday’s chalice lighting words. Many choose to do this at dinner time, but other times can work, as well.

Spiritual practices sustain us in challenging and promising times. But, they require practice. Such practices can improve our resilience and bond us more closely with those with whom we share them. When practiced, such a ritual can become an anchor of stability in tough and changing seas, for you and/or your family. To help you get started with this chalice quest, you will find chalices made by our children in the foyer and fellowship hall.

Light Chalice

Before we say the chalice reading please turn to the Order of Service, so that you may join in when called.

In honor of our 2nd principle. We seek . . .

Principle 2: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations

We offer you these chalice words . . .

Reader 1: Rev. Jeanne

The word courage comes from the Latin word 'cor', which means heart. According to poet Mark Nepo, the original use of the word courage meant to stand by one's core: a "striking concept that reinforces the belief found in almost all [spiritual] traditions that living from the Center is what enables us to face whatever life has to offer."

Reader 2: Amy Buckley, DFF

To "encourage" means to hearten; to impart strength and confidence. This is our work, as a religious community: to encourage one another; to be bold in engaging the world around us, as well as what scares us internally; to give one another the confidence and heart to live as fully as possible.

Rev. Jeanne: I invite you to join with us in this reading . . .

Congregation:

With full hearts, we affirm our relationships with one another; we recognize our agency and our connective power; and we accept our responsibility to be bold and courageous.

We light this chalice, symbol of all that we are, all that we have done together, and all that we will be as our shared ministry encourages those within, and beyond, our walls.

PAUSE

Rev. Jeanne: In the coming week, you are invited to reflect on these words, and to share those moments in your journal or with friends or family. This week's chalice quest questions, are . . . *When was a time that you showed courage? When have you been encouraging to another. Share the story. Most importantly, why did it matter?*

This reflection will be posted on our homepage under "This Week's Chalice Quest".

#*Opening Hymn 1023 *Building Bridges*

There are hymnals in the seats in front of you if you need them.

Story

Kathy Helmrich

Offertory Words

January Share the Plate: Fuel Assistance

Here, we share with generosity what treasure we have with others whose needs are greater than our own. Each week we donate half of our total cash offering to a non-profit program that serves others. This month your cash contributions will go for Fuel

Assistance on the Shoreline. The days may be getting longer, but winter has just begun. Many in our towns are struggling to keep their heat on.

Please give generously.

Offering & Offertory Hymn 1012 *When I Am Frightened*

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

Honoring Our Joys and Sorrows

In the coming moments, we will share with one another our joys and sorrows. We do so in two ways.

(1) You may come forward to the mic to speak (or, if needed we will can bring a mic to you).

(2) Afterwards, you may also come forward to light a candle silently.

Verbal Expression

If there are those among us who would like to share their joy or sorrow from the microphone, please come forward now (or raise your hand as needed).

Silent Expression

And, now let us enter into a time of quiet reflection.

[Bell]

In this time let us slow down the pace of life, see past the distractions, and pay attention to that which, perhaps, you've been too busy to notice. It could be a joy, it could be sorrow, it could be something with which you are struggling . . .

In these moments, ground your feet on the floor (as you are able), relax your body . . . breathe deeply. Reflect in silence on that voice longing to be heard . . . acknowledge it .

..

Silence

As the spirit moves you, you may come forward to light a candle for that which is on your mind or in your heart.

Musical Meditation *From Little Things Big Things Grow, Kelly*

Let us light one last candle and remember with reverence the joys and sorrows spoken and unspoken today.

[Bell]

Reflection

New Beginnings, Part II

Rev. Lloyd

Last week, we talked about reactive change and how hard it can be to adapt to changes you didn't ask for. And, in the spirit of the new year, we also talked about self-initiated change, where we want to change something about ourselves or our lives, and the challenges that can get in the way of making those changes. We talked about being stuck and what we need to do to get unstuck. We also talked about how we tend to blame ourselves when we want to change but don't succeed at making the change. And, how blaming ourselves only makes things worse. What makes it better? When we change our behavior instead of waiting for inspiration, and when we persist toward finding that which brings us joy. Sound familiar? If not, take a look at last week's sermon on our website.

Today I'm going to talk about organizations, and how they change or don't change. As you may or may not have noticed there are different kinds of organizations, large and small, run in different ways. In the best corporate organizations, leadership exists that listens to its employees and consumers, seeking change that serves the common good while allowing the organization the capacity to sustain itself to do yet more good. Now, I'll admit, not every organization operates this way, but I think the longevity of an organization depends on how closely they operate by these standards.

Even with good leadership, change is easier for corporations, than for congregations. In an organization made up primarily of paid employees there can be lower turnover, clearer job descriptions, a better understanding of who is accountable for what, and (usually) a willingness to follow direction toward a certain goal, in return for being paid to show up.

PAUSE

Volunteer organizations, like a congregation, are all together different animals. The smaller the volunteer organization, the less clear are the lines of responsibility and accountability to . . . what? Usually, a good volunteer organization will have a clear sense of its mission, at first, at least at the beginning of its life. Over time, though,

sometimes an organization loses its grasp on a binding mission, and goes adrift . . .
wondering what its purpose is and what it’s working toward . . . ?

The first year I was here, the board and I worked through this book, called, “Governance and Ministry” by Dan Hotchkiss. We learned together that small congregations operate one way, much like a family that sits around the kitchen table to make decisions; congregations our size are called pastoral size congregations and its governance process is different, relying on elected leadership from the Board and Minister to lead with input from the congregation. Larger congregations, like our Hamden, New London and Manchester congregations are called Program Size Congregations and have yet a different governance structure that invests more authority in its leadership and also spread authority across many groups. Corporate size congregations, with membership over 600, like our West Hartford church, rely on a governance model that places a CEO type of authority in the minister, with the board primarily concerned with outcomes. The point I am making here is that with different size congregations, the way change is promoted and followed through on, happens differently. And, with congregations it is important to know the guiding principles that evoke, or should evoke change.

In Hotchkiss’s book, he states, “congregations do some of their best work when, instead of giving [members] what they want, they teach them to want something new. It is not unusual to hear a person thank a congregation for the fact that he or she now volunteers to help [others] or takes risks for social justice. Sometimes a congregant abandons a job that [was] just a job, at some sacrifice of income, in favor of a morally significant vocation congruent with his or her values. When people talk about such profound life changes, [Hotchkiss sometimes asks them], ‘What would you have done if someone warned you how belonging to this congregation would transform your life?’ Often they admit they would have run the other way.”¹

PAUSE

Sometimes members of a congregation don’t realize that they don’t actually own the congregation, that the purpose of a congregation is not to maintain the status quo, but instead to create opportunities of support and discomfort to help its members grow into the fulfilling lives they don’t yet know they want and need. Hotchkiss says, “The congregation’s job is to find the mission [to which] it belongs . . . A congregation’s ‘bottom line’ is the degree to which its mission is achieved.”² He states plainly that the owner of the congregation is its mission. And, I agree . . .

¹ Hotchkiss, Dan. *Governance and Ministry, Rethinking Board Leadership*. (Herndon, VA, Alban Institute, 2009), 82.

² Hotchkiss, Dan. *Governance and Ministry, Rethinking Board Leadership*. (Herndon, VA, Alban Institute, 2009), 85.

Now you may rightly ask, “What is the mission of our congregation?” And, the simple answer is that you can read it on the back of your order of service.

~Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society Mission~

As a Welcoming Congregation dedicated to Love, Faith, Justice and Reason, our mission is to:

- nurture the spirit and enrich the mind;
- foster a reverence for life in all of its complexity and mystery;
- build a spiritual community dedicated to social, economic and environmental justice;
- explore the search for truth, providing a safe space for the exchange of diverse perspectives;
- inspire members, friends and our larger community to go forth and make the world a better place.

Let me summarize and translate: *We are Welcoming Congregation that welcomes those who embrace religious diversity and people with different perspectives, including GLBTQ people, specifically. How do we do that? Through love, faith, justice and reason. What specifically will we try to do? We seek to create a place that nurtures the spirit and mind, reveres the mystery of life, and addresses issues of injustice, together.*

Peter Drucker, a management consultant, states that the most important “core [outcome] of all social-sector organizations is ‘a changed human being’. [He says], a congregation’s mission is its unique answer to the question. ‘Whose lives do we intend to change and in what way?’ [Hotchkiss says,] a congregation that limits its vision to pleasing its members falls short of its true purpose. Growth, [budgets, programs], . . . only matter if they reflect positive transformation in the lives of the people touched by the [congregation’s ministry to each other and the larger world]”³

The ministry of this congregation, its programs and budgets, should all be directed to this mission such that lives are transformed . . . Thus, our ministry together must have at its very heart the capacity to inspire change to embrace new ways of being amongst ourselves and with others. It is in this capacity, this uncynical aspiration to address those events that create dis-harmony and suffering in this world, that a congregation can claim its greatest promise. Living into that promise is something we can only

³ Hotchkiss, Dan. *Governance and Ministry, Rethinking Board Leadership*. (Herndon, VA, Alban Institute, 2009), 85-86.

achieve if we know what our mission is, create a plan to pursue it, and share the ministry of doing so. Together, we can and will make the path as we walk it, looking back with time, at how we have helped each other grow. Together, we must always try again.

So, how do congregations change? Two ways: 1. When we focus on creating a spiritually healthy congregation with people who are themselves spiritually grounded and who then have the courage to face the world. And, 2. When we focus on the spiritual health of our communities addressing issues of justice and equity. Then, we become unstuck, then we are transformed, then we fly, then what we do becomes congruent with who we are.

These words from William Dewitt Hyde:

Since what we choose is what we are,
and what we love we yet shall be,
the goal may ever shine afar –
the will to reach it makes us free.

PAUSE

A short story. Before we lived in Madison, we had a home in Canton, that sat on the edge of a pond. It was fun to watch the seasons and pond-life change as the years passed. Every year, life on the pond would ever so gradually change as we moved from spring to summer to fall to winter. As winter approached, the pond became colder and colder. Eventually it would freeze over.

One winter it was so warm that it took longer than usual for the pond to freeze. During that time, there was always some open water for the geese and other birds to land, swim and eat. Then, one morning, for the first time that year, the entire pond was completely frozen over. On that day, I awoke to a great cacophony of noise coming from the geese. Instead of swimming in the water, they were all (some 15-20 of them) standing on the ice with their big black flat feet at the end of their skinny legs, honking at each other. Honk, honk, honk, honk. They sounded really irritated. As though they were stuck. Mad. Complaining. I wondered what they were complaining about. And, then I thought that I would probably be irritated, too, if I'd unexpectedly landed hard on the ice, perhaps skidding and was now stuck with my comrades, standing on the pond, instead of swimming in it where the food was just below the surface. They seemed to debate their situation for a while. Honk, honk, honk, honk. I grew weary of listening to them, and turned away. And, then, the honking stopped and I turned back. Together, they had lifted their wings and were flying out over the trees, toward a new horizon.

May this congregation remember our wings in those times when we feel stuck. May we seek joy. May we make joy for others.

I offer you a blessing by Rebecca Parker (Choose to Bless the World⁴)

Your gifts—whatever you discover them to be—
can be used to bless or curse the world.

The mind's power,
the strength of the hands,
the reaches of the heart,
the gift of speaking, listening, imagining, seeing, waiting

Any of these can serve to feed the hungry,
bind up wounds,
welcome the stranger,
praise what is sacred,
do the work of justice
or offer love.

Any of these can draw down the prison door,
hoard bread,
abandon the poor,
obscure what is holy,
comply with injustice
or withhold love.

You must answer this question:
What will you do with your gifts?

Choose to bless the world.

The choice to bless the world is more than an act of will,
a moving forward into the world
with the intention to do good.

It is an act of recognition,

⁴ <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/blessing/choose-bless-world> January 11, 2020

a confession of surprise,
a grateful acknowledgment
that in the midst of a broken world
unspeakable beauty, grace and mystery abide.

There is an embrace of kindness
that encompasses all life, even yours.

And while there is injustice, [apathy], or evil
there moves a holy disturbance,
a benevolent rage,
a revolutionary love,
protesting, urging, insisting
that which is sacred will not be defiled.

Those who bless the world live their life
as a gesture of thanks
for this beauty
and this rage.

PAUSE

The choice to bless the world can take you into solitude
to search for the sources
of power and grace;
native wisdom, healing, and liberation.

More, the choice will draw you into community,
the endeavor shared,
the heritage passed on,
the companionship of struggle,
the importance of keeping faith,

the life of ritual and praise,
the comfort of human friendship,
the company of earth
the chorus of life welcoming you.

None of us alone can save the world.
Together—that is another possibility, waiting.

***Hymn 1017 Building a New Way**

***Closing Words & Extinguishing the Chalice**

Please remain standing. Normally, we join hands at this moment, but in this season of flu and respiratory illnesses, instead of doing so, I invite you to touch elbows 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 our support for one another as we try to live into being the values we share. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Let the congregation say, Amen.

Please be seated to sing our closing song.

Closing Song 55 *Dark of Winter, v. 1*

Silent Reflection

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

In a moment I will leave to visit one of our children's classes before they are released. Thus, I will not be able to greet you today at the end of the service. Go in peace and have blessed week.



* Please stand as you are able and comfortable.

Latecomers may be seated.