

Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society
Online Worship Service
September 13, 2020

Restless Beauty
Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

It is my custom to write my sermons and put the service together on Friday mornings. I find it does no good to rush my muse, to try to force her to write on Monday or Tuesday, as my organized and efficient mind would prefer. *No* she must have her baking time, her stewing time. She must dilly and dally, collecting thoughts through the week, to deliver them gloriously, if not somewhat in disarray on Friday. Leaving me with the pleasure and anxious burden of sorting through her freshly strewn array of ripe and blossoming thoughts and metaphors.

Not surprisingly, I was thinking about water this past Friday morning. More than ever this summer, I've been drawn to, called toward, scenes of beauty, beauty that very often included glimpses or wide open gazes of lakes, rivers, seashores and oceans. For many summers, Bob and I camped on a 10-mile lake in Maine where my favorite past time was watching loons swim nearby. I am drawn to water. Not just to water, but to that meeting place where the water and the land touch. The threshold between here and there, the pregnant tidal shore of each new beginning.

PAUSE

This past Friday, I picked up a book of poems by Pablo Neruda, called, "On the blue shore of silence, Poems of the sea."¹ For the first time, I read this poem, "The Poet's Obligation."

To whoever is not listening to the sea this Friday morning, to whoever is cooped up in house or office, factory . . . or street or mine or dry prison cell, to [them] I come, and without speaking or looking I arrive and open the door of [their] prison, and a vibration starts up . . . vague and insistent . . . a long rumble of thunder adds itself to the weight of the planet and the foam . . . the groaning rivers of the ocean rise . . . the star vibrates quickly in its corona . . . and the sea beats, dies, and goes on beating.

So, drawn on by my destiny . . . I ceaselessly must listen to and keep the sea's lamenting in my consciousness. I must feel the crash of the hard water and gather it up in a perpetual cup so that . . . wherever those in prison may be, wherever they suffer the sentence of the autumn . . .

¹ Neruda, Pablo. *On the blue shore of silence, Poems of the Sea*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2003, 45. With translations by Alastair Reid and paintings by Mary Heebner.

I may be present with an errant wave . . . I may move in and out of windows, and .
. . . hearing me . . . eyes may lift themselves, asking . . .

“How can I reach the sea?”

And I will pass to them, saying nothing . . . the starry echoes of the wave . . . a
breaking up of foam and quicksand . . . a rustling of salt withdrawing itself . . . the
gray cry of sea birds on the coast.

. . . [Through] me, freedom and the sea will call . . . in answer to the shrouded
heart.”

PAUSE

The shrouded heart. To me, the word ‘shroud’ infers . . . a cloak . . . a veil. Something shrouded is, in
my mind, hidden from view . . . perhaps a secret even to ourselves.

PAUSE

Do you know what, very often, is the #1 charge to a minister when they are ordained or called to
minister to a congregation? It is: to practice “self-care”. I think it is not only appropriate for ministers,
but also to all those who try so very hard to take care of that or those they love so much and whom
they are called to serve.

The concept of self-care is not one I grew up with, I don’t think it was a guiding philosophy for my
generation! For me, and perhaps for some of you, it has always been a struggle to integrate the
concept of self-care into my life. For some of us it seems selfish to practice self-care. I shudder at
thinking how my parents would have reacted to the concept. A raised eyebrow and look of disapproval
would have been the likely reaction . . . thinking that the practice of self-care is the epitome of a self-
absorbed sloth and laziness.

I don’t know about you, but I’d rather not be a sloth. I, perhaps like some of you, would like to be a
good person? It seems to me that a good person is someone who takes their responsibilities seriously.
They commit to things . . . to people . . . to principles . . . to the future of our children. These are, to me,
the marks of a good person, a good human, a loving person, a giving person.

But, all these responsibilities to which I know we are deeply devoted make for a lot of rushing around
and busyness. A lot of tasks. Lists that are long . . . starting in the morning . . . crossing things off during
the day . . . only to start again the next morning. And, there is satisfaction from getting things done,
crossing things off the list, lists that contain things important for those we love, knowing that what we
do sometimes helps others realize their dreams. It matters to us, that we make a difference in the

world, and so . . . the world continuously calls us forward to make those many, many, many contributions, on and on and on. And, it is often pleasing when we do so.

But, it can also sometimes seem as though we are pushing a giant wave up against a giant rock. We are pushing, pushing, pushing, and sometimes . . . we don't know enough to stop and take care of ourselves.

Sometimes we don't have the good sense that water has . . . which is this:

water always seeks equilibrium.

Do we?

I think too often we utterly forget that we (all of us) need to rest and take care of ourselves and . . . we need to let others do so as well . . . if we want them to learn the art of how to sustain themselves.

PAUSE

A few books in my life have changed my life. "Beauty, The Invisible Embrace" by John O'Donohue, is one of them.

O'Donohue writes,

From source to sea [a river] is one flow; nowhere does it pile up. Nowhere does the water break to leave an empty space. From source to sea, it is one unbroken song of flow . . . ever changing yet always one . . . Its journey is always out of silence, and this silence dwells deep in the river too.

If only our lives could achieve, or indeed allow, such grace and elegance. If we could but find a rhythm of being which could balance a contemplative grace, a poetry of motion and an accompanying stillness and silence, our pilgrimage through this world would flow in beauty through the most ragged and forsaken heartlands of confusion and dishevelment.

[The river] gives itself to the urgency of becoming but never at the cost of disowning its[elf] . . . It engages the world while belonging always secretly [to] its memory and still strives forward into the endless flow of emerging possibility.²

Engaging the world . . . holding secretly to our timeless selves . . . while still striving toward our emerging possibilities . . . this is indeed . . . a rhythm of being.

² O'Donohue, John. **Beauty, The Invisible Embrace**. New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2005, 114.

PAUSE

O'Donohue continues, "The ocean remains faithful to the land, it always returns . . . When the tide goes out, the seashore is exposed, its eroded stone pockmarked and chewed by the tide. Between tides, the line of fragmented shore seems vulnerable as though exposed in an arrested posture from which it cannot stir."³

I call this a "threshold of vulnerability".⁴

He says, "It is reminiscent of edge-lines in your life where fluency abandons you. In such times of emotional devastation, the woundedness and fragmentation stand out, naked and exposed. The natural ease of rhythm seizes up. Each gesture, thought and action has to be deliberately willed. Everything becomes extremely difficult. What you would have accomplished without the slightest thought . . . now becomes an action that seems impossible.

[And,] Yet hope whispers that the tide always returns!

Transfiguration graces you gradually. You stood exposed and atrophied, unable to move in the grip of pain; even the ground was naked and broken beneath you.

Now gradually fluency returns. You recover your spontaneity and a new buoyancy raises you up and your heart is again relieved and glad as when the ocean returns along the shoreline and everything becomes subsumed in the play and dance of young waves."⁵

PAUSE

Lives well lived, seek balance. They find equilibrium. They return to the shore, just as assuredly as they go out to sea, into the world. Too often we forget to come home to ourselves, to tend the fires of our souls, to find, once again the source of our inspiration so that we **can** go out to sea again.

And so I charge you, dear friends, members and respected leaders of this beloved congregation:

Take time, grab time, seize time, wrestle it away from the chores, the responsibilities, and yes, even the people (from time to time). Put aside precious moments of silence and solitude to fill

³ O'Donohue, John. **Beauty, The Invisible Embrace**. New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2005, 116.

⁴ Rev. Jeanne Lloyd.

⁵ O'Donohue, John. **Beauty, The Invisible Embrace**. New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2005, 116.

the wellsprings of your soul and ignite the fires of your love for yourself, others and this very precious earth.

Do so, so that you, you, may stand again, refreshed again to love again fully.

Do so, so that you may, once again, [fill the] deep wellspring of [your life], [in order that the best of yourself may once again give life], to another person, to one's passion, to one's art, to life itself, [and, perhaps most importantly] to . . . [the] invisible embrace of beauty.⁶

May it be so.

⁶ O'Donohue, John. **Beauty, The Invisible Embrace**. New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2005.