

RENEWING FAITH
Unitarian Universalist Church of Yakima
Sunday, March 13, 2022

Description for Unifire and Thursday Update:

What could the term, “faith,” mean for those of us involved in a non-credal religion for which there are no required beliefs? How can Unitarian Universalists be “people of faith”? From materials offered through the Soul Matters series, Susan Kaphammer explores these questions and the importance of personal and congregational renewal of our faith in hope, courage and love.

Spiritual Snack

When we believe that we are supposed to be more, even when we aren't sure what the road to it will be like, that's how we show that we are a people of faith. --
Rev. Megan Foley

Celebrant and Speaker: Susan Kaphammer

Greeter: Carole Sahlstrand

Music: Sunny Sonker

Tech Host: Bill Jacobs

Prelude: Sunny

Welcome

Welcome to this Sunday Service of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Yakima. Whether your heart today is heavy or light, full or wanting, we hope you find joy for your spirit today, and we are glad you are here. I am Susan Kaphammer, and I am privileged to serve as celebrant and speaker this morning.

We are sending out and recording this service with Zoom, and we are glad if you are joining us from a distance. We are still new in making our service available this way and still working out the process, so bear with us if there are glitches. For those of you on Zoom, if you wish to offer comments during Joys and Concerns or during discussion, please type into the chat. If you are on your phone, you can access the chat from the “More” tab below the zoom image. If all goes well, I will be alerted and will share your comment with those gathered here.

Welcome all.

Call to Community: Susan

Good morning! Please join with me in reciting our covenant that binds us in community with the promises we make to each other and for ourselves; the words are printed in the order of service:

UUCY COVENANT

We promise to:

**Treat each other with kindness
Celebrate each other's spiritual growth
Listen deeply to others
Speak with courage and humility
Share the ministry of this congregation**

Chalice Lighting

Now, in fellowship with Unitarian Universalists around the world, we mark our time together in spiritual community with the ritual of lighting our chalice with familiar words printed in the order of service:

**We light this chalice in deep respect
for the mystery and holiness of life;
with honor and gratitude for all who have gone before,
with love and compassion for all who dwell among us,
and with hope and faith for the generations to come.**

Introduction

Today's service is titled, "Renewing Faith." The term – Faith – has a lot of baggage for me from my experiences with religion from childhood through my early 20's. It meant believing, despite reason and evidence and doubts, the creed and dogma articulated for me. This became increasingly problematic as I hesitantly searched for spiritual understanding, a search that eventually brought me to this Unitarian Universalist congregation. I ask today that you join me in considering how we can claim or re-claim the term "faith" with essential meanings for what we know of and how we act in our world.

Opening Song: # 108 “My Life Flows On in Endless Song” in *Singing The Living Tradition*. *Words: Early Quaker Song; Music: American gospel tune*

Our opening hymn, “My Life Flows On in Endless Song,” provides us words and music to celebrate the “endless song,” the “far-off Hymn” that “hails a new creation” and “echo(es) in my soul.” Truth that lives despite the storms and darkness; truth that gives songs in the night and “inmost calm;” and love that prevails in heav’n and earth for each of us and our friends despite the forces that would take us down... such truth and love... this can be the stuff of faith.

The lyrics are printed in the order of service. While singing with gusto is not recommended, feel free to hum or sing to yourself as Sunny plays.

My life flows on in endless song above earth’s lamentation.
I hear the real though far-off hymn that hails a new creation.
Through all the tumult and the strife I hear the music ringing.
It sounds an echo in my soul. How can I keep from singing!

What though the tempest ‘round me roars, I know the truth, it liveth.
What though the darkness ‘round me close, songs in the night it giveth.
No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that rock I’m clinging.
Since love prevails in heav’n and earth, how can I keep from singing!

When tyrants tremble as they hear the bells of freedom ringing,
when friends rejoice both far and near, how can I keep from singing!
To prison cell and dungeon vile our thoughts to them are winging;
when friends by shame are undefiled, how can I keep from singing!

Sharing Joys & Sorrows

As we journey through life, each of us reaches high and low points. By sharing the peaks and valleys of our journeys and other significant events in our lives, our sorrows are lightened and our joys enhanced. If you have not already done so, you may light a candle. If you wish to share a joy or sorrow, please stand if able and speak briefly. Zoom attendees may type into the chat.

....

Let us acknowledge and honor the joys and sorrows that have been spoken, and those that are unspoken but kept in the confines of our hearts and minds.

Sharing our Generosity and Commitment

While Sunny shares with us her ministry of music, baskets will be passed to collect our contributions of time, energy and intentions, represented by our financial giving. We are invited to give to the church in the spirit of love and sharing. Also, we continue to “Share the Plate” of non-pledge contributions with local agencies – Planned Parenthood and Rod’s House – that are working to make our community more just and fair.

....

What you freely give sustains this community and helps heal our larger community and our world; your generosity is received with gratitude.

Reading: “This act of faith...” by Rev. Gretchen Haley

What's going to happen?

Will everything be ok?

What can I do?

In these days we find ourselves
too often

Stuck with these questions on repeat

What's going to happen? / Will everything be ok? /What can I do?

We grasp at signs and markers, articles of news and analysis

Facebook memes and forwarded emails

As if the new zodiac

Capable of forecasting all that life may yet bring our way

As if we could prepare

As if life had ever made any promises of making sense, or turning out the
way we'd thought

As if we are not also actors in this still unfolding story

For this hour we gather

To surrender to the mystery

To release ourselves from the needing to know
The yearning to have it all already figured out
And also the burden of believing we either have all the control, or none

Here in our song and our silence
Our stories and our sharing
We make space for a new breath, a new healing, a new possibility
To take root

That is courage
forged in the fire of our coming together
and
felt in the spirit that comes alive in this act of faith:

that we believe still, a new world is possible
That we are creating it, already, here, and now...

Message: Renewing Faith – Susan Kaphammer

A note about my comments: My message is built around materials identified through the Soul Matters worship packet to which our congregation has subscribed.

I approach the topic of “Renewed Faith” tentatively... since I left faith behind me when I finally admitted I was no longer a Catholic. I rejected the term “faith” in the dictionary meanings of “belief in God or in the doctrines or teachings of religion... a system of religious belief.” Growing up, this meaning of faith was represented in the Apostles Creed, recited every Sunday at Mass:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried;
He descended into hell; on the third day He rose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the
Father Almighty; from there He will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of

Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.

(When I was quite young, in my fractured understanding of Bible history, I puzzled as to how Pontius Pilate had made Jesus suffer; maybe he had crushed Jesus under the wheels of the plan on His way to the cross?)

The statements of the Apostles Creed, however, were so ingrained in me that although it had been years since my previous attendance, the last time I went to Mass to please my mom, I was halfway through reciting the Creed before I stopped myself, realizing, “I don’t believe a word I’m saying!”

As I had been moving away from the Catholic faith, it became increasingly clear to me that rather than believing in Catholicism, for some time I had been “piggy-backing” on the faith of people I respected who were believers – a younger priest in my hometown parish who listened and encouraged me when my teenage life was lonely and painful, and priests and lay leaders at the campus ministry when I was in college. When those people were no longer in my life, I was left with no faith of my own. Now, several decades later, this “lost” faith is nothing I wish to “renew.”

To even begin to deal with the topic of Renewing Faith, I realize I need a different understanding of “faith” if the term is to have any meaning to me as a Unitarian Universalist.

The online article, “The Issue of Faith in a Non-theistic Religion,” chronicles a discussion between Norman Fischer, founder of the Everyday Zen Foundation, and Sharon Salzberg, teacher of Insight Meditation and author of the book, *Faith: Trusting Your Own Deepest Experience*. Their consideration of faith in context of Buddhism helped me both expand and deepen my understanding of the term.

Fischer speaks to Salzberg, “Usually when people talk about faith, as you say in the book, it’s faith in something, faith in something outside of yourself. Buddhism proposes faith not in something outside of yourself, but faith in reality and your own capacity to embrace it.” Salzberg notes, “We...look to ourselves not just to see ourselves, but to see all beings... ultimately it has to be about everybody.”

Salzberg talks about a faith “progression from bright faith to verified faith to unwavering faith....Bright faith [is] at first an intoxicating rush of falling in love...with a teacher...or a brand new sense of possibility.” In another article,

she contrasts this bright faith with “blind faith [that] is associated with an unthinking devotion... mistakenly seen as the fulfillment of the journey of faith rather than an early step. Bright faith, on the other hand, is seen simply as a beginning, and not a beginning in which we surrender discriminating intelligence, but rather one in which we surrender cynicism and apathy. Its abundant energy propels us forward into the unknown.”

“Through questioning, putting things into practice and examining them, bright faith moves to the next stage, verified faith, which relies less on external sources and more on our own experience... When we move from blind faith to verified faith...we have to grab it and test it. We have to look, examine, investigate, we have to find what’s really true, not just accept what someone else tells us. Verified faith comes from our own experience of the truth.”

Salzberg explains that the third level of faith, unwavering faith, comes, “Through constant deepening. It’s like something seeping into your bones. If you’ve seen the power of love enough, for example, then you know it so deeply that it becomes something that you don’t need to refer to externally. You know it so very deeply.”

I can see that the “faith” I rejected was “blind faith.” I remember comments such as: faith means it is not questioned, and don’t look for proof because faith is not based on truth. The “faith” described in this article doesn’t just allow questioning and doubting, it requires them.

Salzberg clarifies the role of essential doubt in the deepening of faith. She first identifies “corrosive doubt” that “is more like cynicism...We stand at some distance and look at it mockingly or ironically and we don’t allow something to speak to us and reveal whatever it may have to offer. Such distancing, which is often seen as a badge of sophistication, allows us to avoid trying. Corrosive doubt is probably based on unacknowledged fear...[that] deflects you.” In contrast, “In the right kind of doubt you’re moving forward into what you’re doubting and getting it all over you, checking it out...it’s based on a sense that we have the right and the ability to know the truth for ourselves.”

“The right and the ability,” and I suggest, the spiritual mandate, to seek, “the truth for ourselves.”

Consider, Salzberg’s idea that, “the opposite of faith isn’t doubt, but rather despair.”

We often welcome people into community with us with this promise from a familiar hymn, “Ours is no caravan of despair.” I see a path in my evolving spiritual understanding in not rejecting faith but in rejecting despair, and instead accepting the challenge to develop and deepen faith in what I find and know to be true through my “free and independent search for truth and meaning.”

Song: “# 297 The Star of Truth” in *Singing The Living Tradition*.

Words: John Andrew Storey, 1935-; Music: Dede Duson, 1938-; cc UUA

As Unitarian Universalist we call ourselves to a difficult spiritual path of testing tenets of faith, of searching for truth and meaning. Our hymn, “The Star of Truth,” portrays in every line the challenges we face: “truth but dimly shines... certainty we crave [but] can never know... brave uncharted waters... must not let our courage fail... winds of doubt blow strong...”

The words are printed in the order of service. Listen as Sunny plays this hymn, read the words or sing along quietly, and seek the wisdom of the lyrics.

The star of truth but dimly shines behind the veiling clouds of night,
but ev’ry searching eye divines some partial glimmer of its light.

The certainty for which we crave no mortal ones can ever know;
uncharted waters we must brave, and face whatever winds may blow.

Though for safe harbor we may long, we must not let our courage fail,
and, though the winds of doubt blow strong, upon the trackless ocean sail.

From honest doubt we shall not flee, nor fetter the inquiring mind,
for where the hearts of all are free, a truer faith we there shall find.

Message continued

“From honest doubt we shall not flee, nor fetter the inquiring mind / for where the hearts of all are free, a truer faith we there shall find.” Not the true faith, but “a truer faith”.

Ours is not a religion of certainties, and it requires us to live at what Albert Huffstickler termed, “The Edge of Doubt.”

There is always
that edge of doubt.
Trust it.
That's where
the new things come from. If
you can't live with it,
get out because,
when it's gone
you're on automatic,
repeating something
you've learned.
Let your prayer be:
save me from that tempting
certainty that
leads me back
from the edge,
that dark edge where
the first light breaks.

We are blessed, or cursed, to live in the questions, expressed in the hymn that summarizes our lives, “We laugh, we cry...We need to feel there’s something here to which we can belong...and we believe in life, and in the strength of love, and we have found a need, a time, a place to be together...” and in the last verse, “maybe we’ll finally see: even to question, truly is an answer.”

Without the assurance of final answers, we can recognize the lament of Rev. Adam Dyer: “Sometimes I am adrift in my faith...” His response: “I must remind myself that not only can I swim,/ But I can read the sun and the moon.../ And the buzz of the fly that says, “land ho!”

These images and memories – of being held by water as I swim, “reading” the sun and the moon, hearing the buzz of the fly – lessons of trust. Albert Huffstickler urges us to trust the edge of doubt and pray to be saved from certainty, so that we may see from the dark edge, the light. Galway Kinnell writes:

Wait, for now.
Distrust everything, if you have to.

But trust the hours. Haven't they
carried you everywhere, up to now?

Thomas R. Smith ruminates on Trust:

Trust

It's like so many other things in life
to which you must say no or yes.

...

Sometimes the best thing to do is trust.

The package left with the disreputable-looking
clerk, the check gulped by the night deposit,
the envelope passed by dozens of strangers -
all show up at their intended destinations.

The theft that could have happened doesn't.

Wind finally gets where it was going
through the snowy trees, and the river, even
when frozen, arrives at the right place.

And sometimes you sense how faithfully your life
is delivered, even though you can't read the address.

“How faithfully your life is / delivered, even though you can't read the
address.” The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reminds us that, “Faith is taking
the first step even when you can't see the whole staircase.” Sharon Salzberg,
who I quoted extensively earlier in this message, re-states this message:

For me, faith has a lot to do with courage, and it's the courage to step
forward into the unknown and, first of all, to admit that we don't
know... to actually admit we don't know, and yet to say, `You know, I
have the strength to go forward anyway... it's connecting to our own
deepest strengths so that we're not defined by this circumstance we
find ourselves in in any given day

And the Rev. Barbara Prose suggests:

At the center of faith is patience - a willingness to trust in a timing, timeline
and unfolding not of our own. Also life as a patient unfolding of and search
for our faith: ‘What if we don't need faith to live, but instead live to find our
faith?’

“Faith Needs a Running Start,” is the title of a sermon in which Rev. Nathan Detering speaks to the challenge of living in tumultuous times and recounts a scene from a family trip to the coast:

... when you're starting out on a journey and you don't know how far you have to go, and the times are overstimulating, and hurricanes of earth and life bring with them their 'cones of uncertainty,' I mean, in the midst of all that, it sure is nice to see the path of certainly laid out in front of us, isn't it? Every turn and each rise visible to the eye so you can brace yourself and take a big deep breath ... Because while we all know how those motivation posters tell us life is a journey and not a destination, can we also admit seeing the destinations is kind of reassuring, especially when we [think we] know how to get there?

...our once trusted sources of authority and reliability have become splintered and polarized and pundit-ed (is that a word?) And partisan.... So that whereas once the facts were facts and truth was truth, and ... Walter Cronkite used to be called the 'most trusted man in America,' ... And facts were called facts and truth was the truth. Now...now...its like ...each of us tending to and get warmed by our version of where we want to put our faith in... Fox news here, CNN there, ... talking heads there... Truth isn't truth..., ...people look at me crazy ... When I tell them I'm a minister, a so-called 'person of faith' Because, really: what does that even mean? What does faith even mean when your life and my life feel uncertain, so 'path-less, so 'uncharted' Across these headlands?

About 100 yards down, on a plateau that juts down and then out into that horizon, with an edge that leads to nothing but air... And there, there is a woman and she's forty feet from the edge, And then she begins to run! Oh my God! But its ok, maybe, because in her hands is a bar and over her shoulders are the wings of a glider. And she's running, running, and just as she gets close enough to leap And a big breath of air push up the nose of her glider and pushes her back, Nearly on her back. So she backs up again, undeterred, and puts herself in her starting position, and seems to stare down the uncertain horizon, seems to say with her body: This is just a wee jump. And then she starts running, running and she gets closer and closer. But then she rears up, and pushes the nose down and, stops, right

on the edge, her body seeming to say, are you sure? You trust these wings? You have faith in this air? But then she backs up again, more uncertain, but still undeterred, and puts herself in her starting position, and stares out into the open horizon and its invisible currents, her body seems to say: trust, trust, faith, faith. And she starts running, running, running and just as she gets closer. A big breath comes and pushes underneath the wings and lifts her body out into the open, trail-less, uncertain, scary, beautiful, Wild, empty, turbulent...twilight sky.

Friends, who I love, and I do love you, here's the thing: ...though I'm uncertain of much, and have more questions than answers, This I believe;

That on these edges and on these plateau's, the bars we hold onto are the hands we hold, and the wings over our backs is the community we create. And that together we can step back and get into the starting position that is this church year together.

That [together we can] start running, running to that edge....and leap. Maybe even with just a wee bit of faith....

That the breath of love will carry us through the messy, turbulent, beautiful, the wild, empty, uncertain horizon of our lives.

If you don't have faith, let us hold faith for you. If you don't know trust, let us hold trust for you. Together let's leave what's heavy behind...and fly.

Closing Song: “#194 Faith is a Forest,” in *Singing the Living Tradition*

Words: Shelley Jackson Denham, 1950-; Music: Chinese folk song, adapt. By I-to Loh, 1936-

Our closing song, “Faith is a Forest,” reminds me to tend to my faith, entertain the doubts, seek insight and weave the thread of commitment that my faith will “speak through me in all I do and say.” Words are in the order of service that you may read, hum or sing quietly while Sunny plays.

Faith is a forest in which doubts play and hide;
insight can hear the still small voice deep inside.
Web of Life, may this thread I weave
strengthen commitment to all I believe.
Vision be my guide as I seek my way,

lead me into this tender day;
Speak through me in all I do and say.

Seeds of both meek and strong are scattered in air;
dignity shines undimmed by bigotry's glare.
Web of Life, may this thread I weave
help me bear witness to all I believe.
Justice be my guide as I seek my way,
lead me into this tender day;
speak through me in all I do and say.

Fortune and famine ride the swift winds of chance;
sorrow and pleasure seem united in dance.
Web of Life, may this thread I weave
mingle compassion with all I believe.
Mercy be my guide as I seek my way,
lead me into this tender day;
speak through me in all I do and say.

Closing Words

Our closing words are selected and combined from two brief readings by Rev. Scott Tayler:

May we go out today
with a trust in the tenderness that so often arrives to hold us in our pain
with a faith in love that never ends and never lets us go,
With a confidence in the courage that arises from within but often not of our
own doing,
remembering and believing that
"All will be well, and all will be well, all manner of things will be well."

Go with faith,

...

And as we stride toward the unseen
may we notice that the way unfolds only as we risk walking it
and may we remember and trust

that none of these steps are ones we take alone.
Amen

Extinguishing the Flame

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.

Postlude

Discussion