

**Enough for a Spark**  
Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer  
Sunday, December 10, 2017

**First Unitarian Universalist Church**  
Rochester, Minnesota

---

**READINGS**

*Hannukah, First Night, by Mark Belletini*

*The lamps are burning in the synagogue by Charles Reznikoff*

**Chanukah Lights Tonight** by Steven Schneider

## Sermon

Sometimes,  
all you have –  
are scraps.

Mere threads of something that once was,  
barely enough  
to remember

*the story, the person, the place*

barely enough  
to re-create

*the moment, the feeling, the memory*

barely enough  
to re-dedicate

*the home, the temple, the heart.*

Hanukkah celebrates a story of liberation of the Jewish people,  
who had been ruled by a tyrant from Damascus,  
forcing them to worship Greek gods.

Jewish rebels fought for three years to reclaim the temple.  
They needed oil to light the eternal flame as part of the ritual of rededication,  
but only had enough for one night –  
but the miracle was that the oil lasted for eight days.  
The question becomes – what was the miracle?

*The miracle, writes Mark Belletini,  
is not that the oil lasts – but that our hope lasts.  
Not that the fire illumines – but that we grow brighter.  
Not that ancient stories are told –  
but that people are willing to live their own stories.  
Not that tyranny is resisted – but that resistance itself re-creates people.*

It's not a certain definition of the miracle will bring clarity to one's life –  
but the story and the mystery around the miracle  
invites one to stop, in the words that Amy read to us from Charles Reznikoff –  
to stop – in the morning, the afternoon, the evening – each day -  
*and look out upon eternity for awhile.*

Rabbi Rachel Barenblat, who also calls herself the *Velveteen Rabbi*, writes these words for Hanukkah,

*Some days I can enter  
the holy of holies  
by snapping my fingers:  
the door swings open.*

*Other days I ransack  
every pocket to find the key  
and when I get inside  
the room is darkened.*

*There's mud on the floor,  
the intricate altar  
is grimy, askew,  
its heartbeat silenced.*

*I sweep the ashes away  
open my thermos of tea  
re-hang the tapestries,  
great branches arching.  
At last I light the lamp:  
the glint, the glow  
regenerating, the homefire  
eternally burning.*

*Learn to trust again  
that this oil is enough  
to open my eyes  
to God, already here.*

Perhaps the miracle is not  
that something happened that is out of the ordinary,  
something that was unexpected  
or considered impossible in the physical world –  
but maybe it was something deeper,  
something truer,  
something more lasting and enduring  
for the human spirit and the human soul -

Maybe, it's like the words of the poet Hilda Morley –  
that Hanukkah simply lifts up the truth that  
*The smallest drop of fuel [can be] enough to leap from.*

When all you have are scraps –  
*and you can't find the key for the temple in your pocket  
and the room is dark and there's mud on the floor –*  
when you don't have everything you think you need  
that you must have  
that you must find on your own –  
that's when the miracle happens.

You may remember, in the movie *It's a Wonderful Life* –  
George Bailey, when the town is afraid of the banks closing down,  
and a large group of people come to his building and loan cooperative  
demanding that they receive their funds,  
he responds – “*you're thinking of this place all wrong.  
As if I had the money back in a safe. The, the money's not here.  
Well, your money's in Joe's house... that's right next to yours.  
And in the Kennedy House, and Mrs. Macklin's house, and, and a hundred others.*”

The miracle  
is that our common wealth,  
our common health and wholeness and survival  
is in the reality that our shared humanity  
our very lives  
live within each other's lives.

We each have something important to offer,  
that may seem like just a scrap, something insignificant,  
something not worth sharing, won't make a difference – small.

But we know, deep down,  
that the larger story of our shared life, our planet, our humanity –  
needs to be opened, and re-opened, and re-kindled  
by the testimony and witness of each other telling our stories.

I believe that's why  
Time Magazine's *person of the year*  
is not one person.

You may have already read that this year's *person of the year* is  
*the silence breakers* –  
those who have told their stories  
about sexual harassment and assault,  
their stories of marginalization and objectification –  
their stories  
of being fearful to tell their stories  
because of the attack it would bring on their character, or family –  
because of the likelihood of losing credibility and access in their career  
and thus jobs and income  
in their field because of being *walled out* –  
their stories  
of being taught to be silenced  
that girls ought be kind and nice and quiet.

One story  
led to another story, and another story –  
what Time authors  
Stephanie Zacharek, Eliana Dockterman and Haley Sweetland Edwards  
called a *revolution of refusal* –  
that has opened conversation,  
allowed for more testimony and countless stories  
resulted in real change for those in power –  
celebrities, politicians, CEOs.  
Not nearly close to enough, but a public beginning.

They write,

*This reckoning appears to have sprung up overnight.  
But it has actually been simmering  
for years, decades, centuries.*

*The women and men who have broken their silence span all races,  
all income classes, all occupations and virtually all corners of the globe.*

*They might labor in California fields,  
or behind the front desk at New York City's regal Plaza Hotel,  
or in the European Parliament.  
They're part of a movement that has no formal name.  
But now they have a voice.*

That's how collective power happens –  
that's how collective stories happen –  
something that has been simmering for years, decades, centuries –  
something that has been known and named many times,  
but the time, the moment, the courage and clarity  
came together at the right time  
to spark the simmer into flame –  
to shine light on injustice  
and overt and subtle cultural norms  
of oppression and the real impact of sexism  
in the micro-aggressions  
that are not new – but have been simmering for centuries.

And even in their choosing, the founder of the #metoo campaign, Tarana Burke, a woman of color, who started it over 10 years ago; was featured in the article, but she was not on the cover itself – she wasn't chosen to be pictured for the movement she started – likely to sell more magazines by picturing celebrities.

The forces of the market, and the systems and structures of socialization of what grabs our attention in the public square is a whole sub-story worth noting, amplified by the cover of the magazine itself.

Speaking about the various and intersecting justice movements regarding sexism and racism and classism – activist Adrienne Maree Brown wrote,

*“...things are not getting worse, they are getting uncovered. we must hold each other tight & continue to pull back the veil.”*

Maybe we’ve been thinking of this all wrong... maybe the reckoning in our wider culture is absolutely what has been happening for centuries, millennia.

Maybe the oil is not just kept back behind the altar – but a little bit comes from each person entering the temple re-dedicating their hearts to one another and become a shawl of prayer to their neighbor.

Maybe the loaves and fishes didn’t magically feed 5,000 people – but people’s hearts were opened with compassion to the stories they heard and they uncovered their own baskets to share what scraps of bread they had been hiding out of fear of starvation – and a table was spread until all had enough to eat.

Maybe one bombshell of a story, or one messiah of a person, isn’t just going to knock on the door and smash the powers that be in one fell swoop – in one dramatic news cycle.

Maybe it takes everyone daring to live their own stories, to share each seemingly insignificant story until it grows into something that the whole world can notice – it takes everyday common people testify to their truth and experience to begin writing a new narrative that is not based in fear but held up by solidarity and strength and love – that’s a miracle.

And it's happening.

It takes a miracle  
of witness and strength and courage  
for those in power to relinquish power  
and move aside – sometimes kicking and screaming.

It takes a miracle  
of humility and courage  
for those with varied privilege  
to know it, and name it,  
and do their part in deep listening, strong support of the marginalized,  
and constantly reflect on their actions and their words and their lives  
so that they live in a way that doesn't perpetuate  
centuries-old systems of oppression, in overt or subtle ways –  
but live in a way to use their access and their privilege and their voice  
to help amplify voices other than their own, clear some space,  
so that the voice and power and agency of others  
might more brightly shine.

It takes a miracle – and I'm beginning to believe in miracles.

Maybe  
the miracle is *an opening of the heart in the face of constriction* –  
an opening of generosity in the face of scarcity and fear –  
maybe,  
the miracle  
is seeing again hope and possibility  
for the return of light in the midst of darkness  
people began gathering their scraps –  
bringing out every small drop of oil  
that they had protected, saved,  
lest it be squandered or taken or lost –  
and together,  
every drop of oil,  
every opening of the heart,  
every moment of giving and community  
is enough to light up a temple –  
both the building – and the heart.



When all you need is enough for a spark  
then each little, simple gift,  
that you were convinced didn't matter and wouldn't make a difference,  
can be re-created, re-formed –  
into something larger than itself.

What began as a coat –  
then a vest, then a scarf, then a tie,  
then a handkerchief,  
is much larger,  
the story much deeper,  
the meaning more powerful,  
than just a scrap.

When you put the scraps together,  
there can be cloth enough to hold you –  
you gather all the stories  
and you pull back the veil  
and you add more and more –  
each bringing what they have to offer -

when you gather together each drop of oil,  
you realize that it is in the common, shared lamp –  
that the flame stays lit  
and the light keeps shining.