

Just a Dusting
Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer
Sunday, March 18, 2018

First Unitarian Universalist Church
Rochester, Minnesota

READING

Blessing the Dust by Jan Richardson

HOMILY

There is a story, maybe you've heard it before,
of a person who fell down into a deep hole.
It was far too deep to climb out.
a rich person walked by and threw down some money.
a priest walked by and threw down a prayer.
a Unitarian walked by and threw down an Emerson excerpt about self-reliance.

Finally, a good friend walked by, and jumped down in it.
The one already in there said, "what are you doing? Now we're both stuck!"
And the friend said – "no, I've been down here before – and I know the way out."

Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return,
says the old scriptures. A phrase shared on Ash Wednesday in the Christian
tradition, beginning the season of Lent which leads up to Easter.

A teaching too often cast in shame and guilt –
of using the smallness of dust and ash
as some twisted truth of the smallness, or the insignificance,
of the soul, of a person.

A deeper teaching, however –
a more ancient teaching,
is not for shame or for guilt or for,
in the words of Jan Richardson –
thinking you are less than you are –
but for the beauty, and the richness,
and the possibility and vibrancy
of life made of soil and earth.

Up out of the dust,
the dirt, the sacred silt of earth,
we are formed and made and connected
to the soil beneath us and to the stars beyond us.

Remembering that we are made out of dust
is an important reminder of humility to the larger whole –
a reminder that we are but one of many -
to keep our egos in check,
to keep our privilege in check,
to keep our sense of self-importance

in right relationship and balance with,
what Mary Oliver calls,
our place within the family of all things.

But it is also a reminder of connection –
a reminder that our finite lives are part of the infinite,
that we are made of earth and stars
and for many – that is the very essence of the Holy –
of Goddess, of Spirit, of God.

A 4-year-old I know, who now as she gains awareness of things her father says in
public shall remain nameless,
this 4-year-old recently told a 2-year-old I know,
named Clara Stevens-Royer,
she's only 2, so I can still say her name –
the 4-year old was having a conversation with the 2-year old about the sun.

The 2-year-old, in her beginnings of expressing language,
while caught in the growing sunshine of spring
was crying a little, and trying to move out of the brightness of the sun –
the glare of it in her eyes, as she played with her sister.

Enter the 4-year-old, wise sage:
Clara, we can't change the sun.
It's too high up from the earth.
It won't let us take it down and put it away.
And I love the sun.

That's what mortality is about.
Remembering our limitations – remembering that we are mortal.
Remembering that we are dust, and we can't pull the sun out of the sky –

but we can attend to those with tears in their eyes,
and testify to our love of the beauty of life – even when it's beyond our control;
because we are mortal – and because, even if it hurts our eyes, it still is beautiful.
We are just a dusting – sprinkled on top of this world -
we are just a tiny part of the something quite large –
and in the balance
between I am next-to-nothing, and I am part of everything –
we breathe and sing an endless song that comes to life
through love and beauty and community –
whatever we can pull up out of the soil, together.

Yes, we are dust –
and it is ours to notice the shared earth beneath our feet,
and jump right down into the dirt and dust of life together,
and say to our neighbor, or a stranger,
*I'm here with you – we are mortal – and the road is muddy and rough,
but we'll get there – heaven knows how, or where, but we're going.*

The beauty of who we are and who we are becoming
the beauty of a new life formed and growing in the humble, sacred dust of earth -
is sometimes so immense, so gigantic,
it takes a whole community –
a whole farmyard of animals
heaving, and pulling, and yanking
opening doors and making coffee and teaching our children -
and bringing and nurturing life into being
until we spring to life out of the soil and earth of our creation,
and something beautiful and immense springs forth from the work of our labor
and we fall back to the ground, laughing,
and feasting on what we pulled out of the soil,
basking in the beauty of it all.

Remember that you are dust, and when you fall down in it - it rises in life.