

Virtual Worship

Univers(alism)

Sunday, April 26, 2020

Prayer

Breathe deep the breath of life –
find your breath, center down,
feel below you the earth and its ancient turning,
feel above you the sky and its ancient stars,
and you, here, held between them – alive, awake, and here -
know that here you are named and you are known as beloved.
Join me in this time of meditation and prayer, first by sharing silence together.

Spirit of Life, Source of Love,
God of a thousand names and beyond all naming,

Oh my goodness, this is a time to remember some things, isn't it?
To remember that this is our faith: each of us worthy, beloved -
no matter how distance learning is going
or how wild our homes have become,
or how lonely and quiet our days have become –
because we all seem to be finding ourselves in the extremes –
extreme increase in noise and obligation and confinement,
that can be hard even with those we love –
or another extreme of deep isolation and loneliness and quiet,
absent those personal connections that give us so much life –
so we gather here, some longing for noise, others for quiet,
all longing for hope and respite and some way to move forward.

All you can do is one moment, one breath, one day,
scratch that –
one minute at a time -
connect on screens,
then step away and close your eyes and feel the sun –
or wind or rain or whatever, because it's all part of this life –

don't let the temptation for connection make your devices a new appendage –
use them for the good they offer, and set them down when they overwhelm you –
and remember the ancient wisdom of earth
as it teaches us stillness and balance and rest and play
tears like the raindrops, strength like a mountain.

We hold in our hearts this day all those who suffer in mind, body, or spirit.
I invite you to bring the names you are holding in your heart this day –
in joy or in sorrow, in celebration or in grief,
and silently or aloud now in this sacred hour,
to speak their names...

For all those names, and many others, may we all be held in love and grace.

These words of meditation come from Ellis Delaney – which we always need to
hear more than once:

I'll tell you a secret that I've learned
Nobody knows everything
We all get caught up in what we think and believe it's the truth
But mostly we don't have the answers
And life can feel like an unsteady boat
Drifting away from the land
Making us feel alone

It is love that will carry you home
It is kindness that holds back the storms around you
It is patience sitting right beside the doubt
The only truth is what we do
With right now

Homily – Univers(alism)

This week,

I've been wondering if it's really wise for my children to learn to read.

All of the sudden they can read what I'm writing on a screen,

or they ask questions about words on the front page of the post bulletin –

or they grab some book of the shelf, and ask –

what does this mean?

I've had to re-configure which books are on what shelves,

in these stay at home days.

Don't get me wrong, I love witnessing them learn and grow.

Maybe the challenge is not their learning, but me learning new ways of being.

It's like the old story, interpreted so poorly,

of Eve eating the apple,

and gaining understanding,

which was bad, somehow, so said some who read it.

An old story,

taken hold of by the powerful

and used to perpetuate knowledge in the control of the few,

rooted in patriarchy, rooted in classism –

to benefit the few at the expense of the many,

conflating that with faithfulness.

Not so, says the poet.

*I stood alone in terror, she writes, speaking for Eve in words not written by men,
at the threshold between paradise and earth –*

let it be known – I did not fall from grace –

I leapt to freedom.

That's a much better understanding –
a gaining of freedom through understanding, and wisdom, and truth.

I wish it were still an old story.

People believing that knowledge is evil or wrong or scary or a hoax,
people fearing science and learning and vaccines –
people focusing on only on their own personal freedoms,
their own personal preferences for how things *ought* to be –
when the world has changed,
nothing really *ought* to be any particular way anymore.

It's not that hard a principle, really, when we think of it –
but we often forget it, for a thousand reasons.

That freedom isn't just doing what we want.

And if that's what you believe it is, or teach your children freedom is –
well, as much as we're an open-minded religion –
I'm pretty sure you're doing it wrong.

Universalism has always been a spirituality that moves beyond the self –
beyond our own individual lives –
it reminds us that yes, we are sacred, and this is the kicker –
so is everyone else.

Universalism, rooted in the belief that all people are sacred –
that there is no hell or punishment other than the ones we create for ourselves –
has always believed that no matter how much your neighbor bothers you -
you're called to love them –
and they are just as sacred as you.

And with that comes spiritual freedom –
not freedom to act, or believe, or live however we want –
but to be free from the need to prove or earn our worth – our belovedness –
that is inherent-

freed from the fear that our humanness is somehow bad or wicked or wrong –
freed, also, from the belief that we are completely and utterly unique and different
– or better, than anyone else,

it frees us to know and name the entire universe –
or God or Spirit is living within each of us –
it frees us to know and name the entire sacred universe living in everyone –
and to act accordingly, not for our own good alone,
but for our common good.

Spiritual liberation is not about being free from certain dogmas,
or being free from the influence of other beliefs –

it is about the wide world of collective wisdom being open to us –
and to know our well-being is connected and part and parcel
with everyone else –
we all do better when we all do better.

Let's be clear about something –
liberation, our theme this month, is more than a tweet.

There is a type of rugged individualism
that tends to cause tantrums in the privileged
when their ability to do what they want, when they want, how they want,
no matter who else it affects, feels threatened.

We will need to be careful, in these coming weeks, months, years,
to not be fooled by the age-old American propaganda
that it is better to go it alone –
as much as we've been told to isolate right now, for our well-being,
and it might seem, on the surface, that going it alone is for our benefit,
it is actually a call to community –
it is for our communal well-being,
our collective liberation,
or as our tradition might call it,
our Universal Salvation, collective wholeness and wellness,
that we are being asked to care for each other by staying away.

Because, as the old saying goes,
distance makes the heart grow fonder.

Isn't that the truth, right now -
I think we are missing, in profound ways, what we perhaps took for granted.

There is an evil temptation in capitalism
to believe that our worth is tied to profit.

If we want an economy that works for all of us,
this type of individualistic capitalism that has always valued profit over people,
is not going to work – and never has.

Yes, a closed economy is causing suffering and pain – and if we can't keep each
other alive and still care for ourselves and pay bills – then we need a different
structure – a caring economy, as some call it, that helps those who are struggling
right now.

We are writing a new story, a new history,
about how our collective well-being, and the well-being of natural world,
is intricately tied together, deeply woven
with strands of connection and care.

We are writing a new story
because we need systems and structures and an economy and a culture
that can bend and shift and change
so that when we need to hunker down to our neighbor's well-being,
and for our essential worker's well-being,
we don't crumble.

*To be free, writes minister and poet Theresa Soto,
You must know, not that you can do whatever you want;
You must know instead, that inside you are entire Universes—
to actually be free, you must know and you must fight
for the entire Universes inside of everyone else.
Being free is not a license, but A promise.*

What are we promising to each other?

By our action, by our idleness, by our sabbath-taking from the normal world,
and maybe the normal world wasn't all that great most of the time, either,
and maybe we have a chance to change some things
that should have been changed long ago.

What are our promises to each other –

for our collective well-being,
to honor the universe which exists in each of us,
the Universalism that calls us to have ever-growing hearts of love,
of compassion, of conviction for the well-being of all –
even those we don't particularly like, we're called to love –
because we want them all, including ourselves,
as the Buddhist meditation reminds us,
to be well, peaceful, and at ease.

So let the books fly off the shelves –

safely, that is – and developmentally appropriate, too,
as my educator beloved would certainly remind me of –

let the wisdom fly off the dusty shelves,

as if we had all the knowledge we need – we don't –

Universalism frees the mind, the soul,

to find wisdom from a thousand sources,
including through the telling of our own sacred stories -
to know our learning will never end in this life,
and that the story we are writing –
we are writing together.

Let's make it a good read –

one that everyone is able to grab right off the shelf,
and to know, in their bones,
it says one thing a thousand different ways:
it is love that will carry us home.