

Virtual Worship – Prayer & Homily

Sunday, May 10, 2020

Beyond the Lintel and Sill

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,

This new world came whirling in
seeming to bring with it some wild ideas –
of staying put and staying in, if you are able –
of faces and voices only being known through the glow of modern gateways of connection – not
something new, but now necessary.

It has also come with wild ideas that we should
adapt, and create, and become things and people in new ways at warp speed.
But right now, I think, my soul needs breath – needs a pause.
A reminder that what we're able to do, to accomplish to produce - is good enough, and often
more than good enough.
And for the weary soul, and the tired eyes and the aching hearts,
may we entertain the wild idea
that taking a breath, and setting some things aside, and taking it slow
is good for our health, good for our soul, good for each other. Help us slow down.

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, 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 is a blessing for Mother's Day,
entitled *Praise Song for Mother's*

Praise for the mothers. The fearless, the courageous.

For down-to-earth wisdom and limitless compassion.

Praise to birth mothers, adoptive mothers, surrogate mothers, mothers in spirit.

Praise to the mother – sleepless and swaying

Reminding their child they are sacred. And should go to bed.

Praise to the mother – the strong and courageous

Reminding their child that women constantly create the world.

Praise to the mother – wise and uncertain

Reminding their child that being human is not perfection, but a process.

Praise to the mother – diligent and committed

Reminding their child that being a mother means doing what you can, as you can, by your means – that a limited life does not stop limitless love.

Praise to the mothers who create the world. Every day.

Creating the world – in the home, in the office, in the high-rise, on the construction site, in the Board room, in the classroom, in the operating room, in the barrack, on the page, from the pulpit, between the notes and on the canvas – in the heart.

Love for the mother who has lost the child.

Love for the child who has lost the mother.

Love for the women who have longed to be mothers – still in hope, or letting go.

Love for the women who are pressured to become mothers and choose not to, for they create the world in equal measure.

Love to the daughters, the sons, with strained or tainted relationships with their own mothers – in the wider humanity, may there be healing.

Praise to the strength of women creating and building up the world, generation to generation.

Praise, and Love, to the Mother of all which holds us all. Amen.

Readings

The first reading is from the Rev. Olympia Brown, Universalist in the late 1800s, one of the first women ordained in the United States. This is from her sermon, *the Opening Doors*", preached in September of 1920:

*"...the grandest thing has been the lifting up of the gates
and the opening of the doors to the women of America,
giving liberty to twenty-seven million women,
thus opening to them a new and larger life and a higher ideal.*

*The future opens before them,
fraught with great possibilities of noble achievement.*

It is worth a lifetime to behold the victory...

Today we are not dependent upon any text or the letter of any book.

*It is the spirit that giveth life
and the spirit speaks to our souls with every breath...*

*the Opening Doors lead to no dark dungeons, open upon no burning lake,
give no evidence of everlasting punishment.*

*But all gladden us with assurances of Divine Goodness
and indicate the final triumph of the good."*

Open Up the Doors by the Reverend Lindasusan Ulrich

Open up the doors
Push on looming wooden arches embroidered with ironwork
Brace shoulders against the weight of history unmoved
Slough off the musty smell of unused joy and stored up sorrow

Knock rust off the hinges if you have to
And let your breath precede you inside

Open the doors more
Make room for a shaft of sunlight to cross the threshold
Give the dust motes something to dance about
Peek through a single slice of possibility
And name even the half-hidden truths you see

Open the doors wider still
Pour yourself through the gap
Strut or sneak or sidle, as suits you best
Cleanse whatever scrapes catch your skin
And bind up the wounds that keep you from entering whole

Open the doors as far as they will go
Draw on the strength of the stones beneath you
Ground yourself in a firm sense of who you are
Stand as a beacon welcoming the next seeker
And shine far beyond the lintel and sill

Open all that you are
Heighten and deepen your connections to the world around you
Broaden your definition of neighbor
Grow into the largest target for grace that you can muster
And pray to become a gateway for even greater love and compassion

Open up the doors, my friends,
Lest we keep the stranger out
And condemn ourselves to prisons of our own making.

Homily – Beyond the Lintel and Sill

There's a book that we received as a gift from my colleague and friend,
the Rev. Victoria Safford, in my previous congregation –
after she and I together dedicated our children,
and as she continued to show them much love in our time there...

It is a book called *Bunny Planet* –
little stories about some bunnies,
who have a hard, so-not-right day,
and they take a magical ride to the bunny planet –

*Far Beyond the Moon and Stars...
twenty light yearas south fo Mars,
spins the gentle bunny planet,
and the bunny Queen's name, is Janet*

And then, enter your name here,
*friend, Janet says, come in –
here's the day that should have been.*

And the story describes a favorite day of whatever little bunny had a rough go,
instead of being ignored or sad,
instead of having a day filled with things that you hated,
it was a day filled with the things – and the people, you love.

You know what, friends –
*I think we all need a trip to the bunny planet right now –
to the days, the weeks, the months
that should have been.*

But, as much as I'd like things to be different, on some other planet,
as the hymn goes – this is our blue boat home.
Or the older hymn – this is the country where my heart is;
my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine.

At the beginning of local changes in this pandemic,
when we gathered as staff during a week of drastic and rapid change,
one member said –

it seems maybe we need a shake-up of what's considered "normal" –
maybe normal was just all false kind of surface level anyway –
a false sense of security, equality. Normal isn't that good.

Or, as activist and poet Sonya Renee Taylor wrote recently,

*"We will not go back to normal. Normal never was.
Our pre-corona existence was not normal
other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion,
depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage,
hoarding, hate and lack.*

*We should not long to return, my friends.
We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment.
One that fits all of humanity and nature."*

An opportunity to stitch a new garment –
to weave together something different.

We know during this time the inequities that are highlighted
in access, in privilege, in care –
like the phrase that yes, we are in the same storm –
but we're not all in the same boat.

There is quite a difference in how you weather the storm
depending on what boat you are in.

Our shared storm reminds us that normal never was,
that our thinking of "normal" and what should have been, perhaps,
is as far away as some distant other world.

I have found some solace and hope, in these tender days,
always finding myself somewhere between –
I'm fine – and *really, I'm fine*. Totally not fine.

But I have found solace
in the witness of so many over centuries
who have pushed the boundaries, again and again, of what was normal,
and forged new paths, in unknown, uncertain, unprecedented times –

often, as Trish shared in the call to worship,
we are called into journeys we didn't anticipate, and if we're lucky,
they just might lead us to lifelong beauty or justice or love.

Even our spirituality itself,
of being open to many sources of wisdom
and constantly pushing the boundaries of orthodoxy or convention,
invites us to always be building a new way,
considering not only what has been,
but what could possibly be.

Ours if a faith of pushing boundaries of normalcy,
an expansive understanding
of what community is,
where beauty is found
who is loved
how to live –

we have always been, in the words of Sophia Lyon Fahs,
searching everywhere and anywhere for the meaning of being –
and we've always believed
it starts right where we are, right at this moment, right now,
and keeps growing
beyond what is assumed,
beyond what is conventional,
beyond what is normal.

"The future opens before them,"
wrote the Rev. Olympia Brown, a Universalist,
one of the first women ordained in the United States in the late 1800s.

She preached this liberal religion in those days
about the doors of heaven, and of God, opening before us
were rooted in love –
she said,

*"the Opening Doors lead to no dark dungeons, open upon no burning lake,
give no evidence of everlasting punishment.
But all gladden us with assurances of Divine Goodness
and indicate the final triumph of the good."*

Opening our doors, our hearts, our minds -
What threshold are we crossing right now?
What unknown path, unknown future
are we entering –
and what skills, what courage, what hope
have we packed, have we had ready,
for just this time, just this moment?

Perhaps when we closed the church doors just a few weeks back,
what we were really doing
was opening them wider than we've ever known how.
We broke the hinges right off
to better understand what we can be, and need to be.

Open up the doors,
writes Rev. Lindasusan Ulrich,

*Push on looming wooden arches embroidered with ironwork
Brace shoulders against the weight of history unmoved
Slough off the musty smell of unused joy and stored up sorrow*

*Knock rust off the hinges if you have to
And let your breath precede you inside
Open the doors more
Make room for a shaft of sunlight to cross the threshold
Give the dust motes something to dance about
Peek through a single slice of possibility
Open the doors as far as they will go
Draw on the strength of the stones beneath you
And shine far beyond the lintel and sill...*

Far beyond what we imagined for spring, for summer,
and even further beyond what we can yet know where we're headed...
Far beyond the world we grew to know as normal, as predictable,
far beyond that –
far beyond convention
and far beyond the width we thought our doors,
our church, our hearts could stretch –

well, that's where we are.

That's where an idea leads you, or where new ideas need to emerge.

And there are skills that have been sung to us down generations,
and there are hopes that have been given to us
in story and protest and movements –
and there are better days, better worlds,
that now, because everything has been unraveled anyway,
are just beginning to be stitched together-

with enough strength and enough flexibility
to stretch our souls
over this threshold into a new world.

Because love was never content with normal –
and the question is – what thresholds are love and justice asking us to cross next?