

“More Than the Sum of Our Parts”
December 27, 2020

Welcome and Lighting of the Chalice - Margaret Rieser and UUFES Youth

Welcome. Here we seek justice and truth and understanding.
Here we celebrate life and contemplate mystery.
Here we seek healing and wholeness. Welcome, all.

Centering - “Scarborough Fair” (English folksong)

Shared Affirmation

Hymn - “’Tis a Gift to Be Simple”

A Time for All Ages - Marion Posner

As social animals, we are part of a bigger community than the one we live in from day to day. It has a power beyond the individuals who comprise it. That larger community exists in a wider, ultimately global, one of all life on earth.

The story I am going to read beautifully illustrates the profound truth of an individual person who, when presented with almost infinite choice for reincarnation, progressively realizes that the life he had had was paradise. The story follows: *The Mountains of Tibet* by Mordicai Gerstein.

Reflection - Jorge Dominguez

Chop, chop, chop. Chop, chop, chop.

Ed cut thin slices; next, he would flatten them. The vegetable grew in the tropics and, through the magic of air cargo freezing, it arrived in Toronto, still green. Call it *tostones*. Call it *chatinos*. Call it fried green plantains. Ed had encountered none in his boyhood.

Knead, roll, slice, chop, season, mix. Ana’s mother is not a baker. Mary, Ana’s grandmother, has taught her how to bake apple pies and pecan pies, most recently through Zoom.

Teenagers look for their independence. At long last, Ana could bake these pies all by herself.

Eggs, evaporated milk, and indescribable artistry has gone into Mary’s preparation of a *flan*, a type of custard, from a recipe she had never encountered before her marriage to me, from an earlier baker who had never baked or cooked anything before the age of thirty-nine. My mother wrote down this imagined recipe so she could remember the happy accident of her invention.

The plantains in Toronto. The pies in Cape Cod. The custard in Moultonborough.

The wizardry of Zoom connected these three households on Christmas Eve for a dinner menu that only I had experienced while growing up. The parts spanned a geography worth 65 degrees Fahrenheit. The lived lives of the meal participants spanned 65 years.

For me, this was comfort food, once a year. For the eleven others, this was an invented tradition, a coordinated simultaneous family meal spanning boundaries, moments, and challenges. The plantains, the rice, the beans, the pies, the flan, and much else nourished us, not just as food, but also as mysteries unraveled, lessons were learned, and love transcended the generations.

It was an outcome far greater than the sum of its components. It was a trinity of households, yet it was a unity of experience.

Joys & Concerns - Mazurka Op.7, No.1 in B flat major by Frederic Chopin
Played by Eve Goss

Hymn - "Spirit of Life"

Meditation and Prayer - Rev. Betsy Tabor

We give thanks
for the pink sunrise
the morning light and shadows
We're grateful for the sparkle of winter and the sun's warmth
for beauty out our window

We are blessed by love
and the simple gifts of smiles - tears - tender words - laughter

This morning we remember the assault of the virus
on people everywhere
- its impact on the 12 million men and women, in this country alone, unemployed
and unable to make ends meet
- its demands on exhausted, depleted first responders
- its pressure on essential workers face-to-face with it every day

May we see beyond our own anxieties, the inconveniences of these times
and see our privilege.
May what we see and feel inspire empathy, movement, generosity, change.

Close to home, we hold in our hearts
Eli's wife Terri and the circle of friends and family who mourn him
Phyllis at MountainView, who's not hugged her daughter for nearly a year
Josephine who is mending at home

friends and neighbors longing for contact, for ease, for comfort

Let us remember, every day, to look beyond what calls us most urgently and offer one another simple gifts of love. Blessed be. Amen.

Reading - "Every 'Wich Way" by Mark Bittman (read by Ricky Banderob)

For something that has almost unlimited potential, the sandwich has become staid and unimaginative. In part this is because we don't have as many leftovers as we once did (we don't cook as much), so a meatloaf sandwich is nowhere near as common as it once was. But it's mostly because we've allowed sandwich-making to become something that is either done by someone else or a task to be squeezed in between breakfast and taking the kids to the bus.

But now and then, . . . it's worth showcasing a variety of unusual ingredients and allowing individuals to throw them together, producing post-Dagwood creations that are beyond the ability of others to imagine. Given the same array of options, you and I would surely come up with radically different creations.

[Ricky added the "fun fact" that sandwiches and Sandwich NH were named after the same person, John Montigu, the 4th Earl of Sandwich, who lived from 1718-1792.]

Reflection - Margaret Rieser

When I was about 18, a couple of friends and I invented a new sandwich. Our criteria were that it had to be inexpensive and easy to make. As we prowled the supermarket aisles, we would pick up potential ingredients only to return them to their shelves as we imagined increasingly more inspired combinations of food. The glee! The inspiration! We checked out with a loaf of rye bread, a can of bean dip, a hunk of cheddar cheese and a container of coleslaw, from the deli. Why do I remember this story that took place almost 45 years ago? The only reason I can come up with is that the resulting sandwiches were EXCELLENT! They so far exceeded our expectations; one would never guess that combining these three humble ingredients would end up as something so delicious. And let me remind you that such experiences are subjective. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

While it might sound trivial, somehow this sandwich-making experience changed my life. I learned that when you put things together, you may end up with something surprising, somehow more, or different than you could imagine. The whole, the way things come together, is sometimes more than the sum of the parts. I wonder when you have experienced this. What stories come up for you?

Consider a choir, singing together, or an orchestra, or even a band. Take apart the Beatles, and what do you have?

In my work as a social worker and a psychotherapist, I have felt called in my life to offer my presence and attention as a tool for change. This involves entering into the unknown, trusting, or

at least hoping, that the feelings or knowledge that emerges, will be greater than what one person might come to alone.

Since October I have been doing hospital chaplaincy training. We sit with people who are quite sick or injured, and sometimes, helping make space, listening carefully for someone's real feelings to emerge, something happens in the room. Something greater than the two of us. I try to find words for this. Sometimes I call it love. Some of my classmates call it God.

My sense of the holy is a feeling, not a being; I find myself translating my classmates' words sometimes, but I feel like we're talking about the same thing. Something happens in our sessions with patients that feels powerful and transformative. And the more we pay attention to this, the more we notice it. It feels sacred.

I invite you to consider times when you have sensed that something more was going on than you could explain in rational terms. I am going to give a couple more examples of when one plus one can seem to equal more than two, and then we'll have a chance to share some stories.

Many people here have attended protest gatherings, when people come together to stand up for what we believe, with all our hearts. We carry signs, chant, march, and sing. We see that we are in mighty company sharing our dreams of justice. And this feels powerful...greater than individuals standing together. I find myself wanting to find words for this feeling, this presence, this power.

As a child attending a Quaker school, I participated in meeting for worship every week with my class. While I can't recall having much sense that there was something out there that was greater than me, I remember feeling that there was something about the whole school assembling in the meetinghouse, and sitting quietly in each others' presence for 45 minutes that was powerful. I felt like I was part of something that was greater than me; greater than all of us. Not something out there, but something in here; something among us, within us. Something that connected us. Quakers believe that the light of God is in each of us. As a child, I had no idea what this meant. As an adult, I still don't. And yet.

Here I am, sitting in a Sunday service at my beloved UUFES, the place I have called my spiritual home for the past sixteen years. Just as I found something amazing with bean dip, coleslaw and cheddar cheese on rye, the ingredients that make up a Sunday service also do something for me. On its own, a song, a story, a fact may be interesting or pleasing, but when you mix them together and add in joys and sorrows, a chalice, well chosen words and beloved faces...something happens.

What is it that gets me here Sunday morning? What is it that calls you here? What is that thing that goes beyond the separate ingredients that make up our service? Why is it that I've been spending my Sunday mornings this way for 16 years? Is it habit? Or looking into the beloved faces of those I know so well, and those I hope to know? Is it Shana's awesome musical talent? Our amazing choir? Reverend Betsy's stirring prayers? Yes, it's all of those things, but honestly, it feels like more.

The Morning Offering - “Fields” by Shana Aisenberg

Community Response

Hymn - “Life is the Greatest Gift of All”

Extinguishing the Chalice

Benediction

Postlude “Äppelbo gånglåt” (Swedish walking song)

This service can be viewed until March 27, 2021 at:

https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/K7iyJOzYtmvrwS7qYpX3jg_cltgB-wPI32YuwB3G0BrvCxmizHXwVM7rFTE3FcV.kq5CjkiqDakldite

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