

“Expressing What’s Within”

A Lay-Led Service

September 26, 2021

Welcome and Lighting of Chalice - Hope Hutchinson & 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.

Thank you for coming this morning to explore the idea of expressing what is within each of us. We will hear from four people, in addition to myself on ways in which we use our imagination and creativity. Thank you to Peaco, Barbara, Ann and David.

Centering - "Sí Bheag, Sí Mhór" by Turlough O'Carolan (17th c. Irish harper)
UUFES Music Director Shana Aisenberg

Shared Affirmation

Hymn - “My Life Goes On In Endless Song”

A Time for All Ages - Marion Posner

Creativity, it seems to me, needs an order, a somewhat stable base from which to leap. But the leap needs to fly with the imagination, fly away from analysis, from judgments, fly into the unlikely, the new, the somewhat unstable. Creativity invites you to stretch out your wings and fly.

Many years ago, I started teaching in London, in a troubled part of London where communities were struggling, the children often disoriented, disturbed. I had a class of 35. Now the teacher in the class next to mine appeared to be handling things well. The children were in straight rows, mostly in silence. My classroom was a different affair, created from my ideals of learning through discovery, working together in small groups and so on. It was joyful, but never quiet and I was always tired. I was a little envious of my neighboring teacher....

One day, she walked in and declared: “I have had enough. I am out of here. The children are all yours.” Behind her was an orderly straight line of 35 children. Now my math is not my strong suit, but I do know that 35 plus 35 makes 70. She strode off into the far distance. Seventy pairs of eyes were on me. I realised that I had maybe five seconds in which to think what to do, in which to hold back chaos. Muttering and titterings began to fill the air. Maybe two seconds left....And then, from somewhere, who knows from where came four words:

“Once” I said, with as much momentum as I could muster, “Upon....A.....Time.’ You could have heard a pin drop. All eyes were upon me. You want to know what I said next? I have NO idea! But I know that a story came, a story that grew and flourished, that held even the most attention challenged of the children. And you know something ~ it was not clever me, no, it was being forced to allow the creativity that lives within us all to take centre stage.

So, my advice is to acknowledge all the reasons you employ for not having fun, for not playing with your imagination to express yourself. Reasons such as: ‘I can't draw. I am hopeless with thread and needle. Acting and theater - Oh no! I am too self conscious!’

Once acknowledged, find a cupboard with a sturdy door and put them into it for a while. Then have fun. Jump off the diving board and do things you have always wanted to do. Judgment is in the cupboard, so you can make mistakes, and mess up. Who is to say it is a ‘bad drawing’ if it is a drawing that YOU made, that you found joy in? Coming back to Albert Einstein’s comment: ‘Creativity is intelligence having fun,’ maybe we have to trust our intelligence to allow us to have fun, to laugh, to find joy in creating, however simply and idiosyncratically.

Do you see words in colors? Try it! I see *creativity* in a light and vibrant green, touched with blue and yellow. *Joy* is a rich red/purple. *Fun* is a silver glittery hue.

How many of you can make a really good POPPING sound? Here’s how to do it: Place the tip of your (clean) finger in your mouth; fill your cheeks with air. Quickly push your finger out (Keep it straight as you do so). Try singing: *Half a pound of tuppenny rice. Half a pound of treacle. That’s the way the money goes. POP! goes the weasel.*

Find blank paper, a nice place to sit, crayons, paints, and/or a pencil. Just start. Don’t think, let your hand take you.

I love to draw in the air. Here is a mountain-scape, with the sun beginning its journey into the day, a dawn mist embraces the scene.

Thank you, spirit of creativity, for what you give us!

Reflections

Peaco Todd

There’s a great quote about creativity by Scott Adams that begins: “Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes.” Creative work isn’t just the domain of artists – the best work anyone does always has an element of creativity – and that often includes a willingness to getting out of one’s comfort zone. My friend Bill Lipscomb, winner of the 1976 Nobel prize in chemistry, once explained how he chose between physics and chemistry: he said, “In physics I couldn’t make mistakes fast enough.”

In my work as a cartoonist, I inhabit that often terrifying space of uncertainty every time I sit down in my studio, knowing that the time is likely to be filled with false starts and imperfect ideas – when something does work it can be a joyful surprise. As Adams said, creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep.

Any creative work involves intention, process and result. My intention as a cartoonist always is to create something funny – or witty – and no, they’re not the same. But they do share a purpose, which is to illuminate something about the world, at least a little bit – a wry comment on our society and our foibles.

I find it tough to describe my creative process since frankly I have absolutely no idea how it comes about. The specter of the blank page is a constant presence – and when that page is filled often I’ll gaze in astonishment: “Did I do that?” What I do know is that when something does work it usually is less about inspiration than staying put in the chair and being present in the moment.

Finally, a brief word about an ongoing project of mine: a graphic memoir about growing up with a severely depressed mother. This work isn’t funny – but I do hope that combing words and images so that each brings a dimension the other doesn’t will be, in a way, its own commentary.

That said, I find it puzzling when creativity is referred to as something only certain people practice. I believe everyone is creative. We recreate ourselves every minute: every moment is a crossroad – at every crossroad a decision must be made – from those accumulated decisions – full of mistakes and hope -- we compose the narrative that becomes the story of our lives. That’s the essence of creativity.

Barbara Bald - “Lift Off”

In a strange way, poetry not only takes me out of my everyday life, but it is my everyday life.

It’s how I see the everyday world, observing details, nuances that often go unnoticed — how a honeybee pauses before it enters a flower, how a little girl in a pink tutu dangles her legs over her father’s tattooed chest, how a nuthatch’s claws sound on the bark of an old pine.

It’s how I feel the world—how sadness fills me when reading poem about father and daughter who died while trying to cross a river to freedom, how sweetness feels when I let a juicy peach dribble down my chin, how joy ripples in the body when making new friends across oceans.

So much more—poetry is also how I voice my beliefs, my rage, my gratitude. Writing reading and sharing it is how I connect with others and how I try to help others connect with what’s inside them.

Here’s an example of how this creative urge tries to do this in the world—

Lift Off

Like Alice, I shrink,
miniature of myself, climb
onto her back with my tiny feet.

Fearing I will damage her translucent wings,
I tiptoe to the center of her spindly body.

No stirrups, no steering wheel, how will I hang on?
What if she dips and dives in and around
pink water lilies, lands on the watery scrim?

Despite fear's shiver, I want to go, Have always ached
to soar freely—hair streaming behind me
as if riding in a snazzy convertible or galloping
across prairie land on a pinto pony.

Freedom, Freedom!

Can you hear it echo on the wind?

3-2-1—Going now. Look out, look down.

There's my reflection on the water's surface, my life,
and my wish to take you with me, blurred
by a dragonfly's quiver.

Barbara Bald, 9/11/21

Ann and David Wilkins

For us, being creative is connected to being curious, to asking questions as we move through life. Don't take anything for granted: think about it, question it, pose possible answers.

David and I love to look at buildings. Not just big grand buildings such as the West Virginia State Capitol by American architect Cass Gilbert--we had a great time writing a book about it. But also simple houses and even the local strip mall and grocery store.

Architecture is a commitment, it costs money! Building even a chicken coop is expensive. There's a lot invested in architecture, so let's take it seriously!

SO: Here's how we make any trip — even to the waste transfer station -- more interesting: We look at buildings and we ask questions. Why does this building look like that? Who built it, and when? Why did they NEED it? What was its function? Has its function changed over time? Why does it look like this? Was it successful? Did it fulfill personal, social, ideological, spiritual needs? How is it seen/understood by others? How does it fit into American history?

We ask ourselves these questions about all kinds of structures:

A colonial style house at Strawberry Banke in Portsmouth,

A rustic summer cottage at the lake,

The North Conway Railroad Station,

The new North Conway Fire Station,

The two Frank Lloyd Wright-designed homes in Manchester!

We've tried to share our curiosity, our enthusiasm, what we hope is our creativity in life with our students. We encourage those in Rome to be engaged with the city as they walk in the historic center or ride on trains throughout Italy. Look around you, look out that window (not at your phone), observe, question, wonder, appreciate. We hope they will do the same when they return to their home campus and hometown.

Why is your town laid out in a certain way? Why is this street named "Depot Road," "Mast Road," "Shady Avenue," or "TaDaDump Road" (check that out as you drive into Holderness)?

Why does this library or that high school have a classical design? What does that say about our history and goals?

We hope that our curiosity will be absorbed by our students and that we are creating more engaged, curious, thoughtful young people who are our future.

Joys & Concerns - “Arioso” by J.S. Bach (played by Eve Goss)
Introduced by Worship Associate Peaco Todd

Hymn - “Spirit of Life”

Meditation/Prayer

We hold in our hearts each others’ sorrows, concerns, and joys - those shared today as well as those that remain silent in our hearts.

We give thanks for this day:

For the beauty of the blues and greens of this place,

For the changing of the seasons, for the beauty of both rain and sunshine

And for one another, within this community and beyond –

Sandra, Mark, Ted, Margaret and others.

We think of those individuals who wish to come to the safety of the USA and of the officials who struggle to find the right way to both welcome them and keep them safe. We think of all those in war torn countries around the world.

We think of those affected by fires, by gun violence, and by illness, of the more than 600,000 Americans who have died from Covid, and their families. Also the health care workers who tend to the sick.

We are grateful for the relative peace and safety of our own homes and communities.

Today we hear the words of Ben Soule, adapted -

Let us hold fast to summer and enjoy with heightened appreciation these still-warm September days. May we create more memories, take more pictures. Swim in the lake a few more times. Enjoy a bit of denial. Suck all the summer sweetness out of our sun-warmed garden tomatoes. May we remember to smile at someone. Squeeze a hand. Put up some jam or pickles.

And let us store these things up as we approach the uncertain seasons, knowing that our summer companions will be our winter support and sustenance.

In celebration of the changing seasons, let us give thanks. Blessed be. Amen.

Reading - “Quilting” from *Aunt Jane of Kentucky* by Eliza Calbert Hall

“Did you ever think, child,...how much piecin’ a quilt’s like livin’ a life? And as for sermons, why, they ain’t no better sermon to me than a patchwork quilt, and the doctrines is right there a heap plainer’n they are in the catechism. Many a time I’ve set and listened to Parson Page preachin’ about predestination and free-will, and I’ve said to myself, ‘Well, I ain’t never been through Center College up at Danville, but if I could jest git up in the pulpit with one of my quilts, I could make it a heap plainer to folks than parson’s makin’ it with all his big words.’ You see, you start out with jest so much caliker, you don’t go to the store and pick it out and buy it, but the neighbors will give you a piece here and a piece there, and you’ll have a piece left every time you cut out a dress, and you take jest what happens to come. And that’s like predestination. But when it comes to the cuttin’ out, why, you’re free to choose your own pattern. You can give the same kind o’ pieces to two persons, and one’ll make a ‘nine-patch’ and one’ll make a ‘wild-goose chase,’ and there’ll be two quilts made out o’ the same kind o’ pieces, and jest as different as they can be. And that is jest the way with livin’. The Lord sends us the pieces, but we can cut ‘em out and put ‘em together pretty much to suit ourselves, and there’s a heap more in the cuttin’ out and the sewin’ than there is in the caliker....”

Reflection - Hope Hutchinson

I enjoy creating note cards. I've acquired a variety of tools, glue pens, tape dispensers, pens and markers, and card stock paper in the last few years. I save calendars and use the interesting photos to make envelopes. I cut up cards I've received and use the pieces to make new cards. I even cut up tissue boxes, tea bag boxes and the like.

This is what my worktable looks like – works in progress and finished cards. Working in this mess keeps my inspired – What colors go together? What shapes are left from a previous project? What did I make last? Do I want to repeat that or go in a different direction. While I work I may be listening to the radio, half watching the TV or participating in a Zoom service but I'm always thinking about the person I'm creating a card for.

I really got started with card making a year and a half ago after the pandemic began. It was a way to fill my time and to stay in touch with friends far and wide. I sent out at least one card a day in the first three month after lock down – some birthday cards, thank you notes, and lots of Happy Spring and “thinking of you” cards.

For a few years I've been writing “Hopeful Press” and the year on the back of each card I make. Yesterday while looking at an old Shel Silverstein book of poetry, looking for a bit of inspiration, I found this card. It is made of construction paper, now faded and very fragile, from a stamp I must have cut at some long forgotten event for. On the back it says “Hopeful Press 1992.” I had no idea I've been using that hallmark for 30 years.

The process of making and sending cards is one of my love languages. I think of the reaction which I hope the recipient will have. I feel a connection to those friends and family whether I hear back from them or not, though few things bring me greater happiness than receiving a response.

Two days ago I got two such emails from friends – one of those from our dear Eve. I smiled and

teared up a bit to read their appreciative messages. A different friend tells me she keeps all my cards and displays them in her kitchen. She has health issues and concerns about her aging husband. She can no longer do some of her favorite activities. Even though I see her in person two or three times a month I know my unexpected cards bring her a bit of joy. Another old friend, really just an acquaintance, who is widowed, childless, and alone, calls me whenever she receives a card. She “doesn't want to bother me.” but still we talk for a while, she repeating most of the same news as last time. I probably do the same.

Today's theme is “Expressing What's Within” - inspiration, creativity, connecting our minds, hearts and hands to others, to the world around us. We've heard wonderful words from Peaco, Barbara, Ann, and David. Different ways that they, and each of us can be explorers, creators, communicators. As we enter another season of uncertainty I invite us all to find time, find ways, to quiet the mind and think new thoughts, to calm your troubled mind, to reconnect and re-create.

The Morning Offering

Anthem - “Rondeau” by Marin Marais
 Played by Candy Dann, Ron Dann, and Betsy Ginsberg

Community Response

What do you do to make your soul grow?

Hymn - “I Wish I Knew How”

Chalice Extinguishing

Benediction

Postlude - “September Afternoon” by Shana Aisenberg

The service can be viewed until December 26, 2021 at:

<https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/SuKu809f4uydPpSKRFArvs3DzkE4OufxK5usmrkzqSJkSOJSFRDgYuHWziF6arUy.37ko4StX9dszwjQF>

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