

Emerging: Personal and Global Transformations

Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship ~ buf.org

Rev Paul Beckel

Sunday April 5, 2020

Gathering Songs *Gathered Here*
 We Laugh, We Cry

Chalice

Please join me by lighting a chalice or candle at home. If you don't have one available, know that people are gathering around the world this morning in very similar circumstances to our own – gathering as Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Unitarian Universalists, and many others. So know that the larger light that we collectively bring into this world shall be a beacon to all who long for community in a time of isolation.

Introduction

Welcome to April. It is a new month and time for a new monthly theme. Note that these were all selected last summer, so to have explored together -- throughout March -- the theme of "Journey," has been surprisingly appropriate. For April we'll be considering "wholeness." This immediately calls to mind the inescapable reality of our all being in this together as an interdependent global community.

For the next two weeks I'd like to speak about Global and Personal Transformations. I'll start today by asking: how shall we find a sustainable rhythm for this new life, with all of its unknowns?

Meditation

Our meditation today is based on the work of my colleague Rev. Ana Levy-Lyons. Get comfortable...sit up straight...especially if you've been slouching all week, this is a time to let your body remember its natural shape. Close your eyes, Breathe...

Ana notes that in the Jewish tradition, the Ten Commandments are known simply as concepts for contemplation on how to live a holy and meaningful life. They are not meant to be (as many of us were taught) a list of harsh, precise laws that you learn by having someone wag a finger in your face, demanding: "*you must do everything right!*" Under some conditions, of course, we need well-defined limits, as these can challenge us to change and grow. But when we're hurting or lost, it's appropriate to swivel our perspective so as to hear blessings rather than demands. Each blessing being an invitation toward our own personal liberation. So please now receive into yourselves these ten blessings:

1. May you be blessed with power directly from the tap -- the Source of life and liberation; may it, and nothing else, guide you.
2. May you be blessed with authenticity; may you be able to discern the real from the simulation.
3. May you be blessed with innocence; may you always speak the goodness of life and break free from cynicism.

4. May you be blessed with peace; may you luxuriate in sacred time and space every week.
5. May you be blessed with humility; may you honor your Source in all its forms.
6. May you be blessed with compassion; may you be a life-sustaining force for all the creatures of the earth.
7. May you be blessed with love; may you repair what is broken and cherish what is imperfect.
8. May you be blessed with abundance; may you never need to take what is not yours.
9. May you be blessed with honesty; may you be a conduit for the voices of truth in your world.
10. May you be blessed with enough; may you always be filled with freedom, joy, and dignity.

Special Music

Sometimes Angels © 2001 Tracy Spring / tracyspring.com

1. As long as there is hunger
 There are some who share their bread
 And as long as there is homelessness
 Some will work to find a bed
 And as long as some keep dying young
 Some will try to find the cure
 There is only so much suffering
 We humans can endure

Bridge: Sometimes we cry, sometimes we bleed
 Sometimes life...brings us to our knees...
 We will rise
 Together we stand
 In unity...in harmony...humanity
 Sometimes we need... a helping hand...

Chorus:
 Sometimes angels land among us
 And they live within our kindness
 And if heroes have to give their all
 Sometimes we are angels for each other
 when we fall...

3. And sometimes we are angels
 'Though none of us have wings
 Sometimes ordinary people
 Do extraordinary things
 It is waiting here, within us
 To be all that we can be
 Through our courage and compassion
 Angels look like you and me

2. When some of us are lonely
 They will show us they are near
 When some of us are grieving
 They're the ones who feel our tears
 Some are full of understanding
 'Cause they've been that way before
 And have risen from their ashes
 To give us hope once more

Chorus:
 Sometimes angels land among us
 And they live within our kindness
 And if heroes have to give their all
 Sometimes we are angels for each other
 when we fall...
 Sometimes we are angels for each other
 when we fall...

Chorus:

Message

This time of uncertainty, I think, is a time for us to have patience for ourselves and others. But whoever heard of being patient in a crisis? Isn't crisis a time for action? And a time to demand that those with resources must act, especially those in positions of authority: Must. Act. Now.?

So how unnerving it can be when the action to which we are called is called “staying put.” We can know with our minds that this is the right thing to do, but it’s hard to comprehend this with our hearts, our conscience, and, dare I say, our egos. I confess that when I feel called to purposefulness -- and up to this point I have always understood this as a call to *go* rather than to stop (after all, the word “mission” is derived from “being sent...”) -- when I feel called to purposeful action, part of my motivation comes from *ego*... from having a sense that *I’m* going to be part of some kind of change for the better. I get my energy -- at least in part -- from a sense that progress is just around the corner.

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I was moved to tears once listening to Peter, Paul, and Mary singing songs of freedom from their radical youth -- looking back after about 30 years. Peter Yarrow sang, “*I always thought that I’d see in my own lifetime, an end to poverty, injustice and war. But now I’ve learned that job is gonna take a long-long time, so there’s one thing that’s got to endure...*” Maybe I was so touched because I was in my thirties. So, 30 years seemed like a long-long time. Maybe I was touched because of my close relationships with people in their 50s 60s 70s and 80s who had spent their lives working to combat poverty, injustice, and war. And how sad to think that they too would never see the day... Or maybe I was brought to tears because this was a kids’ album. Peter may have been singing as much to himself, reflecting, while to the kids singing gently, as if to say, “this is a *truth* that I can tell... I *must* tell you... but it’s not to vent my anger, or scare you, or to insist that *you* do *everything right*.” But gently, calmly, just speaking the truth of his experience ... with grace and humility, *passion* for the ideals to which he’s devoted his life, along with deep, deep compassion for those next in line. Maybe I was brought to tears that evening because I was playing the song, quietly, as a lullaby to a four- and a one-year-old. It was a poignant moment to come to terms with the disheartening reality: not only that these things are not going to be overcome in my lifetime, but surely not in theirs either. And yet, he sang on... moving then to “we shall overcome some day ay ay ay ay. Ooh deep in my heart, I do believe that we shall overcome some day.”

Ah, may we be blessed with love to repair what is broken and cherish what is imperfect. May we be blessed with honesty to be a conduit for the voices of truth. May we be blessed with compassion, to be a life-sustaining force for all. May we be blessed with abundance, not tempted to take what is not ours. And may we be blessed with innocence; may we remember to speak of the goodness of life and break free from cynicism.

Because we believe in life, and in the strength of love. So with the grace of age we share the wonder of youth ... knowing that for every one of us, integrity is simply about how we live today. Paying attention, doing what we can, doing the right thing. And letting go of results.

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Christians today celebrate Palm Sunday, the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem hailed as a hero by the crowds. *Such a moment of hope!* And not just in a theological sense. Rather, many understand Jesus to have been a savior in the most earthly, political sense: a revolutionary who might lead his people to drive the Roman imperialists from Palestine. Of course just a few days later the people turned against him. And his friends turned against him. And he was crucified. It’s hard to experience the climactic triumph of Easter without that trajectory of anticipation / suddenly interrupted by a dark night of the soul.

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One of the many uncomfortable feelings I've had in recent weeks has been whiplash. I get going in one direction then BAM I'm pulled over here and then BAM, and again BAM. It's easy to get discouraged, maybe cynical, certainly weary. Just when you figure out how to be careful, it's not enough. Then you figure out what will be most helpful, and the next day, that's not even needed any more. So we turn for security to the things we're really good at. And it turns out that those skill don't apply to this situation. Hell, they may not *ever* be useful again.

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We have among us today those who have lost loved-ones or worry that they might. Those who have lost jobs. Even those who are still employed may be asking themselves, "Um... thanks, but what's IS this job now?" If we're in close-quarters, or if we're suddenly communicating mostly by email... I imagine many of you this week have wanted to cry out, "*that's not what I meant!*"

And so, many of us will need to *pace* ourselves for the long road ahead -- which may actually be a long series of cycles around and around our homes. Pandemic *and* post pandemic. I do believe in what I just said / about the need for rest and patience and forgiveness. But *many people right now cannot afford to pace themselves*. They have jobs that take them out of their homes. Their setting may seem surreal and yet ordinary, and yet especially purposeful, and rewarding, to know how essential, how foundational their work is for the well-being of the whole. Still others tho find themselves in settings where they are stretched thin, their work suddenly more intense than ever. Still others are putting themselves and their families at risk... dealing with life-and-death decisions and high stakes demands on their job performance. Without the materials or the staffing, or the training they need to succeed. It's hard for me to imagine the stress.

Still others are fighting to breathe, mourning the unexpected loss of a loved one, or caught in some sort of limbo. How can I encourage *them* to be patient? To pace themselves? I suppose, only, to encourage them to mourn between breaths. To let them know that we mourn with them. Acknowledging the small losses and the great. Including the loss of hope they may feel, the loss of control. And to remain with them in spirit, letting go of results. The least we can do for them is to really use this time to grow in this way ourselves.

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In this time of extensive unknowns, there is a lot we know about taking care of ourselves and each other, there's a lot we know about history and cultural change, and there's all that we envision for a better world to help us to continue, purposefully, one day at a time. Carrie Koehline said to me this week: "We will learn more every day about how to navigate this. It will call out inner resources we don't even know we have. We can't expect ourselves to already know everything we will learn by traveling through this crisis, however long it stretches into the future. [So] It helps me to picture my future self, thriving, and wiser and more aware of what matters from having lived through this experience." I say Amen to that.

Singing Together *One More Step*

Offertory

We're grateful for your support of the mission of this congregation to embody freedom, reason, and tolerance. Please know that what you are able to share today will support our ability to maintain our innovative, progressive, inclusive programs well into the future.

You can donate to BUF at any time using "give" button in the upper right-hand corner of buf.org. We also have a donate-by-phone option. Simply download the "Give+" app from your app store -- that's with a plus symbol, not the word "plus." The app brings you to "Vanco," a trusted payment processing service we've been using for several years. Of course you can also write a check and mail it to 1207 Ellsworth street. Thank you so much for your generosity.

Closing Song

We would be One

Benediction

Take still one blessing with you today, wherever you go, and wherever you stay: May you find yourself increasingly susceptible to the love extended to you by others. And may you feel to an uncontrollable urge to extend that love beyond any artificial limits.

Circle Round

Solo *Somewhere to Begin* T.R. Ritchie, sung by Tracy Spring

People say to me: You gotta be crazy
How can you sing in times like these
Don't you read the news? Don't you know the score?
How can you sing when so many others grieve?
And people say to me: What kind of fool believes
That songs will make a difference in the end?
By way of a reply I say: A fool such as I
Who sees a song as somewhere to begin

A song is somewhere to begin
To search for something worth believing in
If changes are to come there are things that must be done
And a song is somewhere to begin.

*In the second verse and chorus, replace "sing" with "dream"
Likewise in the third verse, replace with "love"*