

Order of Service
Here We Have Gathered
Sunday, September 8, 2008

Declaration (unison reading)

Love is the spirit of this fellowship
And service is its law.

This is our great covenant:
To dwell together in peace,
To seek truth in love,
And to help one another.

Vila Blake

James

Call to Worship and Chalice Lighting

We begin again.

Called to the good company of beloved others,

We gather here.

Called to the responsible search for truth and meaning,

We gather here.

Called to make a difference in each other's lives

And in the lives of those near and afar who need us,

We gather here.

Called into awareness of our own deeper nature,

We gather here.

Called into loving connection with our natural environment,

Our planet and our Universe,

We gather here.

Because we are called to begin all this, again and again,

We gather here once more.

Meditation and Prayer

I invite us now to the richness of memory.

So quickly do the days of summer fly by us,
Like swallows circling and swooping on an August evening,
That we hardly take notice.

We hope that we will remember through the months ahead,
When cold creeps into our bones
And soaking rains fall,
Some of the warm and wonderful moments
Of these recent days gone by.

Maybe you were in a wild place in nature...

Maybe you were visiting with dear ones...

Maybe you were mining ancestral roots...

Maybe you were just enjoying stillness and beauty by
yourself...

Bring that memory present to this moment.

Enjoy it. Remember it.

Now silently.

Amen.

Reading, "The Vacation," by Wendell Berry

Once there was a man who filmed his vacation.

He went flying down the river in his boat

With is video camera to hi eye, making

A moving picture of the moving river

Upon which his sleek boat moved swiftly

Toward the end of his vacation. He showed
His vacation to his camera, which pictured it,
Preserving it forever: the river, the trees,
The sky, the light, the bow of his rushing boat
Behind which he stood with his camera
Preserving his vacation even as he was having it
So that after he had had it he would still
Have it. It would be there. With a flick
Of a switch, there it would be. But he
Would not be in it. He would never be in it.

Homily "Here We Have Gathered" Rev. Bruce Davis

Today begins a new year in the life of Evergreen. As we celebrate together the beginning of this fifty-third year of the Fellowship, we have much to be thankful for.

- We are thankful that this liberal religious cause, shaped by the seven principles of Unitarian Universalism, has taken such a strong foothold in Snohomish County, a place not always known for its liberalism.
- We are thankful that we have this safe, comfortable, and increasingly beautiful building into which we bring the life of our Evergreen Fellowship.
- We are thankful that once again Evergreen offers a wide range of classes, small groups, workshops, and worship to its members and to any friends and visitors who find meaning in this lively place.
- We are thankful that the Fellowship advocates for the opportunity of children and youth to explore meaning and values in a way that encourages growth in their own unique ways, personally and spiritually.
- We are thankful that our commitment to justice includes causes of social action both here in our own Snohomish communities and far away.
- We are thankful that our common purpose includes learning how to integrate ourselves more harmoniously with the natural environments in which we live.

- We are thankful that our UU message of meaning and hope has, slowly but surely over our 53 years, has reached out to Snohomish County neighbors who have joined our beloved community.

This morning is one of happy homecoming. For many of us, including myself, it means that we were away for a while. Maybe we were traveling in far away places, or maybe we just stayed closer to home and garden for a couple of months.

I'm reminded of the story in the Hebrew Scripture called "The Return of the Prodigal Son." In my reading this summer I learned that the origins of this story pre-date its Hebrew telling, going back into the ancient lore of Persia. The story resonates in many cultures, because it is the story of the human condition. Are we not all trying to find our way home?

Popular interpretations of the prodigal son story suggest that he's the proverbial bad boy who leaves home, lives a life of debauchery, and squanders his inheritance. Returning home with his tail between his legs, now penniless, he is nonetheless welcomed back by his father with great celebration.

But the word *prodigal* need not have a negative connotation. Basically the word refers to extravagance, to lavish living. To live life large. And to my way of thinking, living life *abundantly* is part of our full potential as human beings. It's not about how much money you have. It's about the wealth of life experience that you harvest. So, here's my own interpretation of the story.

There was a young man (or woman) named little Joe who had a father (or mother) and an older brother (or sister). In the late spring one year he knew he needed a change. Life on the farm had grown tedious. Sure, he'd worked hard and they'd made a lot of money, but little Joe was ready for something new.

So he went to his dad and took his share of the profits from the last few years, and he left. He took a bus to the nearby town, and then traveled from one place to another until he landed in the great city of New York.

Having lots of money he got a loft in Greenwich Village. Now the loft was above an art supply store and he bought paints and clay and sculpting materials. He was a natural and he made fantastic and creative pieces that drew a lot of attention. He didn't need any more money, so he gave whatever he made to local charities and auctions, and soon he was known a one of the most lavishly generous artists in the Village. In the evening, when he wasn't working, he took his many friends to dinner

and to musical shows on Broadway. Year after year he lived this way, spreading his creativity and his abundance in lavish giving to friends and strangers alike.

Eventually the money began to run out. Though his funds were disappearing, he continued to enjoy his rich experiences and his many close friends. But suddenly a depression hit, and the little wealth he had left was suddenly worth nothing at all.

He had to sell his art studio and his loft, and he found himself finally hungry and homeless, living in an alley next to Guido's Italian Restaurant.

Now a friend of his family just happened to be visiting in New York City, and by chance recognized little Joe sitting on the sidewalk near the entrance of an Italian restaurant. (By the way, this twist comes from the ancient Persian tradition of this story. The friend invited little Joe for a meal, and soon he was devouring a dinner of spaghetti and meatballs. Little Joe told the family friend that he was finally ready to return home.

When Little Joe got back to his father's farm, he was welcomed enthusiastically. A feast was prepared and all the neighbors were invited. Little Joe told story after story about his rich and varied life in New York City. He shared the wealth of experience that he had earned while away.

Well, it was a happy homecoming celebration except for one thing. His older brother was furious. He complained to the dad, "Why do you have a big party for Little Joe? He's the one who disappeared. I've stayed here and worked all these years, and you've never thrown a party for me."

His dad replied, "We're having this celebration for Little Joe because we've missed him. You are rich in money, but he isn't. He's been made rich by the experiences and stories that he's sharing with our friends right now."

And so, in this way, I hope we've all been a bit prodigal this summer. I hope that we have invested ourselves in rich experiences and that we have lived our lives abundantly in these three summer months. May it be that your story will enrich and inspire our community in many ways during this year together.

There are two ways to share...

(Water Ceremony Process)