

Delight in What Is... But
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First Parish in Hingham (Old Ship Church)
Unitarian Universalist
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Meditation

May we breathe into the center, into the heart of our lives, into peace...
And know that we are part of a circle of love here in this place,
 Here in this community...
And know that we are part of a circle of love, however imperfect,
 In the community of all souls...
And know that we are part of a circle of love
 In the yet wider community of all that lives, of all that is.
May we feel held and embraced by these circles of love.
May we feel our own love re-awakened:
Prayers of our hearts reaching out
to all who are in need of healing and rest and renewal.

Readings

from Psalm 65:

Thus have you prepared the land,
drenching its furrows,
breaking up its clods, softening it with showers,
blessing its yield.
You have crowned the year with your bounty
and with abundant harvest.
The fallow meadows overflow,
the valleys are blanketed with flocks.
They shout and sing for joy!

from the poem "Look Out" by Wendell Berry:

Leave your windows and go out, people of the world,
go into the streets, go into the fields, go into the woods
and along the streams. Go together, go alone.
Say no to the Lords of War which is Money
which is Fire. Say no by saying yes
to the air, to the earth, to the trees,
yes to the grasses, to the rivers, to the birds
and the animals and every living thing, yes
to the small houses, yes to the children. Yes.

Sermon

E.B. White once famously wrote: "If the world were merely seductive, that would be easy. If it were merely challenging, that would be no problem. But I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (or savor) the world. This makes it hard to plan the day."

These lines have stayed with me for the years since I first read them. Why? It seems to me that with his characteristic style (he wrote the book on style after all) E.B. White nails what may feel to many of us to be a fundamental paradox of our lives, and we know it – it strikes home and strikes deep. We know both poles of the soul's yearning very well. Indeed, sometimes we are tossed back and forth between them with ferocious speed. I know I am.

A perfect New England autumn's day breathes a smile onto my face... and then I remember the war in Afghanistan and the slums of India and Africa... and our own inner cities. When so many are suffering so much, shouldn't I feel guilty for taking pleasure in the beauty of the moment, the hour, the day? How dare I *savor*? Shouldn't I be *saving*?

Yet then I recall Annie Dillard's admonition to notice and appreciate the beauty of creation and of one another "so that the creation need not play to an empty house." And I think too of God resting on the seventh day and telling us to rest too, telling us to notice, as God noticed, that the creation is good. How dare I *not* savor?

Yes, flung back and forth.

What are we to do?

To begin with, I don't know about you, but I can't *stop* savoring. Something like the hymn we've just sung: How can I keep from singing? Or like the old song: I can't stop loving you! Only in this case the "you" is my backyard in full peak color, is the deer that dances away ahead of me on the trail, is the fall goldenrod and aster, is that sunrise the other morning at the top of Turkey Hill, is the face of someone I love, of a friend, of each of you. Is *this* glorious morning.

How can I keep from savoring? From "shouting and singing for joy" to paraphrase the Psalm we heard earlier?

Part of our genetic makeup, isn't it? We don't have to *learn* to savor, to appreciate the beauty around us. Quite the contrary: If we are dead to the beauty, we have somehow unlearned this capacity to savor. Maybe someone along the way told us there were more important things – like having more money than you need, or a bigger house or more expensive this or that. Or someone told us or somehow we came to believe that the first thing we must do each morning is to check our "to do" list... when what our heart calls us to do is to check out the last glow of the moon or Venus on the horizon or the first light of dawn, or the curve of the sun as the earth turns and reveals that daily saffron gift, or the face of our beloved – whether lying next to us or in that treasured photo on our nightstand.

How can we keep from savoring?

Well, we do find all sorts of ways don't we. We keep all too busy – shoulder to the wheel and nose to the grindstone, often in quite worthy ways after all. How else would we know that we are contributing, that we matter?

Yet... all too busy.

And maybe looking for wealth in all the wrong places too much of the time. And not noticing, not savoring... that's the real poverty after all – for once you have enough to eat and a roof, the real poverty is not savoring the riches all around us, freely given, every day.

Me? I don't always succeed with this first-thing-in-the-morning-savoring – sometimes I am grabbed before my run by the surprisingly strong pull of email or it might be the front page or WBUR's Morning Edition that catch me – the news... which is so often just the same olds.

And sometimes, which is already too much of the time, I am pre-occupied (telling turn of phrase that, “pre-occupied” or “post-occupied” but not “present-occupied”) even as I run.

But at least I'm out the door most mornings, my run actually an excuse, and not a bad one, to savor – the morning air, the day, whatever passes my line of vision. Like the trees filled with blackbirds on Turkey Hill Lane the other morning, and the turkeys themselves below.

Savoring, whether I feel like it or not – since some mornings I do feel like rolling over for awhile longer. Which.. actually... is okay now and then too, a different kind of savoring is all.

And what then?

Well, there is in fact plenty of time to *save* the world after breakfast, is there not?

And we hardly lack for ways to do this. There is no shortage of things to do to ease the pain of others, to create more justice and peace and a more sustainable way of living on the planet. I know and you know the drill, the list, we all do.

It is simply a matter of each of us choosing *our* way to save the world. And then to get at it. And it seems to me that the impulse to save, to help, to make a difference... that's also wired into our genetic makeup, even though perhaps it too is too-often submerged by individualistic, everyone out for themselves cultural messages.

Yes, plenty to choose from when it comes to saving the world, and if we have the savoring habit, we might find that we are able to approach the saving part with more *love* in our hearts instead of worry and anxiety.

It is so easy, after all, to *worry* about the world, isn't it? It almost feels like a *duty* to worry about the world.

But does the worrying do anyone any good? Does it do the world any good? In his recent book *The Second Book of the Tao*, Stephen Mitchell calls worrying about the world a dead-end. After all, the world doesn't need more worried, anxious people! They (we) are, sadly, a dime a dozen. What the world *needs* is more serene, happy people who simply see what needs to be done and then go out and do it.

Jesus, after all, told us not to worry about the things of this world, what we will eat or wear, but to seek first God's kingdom. God's kingdom? Being present here and now, which includes not only noticing the beauty of creation, but noticing what needs to be done... and so: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the prisoner, being peacemakers... in short, being planet sustainers, life sustainers.

All this said, perhaps easier said than done, we are pulled in so many directions, our lives are often so full. So we seek guidance, help along the savoring/saving path.

A few years ago, browsing at Borders I came across Pema Chodron's book *No Time To Lose*. I saw that title and I thought, yes, tell me how to get going right away to do what I need to do to save the world, to create justice, to make peace, to heed the call of what Martin Luther King, Jr., called the fierce urgency of now.

Pema Chodron's book? (Which, it turns out, is a commentary on an ancient Buddhist text *The Way of the Bodhisattva*). Well her book teaches us how to become that more serene, happier person, that God's kingdom sort of person, that sort of person who is less likely to get hooked by the welling up of anger or self-righteousness and more likely just to do what needs to be done. The message of Pema Chodron's book and the ancient text on which it is based? That the situation on the planet is *so* urgent that we had better *right away* sit down and meditate and learn how better to open our hearts, to mature in our compassion, to grow in our capacity to love.

Which doesn't mean we have to wait until we think we have got all of this heart-stuff, compassion-stuff, love-stuff *right* before we do what needs to be done to save the world.

Rather, from at least a little more deeply settled and centered soul – less worried, more centered – we will begin to notice in what direction *our* unique love flows.

Because for each of us, when (to paraphrase Wendell Berry) we look out our unique window to the world, our love will flow in a particular direction:

Does our heart especially go out to refugees in Darfur? There are things to be done.

Is our heart torn, are we outraged by the CIA, presidentially-approved, drone missile attacks on terrorists in Pakistan and elsewhere, too often killing dozens of innocent men, women, and children at the same time, and very likely creating additional enemies of the United States? There are letters that can be written, emails sent.

Does our heart ache (mine does!) as the atmosphere warms and the climate changes and species are threatened, fellow human beings die in wildfires or flooding likely worsened because of global warming? There is much to be done that urgently must be done – *this* simply *cannot* wait, for the world warms as we wait and equivocate – much to be done to reduce our own carbon footprint and to demand climate action from ourselves, from our government, from corporations, from the international climate summit in Copenhagen. (In this spirit, wasn't yesterday's International Day of Climate Action, with over 5,000 events in almost 200 nations, from New Zealand to Bangladesh, India, Egypt, Israel, across Europe and the Americas... and right here at Old Ship... wasn't it wonderful and we hope powerful?)

And is our heart at the same time moved closer to home (mine is):

Is our heart touched when we think of elders living lonely lives in nursing homes with few visitors? We can make a visit.

Or touched by those without homes? We can volunteer at Father Bill's or write a check to Friends of the Homeless.

Do we find ourselves yearning for a kinder world? We can practice being a little kinder.

Yes, there is plenty to do in whatever direction our heart leads us. And none of us have to do it all. We are, after all, part of a team of earth-lovers, brother and sister lovers, a team of life-lovers, saying (again echoing Wendell Berry) *no* to the Lords of War which is money which is fire, by saying *yes* to life in all of its wonderful particularities, “yes to children, yes.”

So... it turns out that we can (in fact must it seems to me) hold and heed both turnings of the soul, both the impulse to savor and the impulse to save.

And maybe it's not so hard to plan the day as it might sound. For when we savor, really soak in the beauty of the world, that part of it right in front of us – a leaf or flower or friend (and the savoring is not only of the good parts, the beautiful parts, but paradoxically – even though it might not be precisely the right word – of the hard parts, the suffering of our friends and brothers and sisters everywhere...) then our heart naturally overflows with the desire to save the world. We have discovered that savoring and saving are not such separate movements of the soul after all, but are the intertwined reality of a life lived with attention and love. Savoring and saving. Saving and savoring.

Which we actually can do – or at least help to do, as long as we don't think we have to do it all or all at once. Just this person in front of us. Just this letter or email to write to a leader in protest or thanks. Just this light bulb to change or thermostat to turn down. Just this next kind word to speak.

Yes, maybe it's not so hard to plan the day after all – not such a stretch to both save and savor. Maybe this is what being human is all about.

That's all I'm saying.

And there *is* no time to lose, as well as in a certain sense all the time in the world.
So may it ever be.

Benediction

Knowing the many ways in which we are blessed,
 may we make of our lives a blessing.
The kind word, the gentle touch... gifts without measure...
 are ours to give.
May we make of our lives a blessing.

So may it be.