

Do We Have Eyes to See?

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First Parish in Hingham (Old Ship Church)
Unitarian Universalist

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(text from live-streamed worship)

Call to Worship

We've gathered for worship – together if not in person, most certainly in spirit.

If comfort we need this day, may this service offer comfort.

If inspiration we need this day and these days, may this service offer inspiration.

And whatever our need may be, may this service open all of our hearts to compassion, kindness, and love.

Lighting of the Flaming Chalice

I light the flaming chalice of our Unitarian Universalist faith with these words, a favorite passage of Beverly Tricco's, our retiring Director of Religious Education:

“Invocation,” by Angela Herrera

Don't leave your broken heart at the door;

bring it to the altar of life.

It has high standards and the world needs vision.

Bring them with you,

and your joy and your passion.

Bring your loving,

and your courage and your conviction.

Bring your need for healing,

and your power to heal.

There is work to do

and you have all that you need to do it

right here in this room.

Meditation and Prayer

May we now pause, slow down, breathe into this moment, become more fully awake to this moment we share in spirit...

And from this deeper presence in the moment, our hearts' yearnings arise, prayers to the God of our hearts, God of all blessings...

Continued prayers of gratitude... for all the helpers and healers courageous justice-seekers in our troubled land.

Two days after Juneteenth continued prayers for racial justice – may we all have the strength to persist as long as racist systems continue to reinforce white supremacy and prevent the fulfillment of the promise of genuine equality for all.

And this Father's Day prayers of gratitude for fathers... for the fathers or father-figures who raised and/or mentored us... for fathers and for the fathering energy in each of us.

And prayers holding each individual in our community of faith, in the midst of whatever personal sorrow or challenges each may be facing.

May we pause in silent communion... wherever we are... whoever we are... whatever our circumstances...

Readings

Matthew 6:22

The eye is the lamp of the body.

So, if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.

Matthew 13:16

Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.

From *Anam Cara*, by John O'Donohue:

To the fearful eye, all is threatening...

To the greedy eye, everything can be possessed...

To the judgmental eye, everything is closed in definitive frames...

To the resentful eye, everything is begrudged...

To the indifferent eye, nothing calls or awakens...

To the inferior eye, everyone else is greater...

To the loving eye, everything is real. This art of love is neither sentimental nor naïve. Such love is the greatest criterion of truth, celebration, and reality. Kathleen Raine, a Scottish poet, says that unless you see a thing in the light of love, you do not see it at all. Love is the light in which we see light. Love is the light in which we see each thing in its true origin, nature, and destiny. If we could look at the world in a loving way, then the world would rise up before us full of invitation, possibility, and depth.

The loving eye can even coax pain, hurt, and violence toward transfiguration and renewal.

Message “Do We Have Eyes to See?”

My father, when he was not being a surgeon, was an artist.

In 1979 he gave me (not an artist) a little paperback volume that he had treasured for a long time – copyright 1960: It was Henry Miller’s “To Paint is to Love Again”.

Miller is better known as a writer of books, many of which (not this one) were banned at the time of publication.

But he was also a prolific water color artist. Hence this little book, a meditation on the nature of art and, by extension, of life.

What does the title mean?

Well, to begin with Miller wrote that “To paint is to love again, and to love is to live to the fullest.” All right, but a little bland.

Fortunately a few pages further he goes on, not at all in a bland way:

In love, self is obliterated. Only the beloved counts. Whether the beloved is a bowl of fruit, a pastoral scene, or the interior of a bawdy house makes no difference. One must be in it and of it wholly. Before a subject can be transmuted aesthetically it must be devoured and absorbed. If it is a painting it must perspire with ecstasy.

Strong stuff indeed, but I think in the same territory as that passage from John O’Donohue.

For we don’t have to be, nor are we, all painters to learn to see with loving eyes, rather than fearful, resentful, or begrudging eyes. We just have to practice truly seeing, and not just looking.

Over and over again, Jesus would share a parable and then say something like the words you heard earlier: those who have ears to hear and eyes to see will understand.

Clearly he is talking about more than just the physical ability to hear or see. He is asking us to consider in what spirit we hear or see.

Now, as I’ve reflected this week on that John O’Donohue passage coupled with Jesus’s words, it came to me that the different ways of seeing O’Donohue talks about can be felt quite physically. These are not just abstractions to ponder in our heads.

For we know what it *feels* like, don’t we, to see with fearful eyes... or judgmental... or resentful... or begrudging... or indifferent eyes. As for loving eyes? Look at something right now – anything, doesn’t matter. Seek to look with loving eyes – to absorb whatever it is, as Miller suggested. I’m pretty sure you will feel a softening, a relaxing, a sort of opening, outwardly and inwardly.

It is a beautiful feeling.

When, for example, I think of the work, ministry really, that Beverly Tricco has offered during these past twelve years, it is clear that she saw each child, each youth, with loving eyes, saw each of them in their wholeness for who they most truly and fully are. Beverly is, as we know, an actual artist and a fine one at that. And it seems to me she brought to the children and youth of our congregation that same artist’s eye, the eye of love.

Truth be told, pretty much all of us do know what it feels like to see the world not only with loving eyes, but also with all those other sorts of eyes. It is too often reflexive, in one situation or another – and *sometimes* appropriate.

As for me, though, I'm trying out a practice of noticing when I'm seeing with other than the eyes of love... and then relaxing my eyes, letting them re-open, if you will, as eyes of love... eyes to see, truly see what I'm looking at, as Jesus put it.

To *see* George Floyd, to *see* his family, to see all those we've lost to police violence, to *see* their families.

To see each person. As Alice Walker put it in the poem I shared a few weeks ago, if you love America, then love Americans... of all kinds, sizes, shapes, religions, colors, genders....

And to see the trees outside my window, and the grass, and the flowers. To see, really see, the birds and the chipmunks, the turkeys, the deer, the occasional coyote.

To see our threatened earth, in all its wholeness and particularity. To see those brothers and sisters – often the poorest, black and brown, already living at the margins – most affected by the climate crisis.

To see one another in our congregation, whether we agree or disagree on whatever issue might face us as a congregation.

Yes, to see, more often, with the eyes of love, making everything real, with faith that, as John O'Donohue wrote, "The loving eye can even coax pain, hurt, and violence toward transfiguration and renewal." This is what Jesus was talking about too, wasn't it?

Let me be clear on something here before I finish: To see with eyes of love does *not* mean we don't hold people and institutions to account for harmful, racist or environmentally destructive behavior. Not at all.

It *does* mean seeing deeply and compassionately, remembering with Dr. King that hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.

Here is one final way of putting my message this morning.

That perhaps the artist's eye – whether artist with a paintbrush or artist of the spirit – Jesus, Buddha – must be all our eyes, always, as best we can. Is there a better spiritual practice for these times, for any times, for all our lives?

So may it be.