

The Grace of Giving Thanks

Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship
November 20, 2016

Service leaders: Rosalinda Guillen, Erika Moore, Mike Betz, Paul Beckel,
Melanie Rieck & Bob Loynd (piano), David Wagner (guitar),
The BUF Phoenix Ensemble directed by Kevin Allen-Schmid

WELCOME

Paul : Today as we look forward to a week of Thanksgiving—and we try not to look back too much on a divisive post-election week, let's acknowledge the grace that comes to us through noticing and giving thanks not just for the THINGS in our lives, but for all that we DO for one another. Thanksgiving both for the receiving of such gifts, and for opportunities to give some joy, respect, or assistance to another human being.

Mike: Let's begin by acknowledging that this land is the traditional territory of the Lummi and Nooksack peoples, whose presence is imbued in these mountains, valleys, waterways, and shorelines. May we nurture our relationship with our Coast Salish neighbors, and our shared responsibilities to this place where we mutually abide.

PRELUDE—Melanie

OPENING WORDS—Erika, Paul, Rosalinda, Mike

Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Thanksgiving Address, Greetings to the Natural World

The People

Today we have gathered and we see that the cycles of life continue. We have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things. So now, we bring our minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as people. Now our minds are one.

The Earth Mother

We are all thankful to our Mother, the Earth, for she gives us all that we need for life. She supports our feet as we walk about upon her. It gives us joy that she continues to care for us as she has from the beginning of time. To our mother, we send greetings and thanks. Now our minds are one.

The Waters

We give thanks to all the waters of the world for quenching our thirst and providing us with strength. Water is life. We know its power in many forms—waterfalls and rain, mists and streams, rivers and oceans. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to the spirit of Water. Now our minds are one.

The Fish

We turn our minds to the all the Fish life in the water. They were instructed to cleanse and purify the water. They also give themselves to us as food. We are grateful that we can still find pure water. So, we turn now to the Fish and send our greetings and thanks. Now our minds are one.

The Plants

Now we turn toward the vast fields of Plant life. As far as the eye can see, the Plants grow, working many wonders. They sustain many life forms. With our minds gathered together, we give thanks and look forward to seeing Plant life for many generations to come. Now our minds are one.

The Animals

We gather our minds together to send greetings and thanks to all the Animal life in the world. They have many things to teach us as people. We are honored by them when they give up their lives so we may use their bodies as food for our people. We see them near our homes and in the deep forests. We are glad they are still here and we hope that it will always be so. Now our minds are one.

The Birds

We put our minds together as one and thank all the Birds who move and fly about over our heads. The Creator gave them beautiful songs. Each day they remind us to enjoy and appreciate life. The Eagle was chosen to be their leader. To all the Birds—from the smallest to the largest—we send our joyful greetings and thanks. Now our minds are one.

The Four Winds

We are all thankful to the powers we know as the Four Winds. We hear their voices in the moving air as they refresh us and purify the air we breathe. They help us to bring the change of seasons. From the four directions they come, bringing us messages and giving us strength. With one mind, we send our greetings and thanks to the Four Winds.

Now our minds are one. We have now arrived at the place where we end our words. Of all the things we have named, it was not our intention to leave anything out. If something was forgotten, we leave it to each individual to send such greetings and thanks in their own way. Now our minds are one.

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

Love is the spirit of this fellowship and service gives it life. Celebrating our diversity, and joined by a quest for truth, we work for peace, and honor all creation. This is our covenant.

GATHERING SONG *De Colores* #305

KIDS' CHOIR *Take Up Your Spade*

CHILDREN'S FOCUS

1. Who knows what thanksgiving is? Yes it's a special day or a holiday, it can be a party. It's also what we try to remember to feel inside on that day—the feeling of “thank you.” Even if

you don't know who or what you feel thankful *to*. Or *maybe* even on other days too. Maybe even EVERY day.

2. Do you know that feeling? Feeling thankful is also called being grateful, which sounds kind of like the word for thank you in Spanish: “gracias,” which also sounds like the word “grace.” Now grace is a hard word to explain, but maybe I can show you. Who knows what this is [my wallet]. And I have this wallet because yesterday my friend called to tell me that his neighbor had found this wallet on the sidewalk in front of my friend's house. I was worried I had lost my wallet and some very important things inside of it. But now I have it, thru no effort of my own. I did not work for it, I could not have bought some of the things in here. But now I have it for no good reason. That's grace. We can also call something like that “good luck,” and that's fine...as long as we understand that not everything we have in life comes because we deserve it...those are the things we can especially feel thankful for.
3. Okay that might be a lot to think about, so before you go, I'm going to give you a chance to do an exercise. Now don't get too excited. Exercise doesn't always mean moving around all wild. It can also just mean practice. And saying “thank you” is like music or art or sports, it's something we need to practice or exercise to get really good at it.
4. And there's just one more word you need to know to do this exercise. That word is struggle. Who knows what struggle means? // It's when maybe you want to do something good but it's hard to get started. Or you don't want to do something bad, but it's hard to stop doing it.
5. Or a struggle can also be when something in your life has both good parts and bad parts—and all you can think about is the bad part.
6. OK so now we're going to *exercise* the *thankful* part of your brain and your heart and your belly and your toes (there's something in everything we are that just comes alive when we feel thankful). You've probably all felt that. So here's the tricky part: can you *exercise* this great feeling of *thankfulness* for something that you *struggle* with?
7. For example: I had to vacuum the house Friday because the floor had puffs of cat and dog hair all over. Now what might be a good part of that? [dogs and cats]
8. And speaking of hair, I don't have any, and so I get cold a lot. Can you think of anything good about it tho? [I have to brush and wash and cut the hair of the dogs and cats, but not my own.]
9. I'm sure you know that some struggles are a lot bigger than others. It's not easy to find something good that comes along with everything that scares or hurts us. And it's still important to tell someone, who you feel safe with, when you feel scared or hurt.
10. But a lot of times feeling thankful can help. So I'm going to ask you to close your eyes now...and think of something that has bothered you. I guess you big people can do this too.

11. Maybe it's something that someone else did and you can't stop thinking about it.
12. Maybe it's something nobody did and nobody can do anything about, like if a friend moved away.
13. Or maybe it's something you did and now you feel bad about. If it's this just whisper to yourself: "I'm going to try not to do that again."
14. So now, when you think about your struggle, is there anything about it that you could be thankful for? Something that comes with it, or something you could learn because of it? [pause]
15. And can you say "thank you" for the good part? You can say it out loud or just imagine yourself saying it.
16. When you do this, when you say "thank you," even in the middle of a struggle, it doesn't mean the struggle goes away or all of the hurt will be gone. You might need to keep struggling tomorrow to make things better. But one thing that can keep you going is to find that feeling inside day after day.
17. And I have an easy song to teach you that you can whisper or shout as you go. Take a deep breath, and then say: thank you thank you thank you as many times as you can. Then take another breath, and do it again, and again. Go ahead.

PHOENIX ENSEMBLE

Ubi Caritas

REFLECTIONS—Paul

Today I struggle to make sense of this moment in history. And I struggle to discover the best use of my resources, my privileges, my principles. In the midst of these struggles, I am thankful. I am thankful for you, who keep me humble. I am thankful for these opportunities to be together to recharge for the week ahead. I am thankful for thousands of years of trial and error, and reflection upon successful and unsuccessful ways to be human, to be part of a family, to function as a society.

I am grateful for this very moment. This opportunity to attend to the tenderness, here in this room and out in this world.

I am grateful to live in a world where freedom of conscience has become the norm of civilization. Not universally practiced, not universally understood, but as a key element of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights almost 60 years ago, freedom of conscience is a key piece of our global aspiration to live in harmony, so that even when we disagree, every one of us is free to express ourselves in a peaceful way. And now, having expressed my gratitude for this yet unrealized ideal, it's essential to say as well that intimidation and harassment, incitement to violence, unequal treatment, and voter suppression are not peaceful means of expression.

Freedom of conscience can never be an excuse for these forms of violence, whether direct or indirect.

At a moment in which the norms of civilization are threatened to be turned back 60 year or more, I am grateful for this free pulpit, from which my conscience must speak to condemn the menacing behaviors that have persisted throughout human history but are again being normalized to undermine the basic human rights of women, religious and racial minorities, our LGBT neighbors and friends, and anyone else perceived in some way as “foreign.”

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Long ago the Israelites fled from their imprisonment in Egypt, found a new home, and nearly wiped out the tribes who were living in the area they came to call their promised land. And then, generations later, they reminded themselves, through ritual, law, and mythology:

And they enshrined this wisdom in Leviticus Chapter 19: King James Version: “If a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Maybe you know a parallel story, a more recent story, involving Europeans who came to a new world, conquered, built a society that they came to call American, and ever so slowly, came to self-awareness about who they were and who they wish to be.

And maybe you're unsure of how to partake in that American tradition celebrated annually in late November which focusses on humility and gratitude... when the forward trajectory of these virtues is difficult to see and feel.

I am grateful today that the whitewashed version of the story of European settlers graciously engaging with indigenous people...I'm grateful today that this aspirational vision exists...and I'm grateful that additional stories are emerging as well.

If you're not sure how to celebrate in a time of distress and uncertainty, I urge you to seize the opportunity to tell your story. Supplement the melting pot and the salad bowl stories of our diverse community.

And make room as well for traditional stories and the generous inclinations within them. Make room for any fear or pain that emerges in the telling. Make room for any expressions of loss in those stories (expressed nonviolently) that might elicit the grace you recognize in your own struggle. Make room for expressions of loss in those stories (expressed nonviolently) that might elicit the grace you recognize in your own struggle...and in your own daily practices of thanksgiving.

GREETINGS

We have already had, and will continue to have, many opportunities to greet other souls today. So as tempting as it will be in the next 30 seconds, to extend a hand to as many people as possible, I am going to ask you, just this once, and no matter how corny you think this is, grasp the hand of just one person. Be sure that no one is left out. And take a moment to look one another in the eyes. And then in your own words, take turns saying thank you to one another. If you've never met each other, maybe say thank you for your presence, or your humanity, or whatever comes to mind.

REFLECTIONS—Erika

Good Morning, my name is Erika Moore and I am a co-chair of the BUF Black Lives Matter Ministry Action Team. It is with gratitude that I use my privilege and humbly accept this opportunity to elevate and encourage the voices of those people whose families and histories made it possible for us to be here, on this land, in what is now known as Bellingham, WA today. Today, November 20th, is also Dia Nacional da Consciência Negra in Brazil (National Black Consciousness Day) and as an African American womxn, I believe I am responsible for maintaining personal consciousness regarding all histories affecting this land and its people.

I asked two indigenous women to reflect with me on the upcoming holiday observed in the United States and they had the following to share from articles they'd been inspired by:

First, Lucy London read:

“There is no “thanks” in Thanksgiving for most Native Americans, no turkey with all the fixings around a table filled with family and friends.

For many indigenous people in Greater Boston, the holiday is a day of mourning as they reflect on centuries of racism, genocide, and attempts to destroy their culture.

Just as there is no one Native American nation, there is no one way to mark the holiday. What to do on Thanksgiving is an individual decision often based on tribal history, personal experience, and family traditions.”

Then an article shared by Michelle Vendiola highlighted the following:

“A nation of immigrants: This is a convenient myth developed as a response to the 1960s movements against colonialism, neocolonialism, and white supremacy. The ruling class and its brain trust offered multiculturalism, diversity, and affirmative action in response to demands for decolonization, justice, reparations, social equality, an end of imperialism, and the rewriting of history — not to be “inclusive” — but to be accurate. What emerged to replace the liberal melting pot idea and the nationalist triumphal interpretation of the “greatest country on earth and in history,” was the “nation of immigrants” story.

Are “immigrants” the appropriate designation for the indigenous peoples of North America? No.

Are “immigrants” the appropriate designation for enslaved Africans? No.

Are “immigrants” the appropriate designation for the original European settlers? No.

Are “immigrants” the appropriate designation for Mexicans who migrate for work to the United States? No. They are migrant workers crossing a border created by US military force. Many crossing that border now are also from Central America, from the small countries that were ravaged by US military intervention in the 1980s and who also have the right to make demands on the United States.

So, let’s stop saying “this is a nation of immigrants.” -written by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz

This reading is gratefully gifted with hopes toward igniting the fire of commitment to justice.

REFLECTIONS—Rosalinda

(Rosalinda shared from her heart a powerful message of principle and perseverance, please let Tammy Jo know if you’d be willing to transcribe from the audio.)

PHOENIX ENSEMBLE *Pastures of Plenty*

SOCIAL & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COLLECTION—Todd Jones

for the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

SENDING SONG *We Sing Now Together* #67

BENEDICTION “Farmworkers’ Prayer” by Cesar E. Chavez (1927-1993)

Show me the suffering of the most miserable;
So I will know my people's plight.

*Free me to pray for others;
For you are present in every person.*

Help me to take responsibility for my own life;
So that I can be free at last.

*Grant me courage to serve others;
For in service there is true life.*

Give me honesty and patience;
So that I can work with other workers.

*Bring forth song and celebration;
So that the spirit will be alive among us.*

Let the spirit flourish and grow;
So we will never tire of the struggle.

*Let us remember those who have died for justice;
For they have given us life.*

Help us love even those who hate us;

So we can change the world.

CIRCLE 'ROUND