

Mothers/Nurture

May 10, 2015

Rev. Paul Beckel

Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship ~ www.buf.org

Good Morning and welcome to Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship, I'm Rev. Paul Beckel, the son of Mary Frances Dauk. I'll tell you more about her later. First let's say our covenant: 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 *If Every Woman in the World* #1026

CHILDREN'S FOCUS

Was there a you—before you were born? Imagine what it might have been like if you had been somewhere else and then found out you were going to be delivered into this life, here on earth. This song is about finding the courage to take that journey into life.

Men's Chorus *Mom* Sampson/Varble

Children's Chorus *Simplest Things* Amy F Bernon

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION

On this morning devoted to a celebration of nurture, let's take this opportunity to thank and to honor our Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship volunteers. There are so many different ways to nurture what we love, and likewise: many types of volunteer roles at BUF, empowering each of us to contribute to the vitality and the good work, of this beloved community.

When I look at our list of large and small volunteer roles, I notice two things: it's overwhelmingly large, and at the same time, it's incomplete. There are countless intangible / unofficial / behind the scenes efforts that you make, *willingly*, to fulfill the spirit of our covenant. I say "willingly" because that is the etymological root of volunteerism: what we do by free will, good will, by our own choice. It's the very basis of covenant and of religious freedom: doing what makes us come alive.

So as I read this list now, I invite you to stand (and remain standing as you are able) when I name a role you have played this church year. If there are additional times that I mention a role you play you can just nod to accept our gratitude.

- You are on our Pastoral Care Team—selected by the congregation, known for your willingness and ability to nurture individuals in times of transition, stress, and uncertainty.
- You're on a clean team, week after week making this a healthy and inviting place
- you decorate our BUF home with quilts or flowers, you bring snacks, make coffee, or cook entire meals here or in your own homes for BUF activities
- you teach religious education for children or youth
- you are a substitute teacher, a childcare provider, a Religious Education Committee member, or support our children's programs in other ways
- you lead an adult education program, or chalice circle
- you coordinate or assist with fundraisers
- you are a canvasser
- you chair a committee or a team or a task force or board, or you serve on one of the above
- you prepare and lead Sunday services as a speaker or celebrant
- you've initiated or assisted with a BUF social gathering

- you sing in the choir or share your musical gift with us outside of choir
- you care for the building and grounds
- you copy and fold the order of service, help around the office, or run errands
- you publicize BUF and its programs, and/or when you write for the Midweek update, or BUF news, or even speak a simple announcement, you nurture us with your enthusiasm and clarity
- you greet or usher or make a point to welcome newcomers and help them find their way around
- you coordinate or assist with projects of service to the wider community
- you contribute food to the food cart or deliver the food we collect to the food bank
- you visit BUF members who are unable to leave their homes, or in the hospital ... or you send cards or give rides or make meals
- you contribute financially... to ensure that all of our volunteers have the resources they need, and staff assistance as the work together to fulfill our mission
- You support a partner, child, or parent who is now standing. That is, you help to make it possible for them to invest their energies into the good work of this congregation.
- You are still seated because it's mother's day, and you didn't feel like getting up and down and up and down forty more times. Or maybe you're willing but still wondering how to be a part of all of this riot of generosity...if so please stand now, as you are able, and let's say together responsive reading #728, "Blessed are Those."

CHILDREN'S BLESSING

ANNOUNCEMENTS & GREETINGS

"I greet you in the name of..."

MEDITATION / REFLECTIONS

Thich Nhat Hanh has written a very simple meditation for starting the day with compassion:

*Waking up each morning I smile:
twenty four brand new hours are before me.
I vow to live each moment fully,
And to look at all beings with eyes of compassion.*

"I vow to live each moment fully and to look at all beings with eyes of compassion." Well, that's a wonderful sentiment, but what if I don't have working eyes?

Now that might sound like a silly objection, but when we pray, or speak poetically about our ideals, there is always a risk that, because of our own life experience, we just won't resonate with certain words or images for their intended meanings.

This is certainly the case on mother's day for those who have complicated—and not entirely compassionate—associations with motherhood.

So acknowledging this, I offer a mother's day prayer [adapted from UU Rev Jill Terwilliger]

It is for all the mothers in this room, in this city, across this continent, and in every land around this planet.

It is for the mothers whose homes resound with children's laughter, screeching toys, loud music, or the sullen teenage shrug.

It is for the mothers who gave birth in joy or in agony or in grief.

It is for the mothers who have adopted the motherless ... and discovered how wide love can reach; and it is for the mothers who have given over their children to others. This prayer is for all those who have wished to be parents and are not.

It is for all those whose children have ever gone off to war, for the worry they endure and the tension they carry through every hour of absence. It is for those whose children return whole and unscathed, or return wounded in mind or body, or who do not return at all.

It is for all who grieve lost pregnancies, lost children, lost hopes, lost futures.

*And this is my prayer: May peace come to you.
Peace amid the noise and chaos of active children, Peace amid the silence and the absence.*

Peace with the choices you have made, the paths taken and those not taken.

Peace with the grief you have endured.

May peace come to you; may you greet it and welcome it, and make a place for peace to live within you.

May peace find a home in you, and from that home, may peace venture widely over the earth.

Let's rest a moment now in this peace, in silence.

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Mary Frances Dauk, who I mentioned earlier, is a farmer and a nurse, now retired from those professions but still deeply attached to the people, principles, products, and paraphernalia of these professional pursuits. As a farmer, her days were filled with animals, vegetables, and flowers. As a nurse her nights usually involved delivering babies and treating accident victims.

Inevitably, these experiences shaped her way of being a mother. She was relentless in sharing with us kids what she saw as the consequences of bad decision making. Every week we heard tragic stories. Two in particular were repeated over and over: motorcyclists without helmets, and teenage mothers. She seemed pretty judgmental about all of this, actually. But behind the morality tales two things were clear, One: she really cared for those patients, and had her heart broken in knowing them—so often teenagers and young adults whose entire life trajectories had changed overnight. And two: since her home life was cluttered with nine adventurous and vulnerable teenagers and young adults of her own...and then a second and a third generation...she probably had a hard time separating her hopes and her expectations and her care from one layer of her life to another.

So I heard in her stories both instinctive compassion...and a moral/intellectual quandary: the struggle to love while letting go of judgment.

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What is the nature of human nurture? We are all a part of the whole collection of stuff and consciousness that make up this cosmos, but does that necessarily mean that we understand and feel connection and caring?

Will we ever know where empathy, nurture, or compassion come from? Does it really matter? Is it more important to know about or to experience these things?

Well to the extent that we experience things through knowing, some emerging science might help us reflect briefly today on mothering and being mothered...caring, and our expectations of being cared for...and our amazing ability to recover from not being cared for.

Through studies of how the brain works, we're getting hints of how the cells in our brains, our neurons, can reflect the action of the cells of the brains in other people!

This phenomenon is called mirroring. We don't know yet how or why it happens. But with fancy machines that can take pictures of our brains in action, we can roughly observe our minds in action. And if both you and I have these scanners connected at the same time, and if I watch you, my brain activity will start mirroring yours. I will know what you're feeling. Sometimes I will even know what you're going to do next. Now this is not happening *because* of the machines...the machines just show that this is something natural that human beings do with each other.

We do it all of the time but the most vivid experience I remember of this was when my wife Jane was pregnant. And I would feel some of the physical symptoms of pregnancy that she felt. Now she's pretty skeptical about this. And let's be clear: I didn't experience any but the tiniest fraction of what she went through. But even if it was all in my mind, that's the point. We have the capacity, at some level to feel what others feel, both physically and emotionally.

And this gift makes it possible for us to understand one another, and learn from one another. And to hurt with one another. It may be what enables kids to imitate their parents, learn language, and learn how to treat other people.

This mirroring might be what helps us to understand what other people do, and understand their intentions.

It may even be part of how we understand ourselves, how we can look inside and know *our own* feelings—and know what *we're* going to do next.

With this in mind, then, I'd like to take a couple more minutes of silence now in which I'll ask you to reflect on your own experiences of compassion and empathy, given and received. I'm guessing that the stories may be even more interesting than the science. So:

- o when were you first conscious of being cared for?
- o what is your first memory of caring for another living being?
- o what unexpected source in your life opened your eyes to compassion?
- o in what unexpected way might you pass that along?

Blessings be upon us all. I am confident that when we sit together quietly, making space for one another's joys and sorrows, folly and confusion, when we quiet the firestorms of thinking and judging, our receptivity and love for one another can only grow. Amen.

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Old Mary Frances Dauk Beckel, who cooked so many meals for me, is now a recipient of meals on wheels. She is a participant in the larger cycle of giving and receiving, offering, accepting, willing, reflecting, and communing in quiet gratitude.

COLLECTION	for Meals on Wheels
SENDING SONG	<i>Guide My Feet</i> #348
BENEDICTION	<i>Circle Round for Freedom</i>