

Please join me in a moment of silent prayer and meditation.

In his poem, *Portones Abiertos y Rostros Brillantes*, the California poet, Gabriel Navar celebrates the excitement and joy of living as he writes:

*Of course I am happy, wouldn't you be?  
When I look at open gates and see a garden full of life,  
of good health,  
and smiles of glowing faces  
it ignites my spirit.*

*I have never been more excited to be alive  
and in the radiance of peace that grows.  
I know that when I surrender to sleep  
and the ocean of night cradles my dreams,  
I can only be in one state of being  
completely open*

That's a little more positive than I feel right now. Gabriel's poem makes me question how much he's actually living in the real world, but, then I learned more about him and how dedicated he is to using words, colors, and images that thematically and philosophically speak to what he calls "this great and often absurd human theater we are currently living!"<sup>1</sup>

NOW he's speaking my language. THAT is something with which I resonate. And, you probably do too.

Everyday seems to bring with it some kind of struggle or challenge or assault on a national level that requires more and more mental and physical energy to combat. I feel it. And I'm sure you do too. It feels like the world is coming apart at the seams, and that we're coming apart as well. I echo the words of the lesbian poet and activist, Adrienne Rich, when she says, "My heart is moved by all I cannot save. So much has been destroyed..."<sup>2</sup> In this moment I am thinking of and remembering the 11 Jewish people killed last week at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, and I am also thinking of and remembering the two African-American people who were recently targeted and killed in Kentucky because of their skin color.

There is so much painful division and hateful rhetoric in our country. So much anxiety, despair, depression. I think everyone in America has PTSD for at least one reason, if not more. And, this is just in talking about what's happening on the national level, let alone what's happening in our personal lives with illness, loss, and hardships that deeply impact us and our families.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://gabrielnavar.com/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/adrienne-rich>

It's a hard time to be human and I don't know about you but I've even struggled lately with feeling humane. I confess to you that on the weekend of the Supreme Court vote I tipped over into hatred and resentment, and almost into despair.

It is often said that preachers preach what they most need to hear. I need to hear some Good News, and my sense is that with all that is happening in this great and often absurd human theater in which we are currently living, we are hungrier than ever for some Good News and we are longing for deep truths that can sustain us in these trying times.

So, with words and images and music I hope to offer us some soul truth that uplifts and encourages us, that gives us a sense of perspective and purpose for living in these times.

Turn with if you will to page #1047 in our teal hymnal<sup>3</sup> and let's sing together.

*Nada te turbe  
Nada te espante  
Quien a Dios tiene  
Nada le falta  
Nada te turbe  
Nada te espante  
Solo Dios basta*

(Speak the English translation)

*Nothing can trouble  
Nothing can frighten  
Those that seek God shall  
Never go wanting.  
Nothing can trouble  
Nothing can frighten  
God alone fills us.*

This prayer, *Nada te Turbe*, was written by the Spanish mystic, Santa Teresa de Jesus, also known as St. Teresa of Avila.<sup>4</sup> St. Teresa's books, including her autobiography, are considered an integral part of Spanish Renaissance literature, Christian mysticism, and Christian meditation practices.

Her seminal work is entitled, *The Interior Castle*<sup>5</sup> and was inspired by a vision from the God of her Understanding. She said that God revealed to her "...a most beautiful crystal globe, made in

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.uua.org/worship/music/hymnals/journey>

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teresa\\_of\\_%C3%81vila](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teresa_of_%C3%81vila)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1515-1582,\\_Teresa\\_d'Avila,\\_The\\_Interior\\_Castle\\_Of\\_The\\_Mansions,\\_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1515-1582,_Teresa_d'Avila,_The_Interior_Castle_Of_The_Mansions,_EN.pdf)

the shape of a castle, and containing seven mansions, in the seventh and innermost of which was the King of Glory, in the greatest splendour, illumining and beautifying them all. The nearer one got to the centre, the stronger was the light; outside the palace limits everything was foul, dark and infested with toads, vipers and other venomous creatures.”<sup>6</sup>

This is Christian Mysticism at its core. What a spectacular vision! I love imagining the soul as a diamond, in the shape of a castle, and the nearer one gets to the center, the stronger is the light.

To tell you a little bit of history about St. Teresa—her father was a Jewish man who was forcibly converted to Christianity. When Teresa was 11 her mother died and in her grief she turned toward the Virgin Mary as her spiritual mother. Later in life and for many years she lived in a monastery and suffered great illnesses.

The prayer, *Nada Te Turbe*, was found at the monastery and was written in her own handwriting. Many believe it is based on the New Testament scripture in John chapter 14<sup>7</sup> where Jesus comforts his disciples encouraging them to not let their hearts be troubled or afraid. This prayer, *Nada te Turbe*, was later set to music, and over the centuries, has consoled countless numbers of people.

How could St. Teresa, who suffered so much, write a prayer imploring us not to let our hearts be troubled or afraid? We can't possibly think she was un-troubled or un-afraid.

And, if it is based on John 14, which seems likely, let's look at what was happening at that time with Jesus and the disciples. These are the last precious moments between Jesus and his friends before Jesus is taken away and crucified. Jesus knows full well that he has come up against the religious and political authorities one too many times and they are done with him. His disciples know something is going on and that things probably are not going to end well for their friend. Yet, in his last few moments he tells them, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Do not let them be afraid.” How could Jesus, who knows he is going to die a horrible death from a state sanctioned execution, implore his friends to not let their hearts be troubled or afraid? We can't possibly think they were un-troubled or un-afraid.

Jesus words...

St. Teresa's vision...

Souls, Diamonds, Castles, Toads, Vipers...

It does not make sense. It is not rational. It seems absurd. But, perhaps it has something to do with the song we sang at the beginning of the service,

*Mystery, Mystery, Life is a riddle and a mystery.*

The reading we heard this morning from Dr. Remen is all about mystery. She says, “The first time I heard the word *Mystery*, I did not understand what it meant. As an avid reader of mystery

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<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Interior\\_Castle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Interior_Castle)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+14&version=NRSV>

stories, I had the idea that something is a mystery only because its solution has not yet been found. But mystery (with a small ‘m’) is different than Mystery (with a capital ‘M’). By its very nature Mystery cannot be solved, can never be known. It can only be lived.”<sup>8 9</sup>

Dr. Remen spent her career as a medical doctor counseling people with chronic and terminal illnesses; she herself lives with a chronic illness. In her daily work she says, “I have seen Mystery comfort people when nothing else can comfort them and offer hope when nothing else offers hope. I have seen Mystery heal fear that is otherwise unhealable. For years I have watched people in their confrontation with the unknown recover awe, wonder, joy, and aliveness.”<sup>10</sup>

Speaking of Mystery, I found myself at a Catholic monastery this past week called Our Lady of the Rock<sup>11</sup>, located on Shaw Island. A group of Benedictine nuns have been living there for decades, working the farm that contains chickens, pigs, cattle, llamas, and one cat who is in charge of everything. The nuns grow their own vegetables and herbs and they make what they call Monastery Cheese. They fit their farm chores in around the Divine Office of Hours, which are the times each day and evening where they gather in the chapel to sing and pray, and it’s all in Latin.

Life in indeed is a riddle and a mystery for what in the world was I as a lesbian Unitarian Universalist doing at a Catholic monastery? I was practicing what our Unitarian Forefather, Frances David, is credited with saying, “We do not have to think alike to love alike.”<sup>12</sup>

I was taking a much-needed vacation, and resting from my work as a chaplain at St. Joseph’s Medical Center. I was also taking a break from the news, from email, social media, text, and phone. I was off the grid, and I loved it. I slopped pigs. I fed cows. I ate well because the Mothers do not believe in low-carb diets! I cleaned the guest-house where I was staying. I took naps, and I prayed. While singing. While hiking. While sitting on the cliffs over looking the water. While embracing the spirit of the fall season and letting go. As Dr. Remen says, “Mystery requires that we relinquish an endless search for answers and become willing to not understand.”<sup>13</sup> In that Spirit, I went to Our Lady of the Rock to live the Mystery.

Please turn with me if you will in the gray hymnal<sup>14</sup> to page #391 and let’s sing together:

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<sup>8</sup> Remen, Rachel Naomi, M.D., “Mystery” in *My Grandfather’s Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge, and Belonging*. Riverhead Books, New York, 2014. P. 337.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.rachelremen.com/books/my-grandfathers-blessings/>

<sup>10</sup> Remen, Rachel Naomi, M.D., “Mystery” in *My Grandfather’s Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge, and Belonging*. Riverhead Books, New York, 2014. P. 337.

<sup>11</sup> <https://olrmonastery.org/>

<sup>12</sup> [https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Ferenc\\_D%C3%A1vid](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Ferenc_D%C3%A1vid)

<sup>13</sup> Remen, Rachel Naomi, M.D., “Mystery” in *My Grandfather’s Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge, and Belonging*. Riverhead Books, New York, 2014. P. 338

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.uua.org/worship/music/hymnals/singing-living-tradition>

*Voice still and small, deep inside all,  
I hear you call, singing.  
In storm and rain, sorrow and pain,  
Still we'll remain, singing.  
Calming my fears, quenching my tears  
Through all the years, singing.*

Life is hard, and I can't begin to have answers, but a song like this, which holds complexity so beautifully, offers solace and comfort. St. Augustine<sup>15</sup>, an early Church father said, "Those who sing, pray twice." The first time I heard that quote was 20 years ago, at a Taizé service in San Francisco.

What is a Taizé service? I'm glad you asked.

A Taizé service<sup>16</sup> comes to us from the village of Taizé in Burgundy, France. There is a monastery in that village, and an ecumenical Taizé service was started by Brother Roger. A man by the name of Jacques Berthier<sup>17</sup> was also part of that community, and he is best known for writing much of the music used at Taizé services today including *Nada te Turbe*, along with several other songs in our UU hymnal. Together Brother Roger and Jacques Berthier created the service during World War II.

A Taizé service is one done by candlelight with simple songs or phrases sung in chant-like or meditative repetition. It is a service of songs, readings and silent meditation that allows people the opportunity to relax, to contemplate, and to sink down into what Gabriel Navar called "the radiance of peace that grows".

I am thrilled to tell you that Andrea Rakl, piano player extraordinaire, and I, will be offering a monthly Taizé service at BUF, starting tomorrow evening at 7 pm, and continuing the first Monday of each month, and of course we will give it a UU flair.

One of the sources our own Unitarian Universalism faith draws from is the *Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life*. I suggest to you today that coming to a monthly Taizé service is one way we can have direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder through music and candlelight. It's one place where we can cultivate a sense of Mystery. It's one way to practice sustainability and to keep ourselves grounded during these challenging times.

The theme this month for BUF's services and for the children's program is "Caring Locally". There are times when caring locally means starting right here—with our own bodies, minds, hearts, souls, and spirits—and giving ourselves permission to rest and renew. As Dr. Remen

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<sup>15</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine\\_of\\_Hippo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo)

<sup>16</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiz%C3%A9\\_Community](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taiz%C3%A9_Community)

<sup>17</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques\\_Berthier](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Berthier)

reminds us, “In losing our sense of Mystery, we become a nation of burned out people.”<sup>18</sup> As UUs it is part of our spiritual practice to “act locally” and to help others, but I fear sometimes we forget to take care of ourselves, to heal ourselves, to ensure that we are as grounded as can be, so that we CAN act locally. My friends, we do not know what the upcoming Midterm elections will reveal to us in two days; what we do know is that practicing sustainability is crucial.

Find your path to Mystery! It does not have to be the same as mine; I have given a few examples that work for me, but it’s important that you find yours.

It’s not that the poet Gabriel Navar isn’t aware of what’s going on around him in the world. It’s not that Jesus wasn’t aware of what was happening in the religious and political arena of his time. St. Teresa of Avila, who lived with chronic illness, was acutely aware of suffering in her body, and in the body of the world. Brother Roger’s home in Taizé, France, was occupied for two years by the Gestapo during World War II.

I don’t believe for one minute that their hearts were not troubled or afraid. In fact, I believe it is precisely because of all that was happening around them that they dug deeper into Mystery. I believe they became willing to not understand and by doing so they were touched by a wisdom that transformed their lives.

That’s why Gabriel Navar can say,  
*When I look at open gates and see a garden full of life,  
of good health,  
and smiles of glowing faces  
it ignites my spirit.*

When we get closer to the center—the unknown that lives inside all of us—Mystery is that which ignites our spirits! Mystery helps us recover awe, wonder, joy, and aliveness. Mystery helps us open the gates of our hearts, and minds and spirits when nothing else can, and helps keep them open. Mystery has great power and it cannot be solved. It can only be lived.

I am grateful to be living the Mystery with you. I am grateful for this place, grateful to be pursuing unanswerable questions in such good company.

Blessed be and amen.

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<sup>18</sup> Remen, Rachel Naomi, M.D., “Mystery” in *My Grandfather’s Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge, and Belonging*. Riverhead Books, New York, 2014. P. 338