

Whose are We?

December 23, 2018

Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship ~ www.buf.org

Rev Paul Beckel

WELCOME

Inspired today by ritual, song, and story we'll consider the message of Christmas: the miracle that you and I: our hands, our hearts, every cell in our body, and even those microorganisms inside us that are somewhat peripheral to our body ... *all* that is *us* is filled with extraordinary unknowable, unspeakable ... what?

We have no words. We can try Grace, Love, Beauty. Let's leave it there for now. Because even if we cannot define *what* this miracle is, let's consider for a moment *where* it is. In our flesh and blood. In the food that nourishes us. And in the cookies too, that provide more glow than nourishment. In the ground we walk on, the air we breathe, and the animal companions with whom we share our world.

All of this is us. Our ancestors. Philosophers and poets and parents and paupers. Our children's children, who will live in the shade of the trees we will plant in this coming year.

We are held in, we belong to all of this — simultaneously tangible and mysterious. Today we gather to know this, and to give thanks.

GATHERING SONG

We are not our Own #317

LIGHTING THE CHALICE

CHILD DEDICATION

In all parts of the earth, from the earliest days, parents have brought their children to a sacred place to share their fearful wonder at the responsibility that they have received, and to dedicate themselves to accept this responsibility with joy. We gather today to celebrate and share this moment with the parents and extended family of Marta Sorich. And *we dedicate ourselves* to love and to learn and to grow with Marta.

May this ceremony work a miracle in our hearts so that, as models to her, we may shape our lives according to beauty, truth, and goodness. For those of us who will not have a direct personal relationship with Marta, let us dedicate ourselves to support the Religious Education program here at BUF, dedicate ourselves to civility and to creating opportunities for *all* children within the larger community, and dedicate ourselves to protecting the air, land, water, and living things on which her generation will thrive.

Marta, welcome to this world, filled with mystery and possibility. This is a place of happiness and pain, glorious dreams and very real limitations. The world into which you come is what-it-is. And it is what we, and you, will make of it.

Annie and Chris, do you now promise that to the best of your abilities you will support this child with patience, gratitude, and grace? *[we do]*

Paul dips a rose in water, then gives a flower to Marta, saying:

Marta, your parents hope that you will sit at the feet of teachers from many traditions. May both prophets and fools be your teachers, along with astonishment and the pain of making your own mistakes. We give you this rose now from which thorns have been removed, anticipating someday that we will launch you as an adult with another beautiful rose—thorns and all. May these two roses represent our promise to do our best to protect you in your tender years ... while promising as well to prepare you for the time to come.

In this spirit, while we still can, we'd like to offer you this lullabye:

Amy Van Auken, Annie's sisger, singing Billy Joel's Lullabye:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcnd55tLCv8>

And now I'd like to say something to you other kids who are here today. This is baby Marta. You and she will be growing up together. How you treat her is going to be a really important. If you are kind to her she will learn that this is the best way to treat other people. Will you help her to learn how to be kind? *[yes]*

Now you, her grandparents, extended family, and congregation, I invite you to share this blessing for Marta, knowing that the blessing comes not from these words, but from our choices and actions that will arise from our love for her: *[on cover of order of service]*

Marta, may you grow to a life of joy. May you grow to love other people. May you grow to be courageous to challenge injustice. May you speak the truth you know, and never cease from seeking to know more. In everyone you meet, may you recognize kinship and accept difference. May you grow to be strong and gentle. May you lessen a bit our human sorrows. We, your religious community, now dedicate ourselves: to guide you and comfort you, to teach you and learn from you, and to create a world within which this blessing may be realized.

ERACISM

Cat McIntyre

STORY

“John,” by Rev Liz McMaster

MEDITATION / SILENCE (2:00)

INTERLUDE

BRIEF REFLECTIONS

Sometime this week you'll probably hear someone say, “Aawww, we should celebrate the spirit of Christmas all year ‘round.” And when you're done pulling out your hair, you might stop to consider whether you already do.

I think it's important to mark milestones of our lives, and milestones of the year. To

acknowledge that it's cold and dark, now, and we could use a boost. A reminder that there is light and hope, and much in our lives to be grateful for.

I also think this applies to Valentines Day, Bodhi Day, the Fourth of July, Summer Solstice, Ramadan, and Halloween. And more obviously this applies to Father's day, Mother's Day, Easter, and Earth Day ... because on each of these festivals we remember that our lives are part of a great cycle of life. Growth and decay. Sorrow and Joy. Struggle and hope, and contemplation.

In the Christian tradition this week all of this is brought to our attention with the image of a loving God investing himself into an earthly body. A body which, in this version of the human story, brings wisdom to the world. Conveying the message that the last shall be first. The message that saying we're going to be kind, but then not being kind, destroys our trust for one another — and even our trust in ourselves.

We remind ourselves of this on a regular basis, because it's too easy to forget. We could speculate all day about *why* it's so easy to forget. That kind of speculation, especially when it's turned on *others* — why *others* forget to be honest and kind — that can be an entertaining question. But maybe it's beside the point.

The point today is that I am, and you are, and all of creation are a part of that same love to which Jesus, born in Bethlehem, called our attention. Just like the kid born here at St. Joe's Hospital, or in an immigrant laborers' camp, or palace, or war zone. All, if we look closely enough, are like *us* — both in that they are of the earth and they are of the heavens.

Made of stardust and light spun from ancient galaxies, made to last only so long among us, and therefore infinitely precious while they are here.

Last night a group of us went Christmas caroling in the neighborhood. It was misty at first, then windy, then rainy. But it was fun to stop in front of lighted homes, and sometimes up onto the shelter of porches. At one home a man answered the door, surprised, and invited us in. We laughed and said thanks, but there can't be room inside for all of us. I mean there were 35 or 40 carolers (although some of them were on the small side).

So he said, my wife's inside, and she'd love to hear you sing, but she's sick, she can't come to the door. Then he ducked back inside for a second, came back to us and said, "no, really. Really, we want you all to come inside."

So we poured in and found another 8-10 family members in there, stationed around a woman lying in a hospital bed, who, we were told, was in an end stage of cancer. Looking on as someone who appeared to be an adult son held her hand, I found myself standing on an oxygen line, so I anxiously pushed it back under a knick knock shelf. We asked if the family had any requests, and I wasn't surprised that they chose a quiet song.

Since now I've already forgotten what that song was, and since this is the season of the power of

sincere myth, let's say it was *The First Nowell*. Then we hoped they'd ask for another, because I, and I could see many others, and hear many others, choking up, and feeling, knowing that this moment was an extraordinary gift — a gift we were giving and no less a gift we were receiving. I can't remember what we sang next, but I remember all of those BUF kids watching and singing at the foot of that bed. Then we sang Silent Night, and, well, I tried to breathe as much as I tried to sing. I could have used a bit of that oxygen.

The family members were so surprised, initially. From the looks on their faces I'm guessing that they were holding back because they were a little weirded out. I mean, before we came they were probably already in a very unfamiliar and uneasy moment of their lives. But they let us in. And eventually they started singing with us too. And crying. It was a moment that I hope I will never forget.

And then they all joined in as we finished up with something more vigorous and lighthearted. Jingle Bells, probably. And they thanked us and we thanked them. And we strolled on to other homes, then back to BUF for cookies and stories and hot chocolate. But the story I think we'll remember best is that of singing silent night to a dying woman.

*Glories stream from thy holy face. With the dawn of redeeming grace.
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

We are not our own. We come into this world, dependent, but bringing vigor and hope. We will go from this world dependent, eliciting compassion, and calling compassion forth from others — and this too can be a gift of our lives. So may it be.

Whose are we? Whose is Marta?
To whom will she owe allegiance?
Who is responsible for her?
When and how will that change over her lifetime?

We are of the earth and we are of one another — in having been loved into existence.

We drink from wells we did not dig... and we borrow this entire biosphere from our descendants. So let us hold one another gently, even as we are held ourselves in this miracle of love and loss and rebirth.

SHARING OUR GIFTS

SENDING SONG *Light One Candle* #221

BENEDICTION

CIRCLE 'ROUND