

“A Search For Joy” Diane Shelby Churchill

Order of Service
Sunday, July 26, 2009, 10:00 a.m.

*Life will bring you pain all by itself.
Your responsibility is to create joy. – Milton Erickson, M.D.*

Call to Gather:

Look to this day.
For it is life, the very life of life.
In its brief course lie all the verities and
Realities of your existence:
The bliss of growth,
The glory of action,
The splendor of beauty;
For yesterday is but a dream,
And tomorrow is only a vision;
But today, well lived, makes every
Yesterday
A dream of happiness
And every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Look well, therefore, to this day.

Chalice Lighting

Hymn #346 Come Sing A Song With Me

Welcome

Doxology

Children’s Story: Each Breath a Smile, by Thich Nhat Hanh

Singing the Children Out

Sharing Our Abundance

Joys & Concerns

Meditation (by Thich Nhat Hanh)

Today’s meditation is written by Thich Nhat Hanh –

After the meditation is read, we will have a minute of silence:

I vow to offer joy to one person in the morning
And to help to relieve the grief of one
Person in the afternoon.
I vow to live simply and sanely, content with just a few possessions,
And to keep my body healthy.
I vow to let go of all worried and anxiety
In order to be light and free.

I vow to practice mindful breathing and smiling,

Looking deeply into things.
I vow to understand living beings and their suffering,
To cultivate compassion and loving kindness,
And to practice joy and equanimity.

Minute of silence

Special Music sung by Doug Hoffman: 59th Street Bridge Song (by Paul Simon)

First Reading:

Revel in the Ordinary
By Mary Jean Iron

Normal day, let me be aware of the treasure you are.
Let me learn from you, love you, bless you before you
depart. Let me not pass you by in quest of some rare
And perfect tomorrow. Let me hold you while I may, for it may
not always be so. One day I shall dig my nails into the
earth, or bury my face in the pillow, or stretch myself
taut, or raise my hands to the sky and want, more
than all the world, your return.

Second Reading:

If I Had My Life to Live Over
By Nadine Stair

I'd dare to make more mistakes next time. I'd relax, I would limber up. I would be sillier than I have been this trip. I would take fewer things seriously. I would take more chances. I would climb more mountains and swim more rivers. I would eat more ice cream and less beans. I would perhaps have more actual troubles, but I'd have fewer imaginary ones.

You see, I'm one of those people who live sensibly and sanely hour after hour, day after day. Oh, I've had my moments of joy, and if I had to do it over again, I'd have more of them. In fact, I'd try to have nothing else, just moments, one after another, instead of living so many years ahead of each day.

I've been one of those persons who never goes anywhere without a thermometer, a hot water bottle, a raincoat and a parachute. If I had it to do again, I would travel lighter than I have.

If I had my life to live over, I would start barefoot earlier in the spring and stay that way later in the fall. I would go to more dances. I would ride more merry-go-rounds. I would pick more daisies.

Special Music sung by Doug Hoffman: “New Shoes” (by Paulo Nutini)

Sermon: “A Search For Joy”

“New Shoes” ... don’t you love wearing new shoes? Or maybe it’s slipping on those comfy, well-worn shoes that brings you a bit of joy after a long day of work. And that’s what this talk is about ... finding the joy in life ... finding the joys in the every day world. It’s easy to find happiness and joy in the BIG events of our lives... but, it can be more of a struggle to sustain that feeling of joy and wonderment in the mundane -- in the every day tasks of our lives.

As Judith read in “If I Had to Live My Life Over.”... I don’t want my life to slip through my fingers with regrets ... I want to learn to relish every moment of every day.

The idea for this sermon came to me a long time ago. You know how when you are talking to someone or reading a book or watching TV, an idea or a fragment of an idea will stick in your mind? After awhile you need to get them out. So bear with me as this is a conglomeration of those fragments. Now these are not new ideas. They are ordinary and familiar. The difference is that I am learning to look at them with fresh eyes.

Mother Teresa said, “We do not great things; we do only small things with great love.” And Helen Keller wrote “I long to accomplish a great and noble task but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.”

These two ideas are especially useful to me.

Several months ago I had an appointment with a neuro-psychologist. I was having problems with concentration and short term memory, and my doctors wanted to be sure that it wasn’t some kind of early onset dementia, as it ran in my family.

After four hours of testing and an MRI of my brain it was decided that it was probably due to a lack of sleep, some depression and chronic pain causing the lack of concentration.

In our discussion after the testing, the neuro-psychologist asked me what I liked to do. I told him that I enjoyed volunteering, politics, working on my property with my husband and spending time with our animals. I told him I didn’t work at my career any longer because of my health, and because of my health, I was winding down my volunteer responsibilities. And even the work around the house suffered because of chronic pain, and I was feeling guilty that I wasn’t doing enough. I felt I should be still working, I should be contributing more. And I used to travel to off-the-beaten path exotic places, a couple times a year. Planning the trips, looking forward to them and being there truly was a joy. I

felt I was running out of time to do the things I wanted to do, and perhaps I would never be able to now, because of my health issues.

He said, “Why do you HAVE to do anything?” I was speechless. I didn’t know how to answer. I said “we all need to do things.” He said, off course we do, but after we do what we absolutely have to do like pay the bills, wash the clothes, eat, sleep etc., why do we have to do anything? What he was getting at was my need to do BIG things ... to try and make a big impact ... and my feelings of guilt if I wasn’t ‘busy’ and contributing.

This has haunted me all my life... feeling a need to do everything asked of me. Feeling the need to do BIG projects, not only volunteer, but be the head of the whole shebang, even suggesting things that weren’t asked of me. I have made progress and have learned to say ‘no’ when I feel I have too much on my plate or if I just need time to myself. But even then, when I do take on a project, I still tend to over-do it. I recognize it really does take the joy out of what I am doing. Seems obvious right? It has taken me so long to realize this.

What I took from the quotes of Mother Theresa and Helen Keller and other great do-ers is that we all can’t do great things, but we all can do small things that can make a great difference. I belong to a small group here at First Unitarian as many of you do. At one of the groups last year we were talking about how to make life more meaningful, which to me meant finding the joy in life and giving joy where we can. One of the men in the group said that there was a small movie theatre in Winterset, his home town. This movie theatre had many financial problems and could barely keep the doors open. This fellow said he would purposely go to the movies every week to kind of help out. He knew the tickets he bought along with popcorn and soda pop was not enough to keep the theatre going, but he still did it. It made him feel good. He couldn’t afford to help out more. But he did it in a small way and it gave him a private joy. Also, every once in awhile when he had a little extra money, he would give the ticket-taker extra for another ticket, popcorn and pop for the next person who came along. He would never know this person or get a thank you ... it was a small deed, but very meaningful to him.

My husband David and I were amazed by this small act of kindness. We had a discussion all the way home of small things we could do and Do do that are meaningful and joyful in this way. It doesn’t take much to brighten someone’s day. It doesn’t have to be monetary. It could be being especially nice to a person who is having a bad day, like a grocery clerk. Things like that.

Sue Bender wrote in 'Every Day Sacred,' "Early every morning I go to a café near the Berkeley campus, Café Milano, to make my list for the day, write, and have a cappuccino...Martin, from Mexico, is there making the cappuccino. No matter how long the line, he never seems to rush. He has a quality I've read about in books but have rarely experienced—"a still point in the midst of activity." As he is about to hand over each drink, he stops, and with a gentle flourishing, makes a smiling face in the foam...That gesture is the opening ceremony of my day. Being greeted by a different smiling face each day has become a sacred ritual. Martin is shy, and in this situation I am also shy. We hardly talk, but his act of generosity blesses my day."

I have started to look at my world this way, finding the small things to start my day with joy. Asking how can I give joy in some small way? It seems to come natural to my husband David. Waking up each day fresh and new, letting go of the day before. But for me, it is something I have to work at, remind myself. Even Sponge Bob Squarepants knows this. He says at the beginning of each day, "This is going to be the best day ever."

I've learned a lot from our animals. We have so many animals that we have adopted that we are starting paper work to become a non-profit sanctuary. It is a lot of work keeping up after 6 goats, 4 sheep, 3 large pot bellied pigs, one go-to market- type pig that actually fell off a truck on the way to market, two dogs, seven cats, a crippled Mullucan cockatoo, a randy turkey, a raccoon, numerous ducks, geese, chickens, roosters, guinea hens, a miniature stallion, dozens of koi ... you name it, it lives at our house... with more to come. These animals don't know they've been saved. They don't know what they don't know. Most of them pretty much ignore David and I as we make sure they are well fed and housed... they take it all for granted. But they give us so much joy in return. They truly live in the moment. Every morning I let the chickens and roosters out of their coop, and they run out with such joy to meet the day to hunt for bugs, revel in their dust baths and just be chickens. Have you ever seen goats and sheep who've been locked up in the barn all winter run out to pasture on the first day of warm weather? I swear, they run and literally kick up their heels with joy. And our go-to-market pig, named Lucky Penny ... well all I can say is she sure is joyful as she eats her meal and treats, and to watch her in the mud pit ...it is a wonder to behold. I swear she is smiling. We can learn a lot from them, being in the moment and greeting the day with such enthusiasm and honesty.

In trying to find joy in the every day, I looked at my attitude about housework. I hate doing housework. I always have. I was brought up in a household where my mom kept a spotless house, even though she worked full time and had three kids. She didn't ask us to help much. She felt it was her DUTY. And her mother had a spotless house too. My sister's house is

spotless and so are my brother and sister-in-law's. I come from a long line of clean houses. To help me learn to find the joy while cleaning, I read a Zen Buddhist book called, "Sweeping Changes," which talks about being in the moment while sweeping or vacuuming ...by really paying attention to each task. Use sweeping and dusting as a meditation. I can see the value in this because our lives are mostly a string of mundane tasks with little surprises and events in-between...but I still hate housecleaning...Even though it feels so good when it is clean and orderly. I try to keep my eye on that prize. My husband, David, doesn't care if our house is the cleanest on the block. He says there are no rules about such things at our house...but I still feel guilty. My mother taught me 'well' ... it is my DUTY.

I am learning that part of finding the joy in life is letting go of the guilt. Learning to NOT feel guilty when I am NOT doing things. Why is "not doing" so hard? I do come by it honestly by coming from a Catholic upbringing. I am consciously trying to let go of guilt when I say "no" to someone or when I am relaxing or reading a book or watching a movie or just doing nothing but BEING. Just sitting and watching our animals...they are a hoot; watching and feeling nature, feeding my fish in the pond, listening to the trees and feeling the breeze ... all can be a joy. What has been ruining these moments has been my feelings of guilt. I even felt guilty a few times when I swimming ... I thought I should be working on this service instead.

I've been working on doing what I am doing and NOT worrying about what I am NOT doing! What a release.

Another tidbit of wisdom came from my psychologist, Mary. She said, "Diane, you are full of 'Shoulds'." I *should* be doing this, I *should* be doing that. And I tended to feel that David *should* do this or that too. At first I was a little taken aback. But after a while I realized it was exhausting. Where is the joy in carrying around a whole bunch of 'SHOULDs'? If I kept carrying them around in my head, I think most of life would be joy-less. Too many 'Shoulds' is just another word for 'expectations'. Everything and everybody could be a let down. With my head too full of 'shoulds' it was too full to absorb new things, to see the real joy in myself, my husband, my friends, my life...Which brings to mind another story rattling around my brain, the story of the "Overflowing Tea."

There are many versions of this story, but there is always a wise old Zen monk, living in a remote place, and an earnest student who has made a pilgrimage to see him-- high on a mountain ledge no doubt, seeking wisdom. The serious student,

his head filled with questions, is annoyed and becomes more and more frustrated when his teacher refuses to answer his questions.

“Pour me a cup of tea,” the monk eventually says, “and I will tell you when to stop.” The dutiful student starts pouring the tea—and pouring and pouring. The bowl fills and he is horrified, watching as the tea spills out of the cup and over everything. Exasperated, the student finds the courage to speak. “Can’t you see the cup is full? It can hold no more!”

“And so it is with you,” the wise teacher answers. “Your mind is full of too many things. Only when you are empty will there be room for more knowledge to come in.”

And so it is with me: I am learning to get rid of all those “shoulds” and “guilts” and to de-clutter my mind. Perhaps then I have more room to see and feel the joy of every day living. And yes, David and I are also working on de-cluttering our house of too many things...numerous collections, antiques, gadgets and widgets ... you name it... when is enough ENOUGH? Even our gardens are too big. At first, collecting objects and gardening was truly a joy. But too much takes the joy away and then it becomes a burden. Come to think of it, joy will get lost in too much of anything. David and I are learning what is the path from too much to “just enough.” And getting rid of some of those things to dust and keep orderly will make it easier to find the joy in housekeeping too ... a win-win all the way around.

A while back, David said he was talking to his daughter who graduated from high school this past year. She just started her first full-time job as a CNA. Her long-term goal is to become a registered nurse. David said, his daughter commented that she wanted to get everything going with school and an apartment, so she could “start her life.” That really stuck with me. I thought ‘didn’t she realize that she had already started her life a long time ago?’ I realize that a lot of us, tend to pin our happiness or joy on future outcomes: if I get this job or if I get this raise or once I get all my bills paid off or once I buy a house or a bigger house ... or when I get married ... when I get a divorce ... it goes on and on. Upon deeper thought, I discovered I was guilty of this too ... holding my breath until whatever ‘it is’ happens. Of course, what I may have waited for doesn’t start my life as I had expected ... and some times it is a disappointment because I had too many expectations. It all seems to get back to living in the moment. As Buddha said, “If you take care of each moment, you will take care of all time.” Of course we need to plan for our future to get the best outcome possible; but worrying about it

really wastes a lot of time. Worrying won't change the outcome...and pretty soon all those precious moments will have slipped away.

I know nobody lives forever. But I don't ordinarily include impermanence, a word that has such a cool distant ring to it, in my list of possibilities. However, about 9 years ago it was very present in my thinking. Some of you may know that I was diagnosed with HIV in 2000. I couldn't say, "No, I don't want it. Take it back, I prefer something else." It was shocking. After a long process of elimination, it was determined that I was infected at a clinic I went to for treatment in Kenya when I became ill on vacation in 1994. I'm not going to go into the details of my struggles and progress with this disease, but having a chronic, potentially fatal disease put a whole new spin on how to spend the rest of my life, how long or short it may be.

After a year or so of being in shock and deeply depressed I realized, no matter how I live my life from then on...whether staying at home and letting myself be ill and depressed, or fogging it over with drugs and alcohol as many HIV and AIDS victims have done ... or going on and living what is the rest of my life to the fullest ... no matter what I do, I will still have this disease. Acceptance is the key. I can't change my diagnosis. I can change my outlook and not be a victim. Two years after my diagnosis, I married my husband David, who by the way, is HIV negative.

It's easy to get off track when I'm feeling ill from the side effects of HIV or from the numerous medications I have to take. Or when I am in pain from fibromyalgia and arthritis, and, of course, I still get depressed at times. But I can honestly say now, even when I am down, when I am in the hospital, when I am on the couch recuperating or just sitting outside because that is all I can do at the moment, I am learning to find the joy in the down-times. It really is easier than feeling sorry for my self. By being forced to sit and observe everything and every one around me, has taught me a lot. In Sue Bender's Book "Every Day Sacred" she wrote, "A couple of years ago a friend of mine fell off a bike during vacation and hurt her knee. She and her husband were going on a hike in a national park and she could only walk very slowly. She discovered her slowed pace helped her look at the world as if through a microscope. As they walked along so slowly, she discovered a lizard was in the process of devouring a centipede. They spent ten minutes watching. She said, 'of course, I would have missed this if I hadn't hurt my knee and was forced to slow up.'"

Do we slow up and become aware of all the wonderful things around us only when we are forced to?

Most of us don't have the luxury of large chunks of time to do exactly what we want to do. The challenge sometimes is to find even ten minutes when the world stops, and for that moment, there is nothing else. How can we bring that quality to what time we have? I am learning that joy is a practice. Like anything else, the more we practice, the easier it becomes. Joy is everywhere. As bad as things can get in life ... with this economy, with the world as it is, with our own personal demons and challenges... as long as we are breathing, we can find joy within our world.

Please Stand As You Are Able and Turn to Hymn #326 Let All the Beauty We Have Known

Closing Words (Sara BanBreathach) "Begin today. Declare out loud to the Universe that you are willing to let go of struggle and eager to learn through joy."

Leader: I extinguish the symbolic flame of this Gathering. May we carry its light into the world.

People: *Let us go from this place, open to life, Expecting to love, and prepared to serve.*

***Closing in Song** *Hymn of Valor (inside back cover of Hymnal).*

This Service is Over.

Go in Peace.

Go in Joy.