

**Order of Service "Prophetic Love of Country"**

Sunday, July 4, 2010

10:00 AM

Welcome and Announcements: Board Host

Prelude

Chalice Lighting

Opening Words: "We Must Be Saved"

from Reinhold Niebuhr

Opening Song: #188 "Come, Come, Whoever You Are"

Reading: from *Patriots, Stand Up!* By Russell W. Peterson

Celebrating with Music

Sermon: Prophetic Love of Country

Sung Response: "This Land Is Your Land,

This Land Is My Land" by Woodie Guthrie

Spoken Response

Candles of Joy and Sorrow/Offering

Prayer and Meditation

Closing Song: #155 "Circle Round for Freedom"

Closing Words

Closing Song: #155

Celebrants: Leslie Chartier and the Rev. Dr. Gretchen Woods

Musical Leader: Mina Carson



**Chalice Lighting:** On this day when freedom was proclaimed by the founders of this country we love, we kindle a flame to counter the darkness that abides within our souls when we consider so much that has been done in our name. May this flame provide vision to penetrate the mystification declared by our leaders, warmth to overcome the paralysis within our bodies, and love that recognizes that freedom must be accompanied by justice and love in equal measure.

**Opening Words:** "We Must Be Saved"

by Reinhold Niebuhr

Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime;

Therefore, we are saved by hope.

Nothing true and beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history;

Therefore we are saved by faith.

Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love.

No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as from our own;

Therefore, we are saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.

**Reading:** from *Patriots, Stand Up!*

by Russell W. Peterson

A Call to Action

Fellow Patriots, Stand Up!

Stand up to honor the great nation we have inherited and the many generations who have built it.

Stand up for our American Way of Life with its freedoms, justice under law, enviable standard of living and opportunity to choose our own leaders.

Stand up for the heroes who have led America, fought for her, died for her, conquered her enemies from within and without - colonization, slavery, Fascism and Communism - and won the respect and admiration of the peoples of the world.

Stand up for the basic foundations of our way of life - the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution with its Bill of Rights and the Charter of the United Nations.

**Sermon:** "Prophetic Love of Country"

I sometimes wonder if the Fourth of July has not become even harder for Unitarian Universalists than Easter. In the case of the Fourth, we may find ourselves mindlessly engaging in the celebrations without thought for their implications: justifying colonization, mongering war, blowing things up with great abandon, defiling our beloved planet. Or we may find ourselves wallowing in despair for lost virtues: reason, freedom, and acceptance that once were foundational for this country as well as our own religious perspective.

We need to remember that the values upon which this nation was based are indeed those of the Unitarians and Universalists of that era. A disproportionate number of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were Unitarian or Universalist.

We Unitarian Universalists, given our critical minds, live with the reality that we can not say, "My country, right or wrong." We seem to be more comfortable with the notion, "My country, what can I do to help it live up to the promise of the values upon which it was founded?" It is that perspective from which I offer these few reflections on "Independence Day."

When I was a child, I hated fireworks. I was deeply afraid of the noise, the flashes of light, and the sense of danger that came with them. I remember, at three years old, having to be taken by my paternal grand father to the car because I had buried myself under a blanket to avoid the experience of fireworks. I was terrified.

Paradoxically, I loved to hear - and later play - the patriotic marches that instilled in me a deep sense of love and hope for this country. My heart would soar with the music, which is exactly why the composers wrote it. I loved - and still do - the songs that extolled the beauty of the earth upon which we dwell. And I most certainly was inspired by the values and virtues extolled in the patriotic songs: freedom, justice, love for one another. In fact, for me, it is those values toward which I continue to strive, even as I recognize how often I fall short.

So, how can I speak of "Prophetic Love of Country?" I might benefit from considering prophecy, love, and country, how we understand those notions, and how they relate to religion.

To begin, Prophecy is often misunderstood. Too often we think of prophecy as predicting a future that may or not come into being. We UUs are not particularly comfortable with the idea that a person could foresee what will happen. Such gifts are considered "fey," "oogly-boogly," "a bit queer," or irrational. They are certainly conceived as non-rational. The Jews of Hebrew scripture specifically forbade people to engage in rituals that might provide such insight. This was playing G-d.

In actuality, prophecy has consistently been a process of looking at things as they are and voicing the possibilities toward which they point. Every person who takes seriously global climate change and predicts that the oceans will subsume large tracts of land in the next hundred years are prophesying. That the Marshall Islands or Marianas will disappear in the next century is prophecy.

Prophecy, first of all, speaks to the present. It acknowledges the truths of the world in which we live. When sociologists tell us we are the most isolated people in the world, despite our technological networks, they are prophesying. The sense of fragmentation, isolation, fear, and longing for connection that some prophets observe leads them to speak to the possibilities for disaster - or opportunity - that may be plucked from those observations.

Our longing for and lack of connection, of which the Rev. Peter Morales preached in his sermon at the UU General Assembly last Sunday in Minneapolis, MN, could be a source of dissolution for our country. It could also become an impetus for creating far better community through asserting and enacting visions of a better life for all. The prophetic call offers a larger vision than the cataclysmic and provides specifics about how we might possibly change the world to fit our values and our dreams.

So, if we bring love to prophecy, if we forge our vision on the fires of values that provide a deeper sense of community, a treasuring of the earth, a love that encompasses the stranger as well as the friend, our prophecy has immediacy for action beyond despair.

But first, we must ask, what is our country? Well, the disaster that is Deepwater Horizon, the oil well that is spewing toxic spumes in the Gulf of Mexico, shows us that there are no borders. If the photo of the earth taken by the first astronauts did not cement the awareness that our country is our world, certainly the recognition that there are no walls between the oceans, no boundaries to stop the poison, comes from this tragedy.

Beyond this awareness, the consciousness that this country came to existence through colonization of a vast piece of land already inhabited by many varied peoples must also prick our consciences on this day. Sarah Vowell's book, *The Wordy Shipmates*, provides us with a history of the first heinous treatment of the "Indians," of Massachusetts by the English settlers. I highly recommend this alternative history which is not only seeringly accurate, but also pithily humorous in its articulation. Laughing makes the medicine more effective.

But we cannot be prophetic only with Jeremiads. We must also provide visions of possibility and hope, or we simply scold those we wish to move beyond paralysis and despair. Here I commend the work of David C. Korten: *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community* and Charles Eisenstein: *The Ascent of Humanity*.

Korten refuses to believe that the only possibility we face is disaster for the whole of humanity. He writes:

We are getting a wake-up call we cannot ignore. How we respond will determine whether Creation's gift of reflective consciousness was well conceived or overly reckless. To pass the test before us, we humans must demonstrate the intelligence and the moral maturity to liberate ourselves from the addictions of Empire and to use our gifts wisely in the service of the whole.

Rather than give in to despair in this often frightening time, let us rejoice in the privilege of being alive at a moment of creative opportunity unprecedented in the human experience. Peace and justice for all and a sustainable relationship with the planet are within our reach. If we fail to embrace the opportunity, Empire's pessimistic assumption that we are an inherently destructive species becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and we continue on the path of the Great Unraveling. If we pass the test, we move on to the exploration and realization of untold possibilities. (Korten, *The Great Turning*, p. 359.)

Korten's is a prophetic voice speaking to us with love. And he speaks of developing a community that is based, not on belief that "the one who dies with the most toys wins," but that we win when we recognize that our lives are part of "the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part." This is a religious assertion, reminding us that we are all truly connected within a Creation that is so much more than just our short lives.

Eisenstein echoes that vision as well when he writes:

By integrating the sad truth of what we have made of life and the world, the sad truth of our millennia-long reduction of reality into label and number, money and property, we regain a vision of what we can be, should be, and actually are; we reclaim our birthright as whole creative beings, in love with life and life in love with us.

. . . We must remember the playful origins of separation, this exploratory game we lost ourselves in and from which we are now awakening. Our quest, our journey to the farthest reaches of separation, is now nearly complete. However hard the birthing pains, a light beckons us, a Reunion with that place of enchantment, understanding, and wholeness. Let that light sustain us through the coming darkness. (Eisenstein, *The Ascent of Humanity*. P. 565.)

Let us begin to express our prophetic love of country by acknowledging the empire we have allowed to be created in our name and the rapacious greed that has characterized it for the past forty years. Then we may co-create concrete actions to change that. We can begin by making of this religious community a "pocket of peace" that provides for all its people a place in which to return to our values, to "the home of our souls" that nourishes and holds us home. That is truly prophetic love of country, whatever the country, which is all inextricably linked with the whole world.

So Be It! Blessed Be!

