

ALL SOULS UNITARIAN CHURCH

Themes 2010-2011 God

Opening Reading/ Chalice Lighting

To love God is to follow the mystery, to be led by its showing and withdrawing. — John S. Dunne in *The Music of Time*

Getting to know One Another: Please take time at this point to introduce yourselves. (Suggest that everyone try to remember to wear a nametag so that you can learn everyone's names)

Check-In How goes thy spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? 2-3 sentences

Business (Please highlight the following with your group if events have not passed) Talk about your service project possibilities.

Revisit the Covenant

(Please go over the culture of a branches group highlighting: space inbetween speakers, popcorn style sharing, taking care of your own needs, speaking from I..no crosstalk, etc)

Are there things that need to be addressed? Starting and ending time, social opportunities before after meeting or at another date?, your service project inside and outside the church)

Claim time for Deeper Listening Deeper listening is a time at the end of our meeting where you can be listened to uninterrupted for what is essentially an extended check in if something is going on in your life that you would like to share. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes at this time. Is there anyone who would like to claim time for deeper listening?

Centering Take a moment to breathe, feel your feet on the floor and your body in the chair. After a few minutes of breathing, find your heartbeat (either by listening to your ear or placing your fingers on your pulse). See if you can hold the attention of your heartbeat and listen to the sounds in the

room. (1-2 minutes) Our goal would be to bring this sense of calm and way of listening to the readings and to one another, keeping our attention toggling between self and what you are listening to.

Readings (*Read through readings and questions twice, one time per facilitator, with reflection space in between* followed by Quaker Style sharing. Try to stay in I statements and personal stories and not shift into third person and facts. Try to leave space between speakers.)

An Excerpt from Desert Quartet by Terry Tempest Williams

"Earth. Rock. Desert. I am walking barefoot on sandstone, flesh responding to flesh. It is hot, so hot the rock threatens to burn through the calloused soles of my feet. I must quicken my pace, paying attention to where I step.

"For as far as I can see, the canyon country of southern Utah extends in all directions. No compass can orient me here, only a pledge to love and walk the terrifying distances before me. What I fear and desire most in this world is passion. I fear it because it promises to be spontaneous, out of my control, unnamed, beyond my reasonable self. I desire it because passion has color, like the landscape before me. It is not pale. It is not neutral. It reveals the backside of the heart.

"I climb the slickrock on all fours, my hands and feet throbbing with the heat. It feels good to sweat, to be engaged, to inhabit my animal body.

"My destination is Druid Arch I have no map, only cairns, human-made pile of stones, to guide me, hand-stacked piles of rocks that say, 'Trust me, turn here, I know the way —'

"Many resist cairns in the desert, kick them down, believing each traveler should walk on their own authority. It is also true, some cairns have been designed to fool people, to trick them off the trail so they will become lost forever, a quick lesson in self-reliance, to never believe in the stories of others. But I believe our desire to share is more potent and trustworthy than our desire to be alone. And so I do not anticipate these markers will lie. To walk in this country is always an act of faith.

"The cairns I have followed have not secured my own path to intimacy as much as they have given me the courage to proceed — one foot in front of the other in a landscape mysterious, unpredictable, and vast. Nobody really knows the way, that is the myth of convention.

"Cedar Mesa formations of sandstone envelop me. These pastel cliffs could convince you that you are a hostage with no way out. But the various shales, softer in character, create the slopes and benches to climb out of one canyon into the heart of another.

"Once I enter the Joint Trail, it is as though I am walking through the inside of an animal. It is dark, cool, and narrow with sheer sandstone walls on either side of me. I look up, a slit of sky above. Light is deceptive here. The palms of my hands search for a pulse in the rocks. I continue walking. In some places my hips can barely fit though. I turn sideways, my chest and back in a vise of geologic time. I stop. The silence that lives in these sacred hallways presses against me. I relax. I surrender. I close my eyes. The arousal of my breath rises in me like music, like love, as the possessive muscles between my legs tighten and release. I come to the rock in a moment of stillness, giving and receiving, where there is no partition between my body and the body of Earth."

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An Excerpt from *The Restless Heart: Finding Our Spiritual Home* by Ronald Rolheiser

As the Hebrew scriptures develop, so, too, does this motif of the face of God. It begins, at a certain point, to refer not just to the veil of faith that separates us from God, but also to the fact that, as persons, we live our lives within a certain riddle, behind a veil that separates us partially from all that is real and keeps us lonely. Eventually, the Hebrew scriptures begin to express all the longings within the human heart with this plea: 'Lord, show us your face!' In effect, they are really saying, 'Lord remove the riddle, the veil, the mirror of unreality, show us yourself and each other! Take our loneliness away.' . . .

"Jesus, in his most famous sermon ever, answers that question by saying, 'Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.' These words by Jesus must be understood with some background in mind. His Jewish listeners would have made the connection — that when we cut through the riddle of life, we pierce the mist of loneliness and encounter God and others face to face, to the extent that we attain purity of heart. The whole Christian life (that which has classically been called 'the spiritual life' and which today we generally call 'spirituality') is nothing other than this, an attempt to strip aside the veils and mirrors, riddles and walls, barriers and shadows, fears

and fantasies, facades and mists, and selfishness and unreality that separate us from God and each other.

"The Christian life is an attempt to pierce the mist of unreality and encounter God and others face to face. To the extent that this happens in our lives, we enter the kingdom of God and community of life, which will wipe away all our tears and take our loneliness fully away. To the extent that this happens in our lives, we begin to attain already the heaven that is promised to us."

Questions

1. Do you remember the first time you felt the presence of something larger than yourself?
What were the circumstances? Were their people around or were you alone? Share your story.
2. Let's imagine God is only revealed in a way you can best experience... for you would God be revealed as a feeling? a person? An experience? A contradiction? A paradox?
3. How do you explain God to children?
4. Have you ever experienced something you would call looking into the eyes or the face of God? What were the circumstances?
5. When do you feel closest to God? When do you feel the most distant from God? If you are uncomfortable with God language, try on: when do you feel most connected or disconnected?
6. What has helped you translate other people's images of God to your own?

Deeper Listening If time is claimed by an individual, group listens to speaker uninterrupted for that designated time. It is best to have a timer of sorts so that facilitator can listen fully as well.

Check Out

One sentence about where you are now that we have been together for the past hour and a half. (How did you show up? Would you share more or less? Would you do anything differently? Focus your likes and dislikes on your own behavior) Please state your name again for the group so that we might have yet another opportunity to put faces to names.

Closing reading/Chalice Extinguishing

It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity. — Albert Einstein quoted in *Holy Clues* by Stephen Kendrick