

Thoreau Woods UU Church – Worship Service
Everything is Holy Now
July 1, 2012

Prelude

James Johnson

Chalice Lighting

Pam Johnson

We light this candle
For the light of truth and reason
For the warmth of love and friendship
For the flame of strength and action
And for the vision of tolerance and justice.

Please join me standing as you are able singing our opening hymn #188 Come, Come, Whoever You Are

Announcements

Pam Johnson

Visitors, Welcome! We are happy to have you here. If you would like, please sign our guest book on the table in the entryway and give your address or email if you want to receive our newsletter. If you would like to become a member, we have an application form also on the table you can fill out and turn in when you are ready. Read announcements from OOS.

Our special collection this month is for Community Praise Ministry , which is coordinating school supply drive for HISD. Please plan to join us for lunch today at

I want to recognize today is Anne True's first day as president. She will need our support and patience as she bravely takes on this new role. Do you want to say anything Anne?

Are there any other announcements from the floor?

Opening Words #417

Pam Johnson

I picked the opening and closing readings before noticing I had picked both of the same ones. I did change the closing but the opening words were just right for today.

For the beauty of the earth,
This spinning blue green ball, yes!

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Gaia, mother of everything
We walk gently across your back
To come together again
In this place
To remember how we can live
To remember who we are
To create how we will be.
Gaia, our home,
The lap in which we live-
Welcome us.
Barbara J. Pescan (Unitarian)

Everything is Holy Now by Peter Mayer **James Johnson**

Joys and Concerns

Pam Johnson

As an expression of our connectedness and community, you are invited to come forward and share a joy, sorrow or concern as you light a candle. Or you may choose to light a candle without comment. Visitors, you are also encouraged to participate. Please form a line to my left.

(Pause)

I will light one final candle for all those joys and concerns left unsaid.

Offertory

Beth Williamson

Story for all Ages – The People Who Hugged the Trees

Pam Johnson

#118 This Little Light of Mine **James Johnson/Congregation**

Responsive Reading #552

Pam Johnson

My Help is in the Mountain

Introduction of Speaker

James Johnson

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Talk: Everything is Holy Now

Pam Johnson

My husband James & I were first exposed to Peter Mayer's songs when we went to see Rev. Michael Dowd's presentation "Thank God for Evolution" that the church sponsored at the Walker Education Center. He and his wife, Connie Barlow, a scientist, travel the country promoting what they call "evolutionary spirituality," and "the Universe story" as a theology they believe all religions could share.

We heard some of Peter's songs here at church and listened to his CD's, and then we went to see Peter perform at Millbend Coffeehouse last year. Peter belongs to a Unitarian Universalist church in Minnesota, and performs at UU churches and coffeehouses all over the country. When we heard he was presenting workshops at the SWUUC Midwinter Conference, we jumped at the chance to go. The following is from his website:

Peter Mayer writes songs for a small planet—songs about interconnectedness and the human journey; about the beauty and the mystery of the world. Whimsical, humorous, and profound, his music breaks the boundaries of "folk", and transcends to a realm beyond the everyday love song, to a place of wonder at the very fact of life itself.

Peter began playing the guitar and writing songs when he was in high school. He studied Theology and music in college, and then spent two years in seminary. After deciding that the priesthood wasn't for him, he took a part-time job as a church music director for 8 years, while performing at clubs and colleges, and writing and recording his music. In 1995, he quit his job and started touring full-time. Since then, Peter has gradually gained a dedicated, word-of-mouth following, playing shows from Minnesota to Texas, New England to California. He has nine CDs to his credit, and has sold over 70 thousand of them independently.

Peter's songs speak to me on a spiritual level. He puts into words many of my spiritual thoughts I am unable to articulate, partly

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because they are not that clear to me, and because they are constantly evolving. I am lucky to have been raised UU, and spared a lot of angst people go through denouncing their childhood religion. I was often humored by what I call “silly little rules” of religion where some can’t dance, have musical instruments, drink alcohol, play cards, etc. I like to think I would have found UU on my own. I am very comfortable being UU and not having to commit to any certain creed or doctrine. I mostly identify as an agnostic, believing that the truth cannot be known. I like the excerpt from the first chapter of the Tao Te Ching that says:

*The "Tao" is too great to be described by the name "Tao".
If it could be named so simply, it would not be the eternal Tao.
Heaven and Earth began from the nameless,
but the multitudes of things around us were created by names.
We desire to understand the world by giving names to the
things we see,
but these things are only the effects of something subtle.
When we see beyond the desire to use names,
we can sense the nameless cause of these effects.
The cause and the effects are aspects of the same, one thing.
They are both mysterious and profound.
At their most mysterious and profound point lies the "Gate of
the Great Truth".*

It’s a lot easier to identify what I don’t believe, but I won’t go into those today. I’d like to say as an agnostic I’m open to being wrong on what I don’t believe but often that is not the case. Sometimes I have used my difficulty of naming or committing to my belief system as a shield to avoid examining my own spiritual beliefs. When I took “Building Your Own Theology” course at my UU church in my twenties, we studied different religions and I liked certain parts of most religions but couldn’t wholeheartedly support just one.

A few years ago I took a quiz about spiritual beliefs on beliefnet.com, which said I agreed with UU 100% UU, Secular Humanist 90%, Liberal Quaker 85%, and New Age 70%.

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I firmly believe in all seven of our UU principles and believe that going into social work was a spiritual calling stemming from these beliefs. I also take an eclectic counseling approach, studying and practicing different theories but not committing to any single one. I will share our UU principles.

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

I often think of myself as a humanist. I believe how to behave and treat people is more important than why or how the universe is as it is. I didn't even know what Liberal Quakers were, but our good friend Rich Heiland helped me learn more about it.

"The Religious Society of Friends is an alternative Christianity which emphasizes the personal experience of God in one's life. They affirm the equality of all people before God regardless of race, station in life, or sex and this belief leads them into a range of social concerns. Being "Children of the Light" they find recourse to violence intolerable. Friends believe that God's revelation is still continuing, that God is not absent or unknowable but that we can find God ourselves. It is the search for a closer relationship with God. Religious knowledge, like the appreciation of beauty, is not attained by a logical process of thought but by experience and feeling. Quakers maintain that the teaching of Jesus is a practical method for the guidance of the world today, that religion is concerned with the whole of life, and that, beyond a certain point, definition becomes a limitation."

The part of my New Age beliefs and what attracts me to Peter Mayer's songs is pantheism. I love the pantheism in Native American and Pagan spirituality. I was briefly involved with CUUPs in the 90s. I enjoyed the rituals and they connected the earth and our fellow creatures in a meaningful way. But the goddesses kept getting in my

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way. The rational part of my humanism just wouldn't allow me personally to translate the goddesses into metaphors of nature.

I have nicknamed my eclectic belief system The Religion of Pam.

Unitarian means "One God" and denounces the Trinity. If there is a God, I do not think of God as Father or Son or any gender or person, but as Holy Spirit, the spiritual glue that holds the universe together. I think of this Spirit everywhere, with no beginning or end. This could be called pantheism, but is also similar to the Omnipresence of God. When I was told God was everywhere as a child I asked "Does that mean we pee on God?" I was often getting in trouble for my blasphemous questions, but at least not at home.

When I was researching for this talk, I came upon a sermon given by Richard Hervey at UU Church, Corvallis, Oregon, February 20, 2000 entitled UU Humanists and Pagans; Can This Marriage be Saved? Yes! And the Children Will be Scientific Pantheists.

He states "Almost all religions have their Creation Story – Scientific Pantheism does too. The only thing remarkable about ours is that it is constantly being discussed, argued about and changed.

The definition of pantheism combines pan and theos to mean, "All is god". According to the American Heritage dictionary "pantheism is defined as "the doctrine identifying the Deity with the various forces and workings of nature". Walter Mandell, via the Scientific Pantheist E-mail digest defines it as - "Pantheism is a religious philosophy that holds that there is no supernatural God or Gods; but rather that the universe, as a whole, possesses attributes traditionally attributed to divinity, such as - power, magnificence, grandeur, and omnipresence. Pantheists regard the universe itself as sacred. It is all that IS, WAS and EVER WILL BE. Pantheists seek to feel, know, and celebrate its sacredness - through love and other profound human experiences, through deep contact with the natural world, through the arts and sciences, and through ethical action."

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Unitarian and Universalist beliefs have evolved throughout the years. They started out as Enlightened Christians, as an outgrowth of rational examination of Protestant doctrine. Soon thereafter transcendentalism replaced Enlightened Christianity as the dominant Unitarian belief. Then in the 1920's and 30's humanism moved into Unitarianism and Universalism.

"At the height of the humanist dominance in the 60's, UU activism in civil rights and antiwar movements had imbued members with a sense of shared identity and purpose. However, in the 70's, UU's joined Liberal Protestants in focusing on personal growth and self development, and more recently an increase in new age paganism and pantheism.

So why will the children of UU Pagans and Humanists be Scientific Pantheists? Because it honors the best of both traditions. Ethical living, reverence for humanity and our fellow living beings and more—reverence that extends beyond to the natural world to the universe. The use of reason, the willingness to revisit our beliefs when new information becomes available - and a willingness to celebrate all this with our hearts, our feet, our voices and our imaginations.

Carl Sagan once said that a religion that stressed the magnificence of the universe as revealed by modern science, might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly touched by conventional faiths. Sooner or later, such a religion will emerge.

In a sermon entitled Theism, Deism, Pantheism, Non-theism – What Does God Mean? -- 2009, The Rev. Suzelle Lynch, She states "god in you and god in me and god in the rock and god in the tree..." And there's also panentheism, her personal favorite, which says god is all of nature and the universe, but is also somehow "something more" than that.

I also found a sermon entitled Using Nature and the Universe as a Spiritual Path by Dr Paul Harrison.

He explains that back in 1917 a historian of religions called Rudolf Otto published a classic work called "The Idea of the Holy." He

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*compared religions east and west to try to sum up what it takes for something to be considered “holy” or “sacred” or numinous. Otto summed the qualities needed in one phrase:
An awesome yet fascinating mystery.*

There are three aspects here, all of them related to the way humans respond:

- The first and the heart of it is Mystery - something that is greater than human comprehension.*
- The second is a sense of awesome overwhelming Power - the power to create and to sustain, but also the power to destroy.*
- Finally there is a sense of Beauty, so breath taking that you have no choice but to love it.*

The place where humans first felt those three feelings was in the midst of nature, and looking up at the galaxy we call home, the Milky Way. I find that fully restoring those feelings to the natural universe can create a completely satisfying and fulfilling alternative to belief in a god or gods. This alternative approach to spirituality goes by many names. Probably the most common today is Pantheist, which refers to someone whose only “god” is the natural universe. God in quotation marks - something you deeply revere. But there are many people with this same approach, maybe even some of you here, who call themselves humanists, atheists, naturalists or pagans. The name is just a label: what matters is the shared acceptance that Nature is all there is, we are part of Nature, and Nature is the ultimate focus of our feelings of reverence, awe and wonder.

When I was a child I thought everywhere looks about the same and that I learned the names of all the countries and all the animals in school. As I got older, I learned that was wrong. That is one of the reasons I love to travel, to see the beauty in the world, the unique geography, flora, fauna, wildlife, culture, of each person and place. I often feel most spiritual looking at something I haven't seen before, slightly changing my world view.

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Even though I revel in the differences, it strikes me that people are more the same than different. All over the world people gather together to talk, laugh, love, eat, and build sand castles on the beach.

Dr. Harrison states, “We are all part of it, each one of us in this room, all humans, all living things on the planet, all planets and all stars: we are all in it together. The key lies in feeling that connection more deeply, with humans, animals, plants, rocks, rivers and the sky at night, and deepening that connection in every way we can. It can lead to a life that’s lived and felt and enjoyed more intensely. It is an invitation to true mindfulness of everything we do, both in human contexts and in nature, similar to parts of Zen Buddhism. It means living responsibly not just in how we act with other humans, but how we interact with nature: what we consume, what we waste, and how we dispose of it. And it means doing that not just as individuals, but in our families and social groups.”

We are all live in the same Blue Boat. Namaste.

Discussion

Pam Johnson/Congregation

Closing Hymn Special Music: Blue Boat Home

Closing Words #681

Pam Johnson

Deep peace of the running wave to you.
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the infinite peace to you.
Adapted from Gaelic runes

Extinguish the chalice

Pam Johnson

Postlude- James Johnson