

Thoreau Woods UU Church – Worship Service
Guest at Your Table
November 28, 2010

Prelude

Chalice Lighting

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.

Opening Hymn

Please join me standing as you are able in our opening hymn No. 1010 “We Give Thanks”

Announcements

John Pepper

Visitors, Welcome! We are happy to have you here.

(Pause)

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, please speak to any member after the service about signing our membership book.

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I will be back next week and my service is titled “The First Christmas.” I’ve taken the title from the book by the same name written by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan.

Next week we will also have a business meeting after the service so please plan to stick around for the meeting and the vote on the chairs. That will be followed by a potluck lunch.

Our special collection this month is for the Senior Center of Walker County. Their mission is to improve the quality of life for Walker County seniors. Please make all checks out to the Senior Center of Walker County.

This week we will be eating at Margarita’s after the service. I hope you can join us.

Are there any other announcements from the floor?

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Opening Word No. 418

John Pepper

Come into the circle of love and justice.

Come into the community of mercy, holiness, and health.

Come and you shall know peace and joy.

Adapted from Israel Zangwill

Hymn

John Pepper

Please join me standing as you are able singing hymn No. 123

“Spirit of Life”

Joys and Concerns

John Pepper

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.

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Offertory Statement

Anne True

Offertory Music

Natasha Satterfield

Story for All Ages – *Blessing the Welcome Table* by Rev. Laurie Buschbaum (adapted)

1. Why do we set the table?

We have a table here because we believe in community. We are fed in relationship, giving and receiving, and the table is our symbol. When you gather at a table for a meal – in your own house for dinner, here at church for a potluck supper, or even in your classroom for a snack – it is a sacred time, a moment to give thanks for the food and the earth, for the workers who grew the food and prepared it for you, and for everyone you love.

2. Who do we have a cloth on the table?

We have a cloth on the table because each life is woven with every other life, just like threads in cloth. A community or family is made of many separate strings, but together we are a beautiful, strong fabric.

3. Who do we have candles on the table?

We have candles on the table because we believe in light: the light of faith, hope, and love. The candles are like our chalice in church: they guide our search for truth. Candles are a welcome sign for strangers; they are signs of warmth and friendship.

4. Why do we have bread and wine on the table and why do we have vegetables and fruit?

These are the gifts of the earth. They speak to the power of growing things, a power that is here for us always. When we see them on a table, we remember that food does not just come from a store or a restaurant or a box or a can. Our food is a gift from the earth, from the ground. These things are part of us, and we are part of them.

5. Why do we have flowers on the table?

We have flowers on the table to remind us to see the mystery and beauty all around us. Flowers are signs of grace and good things springing up in our lives. We need food to live, but we also need beauty. Everyone needs “bread and roses.” A table is a celebration!

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6. Why do we have an empty box on the table?

This empty box reminds us to welcome unseen guests at our table, brothers and sisters whom we may not know but who share this planet with us. The empty box reminds us to give from our fullness to those who are in need, so that everyone can live in justice and peace.

Let's give a box to everyone!

(give out the boxes)

Thanks for helping me set the table!

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Readings

From the Gospel of Mark

"One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, 'What commandment is the foremost of all?'

Jesus answered, 'The foremost is, hear, o Israel! The Lord our God is One Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.'

From the Prophet Mohammed

What actions are most excellent? To gladden the heart of a human being. To feed the hungry. To help the afflicted. To lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful. To remove the wrongs of the injured. That person is the most beloved of god.

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From William Henry Channing (Unitarian)

To live content with small means, to seek elegance rather than luxury, and refinement rather than fashion, to be worthy, not respectable, and wealthy, not rich, to study hard, think quietly, talk gently, act frankly, to listen to stars and birds, to babes and sages, with open heart, to bear all cheerfully, do all bravely, await occasions, hurry never, in a word, to let the spiritual, unbidden and unconscious, grow up through the common, this is to be my symphony.

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Prayer

John Pepper

The following is an Iroquois Prayer.

Please join me now in a time of prayer and reflection. Center yourselves in whatever way is comfortable for you.

We return thanks to our mother, the earth, which sustains us.

We return thanks to the rivers and streams, which supply us with water.

We return thanks to all herbs, which furnish medicines for the cure to our diseases.

We return thanks to the corn, and to her sisters, the beans and squashes, which give us life.

We return thanks to the bushes and trees, which provide us with fruit.

We return thanks to the wind, which, moving in the air, has banished diseases.

We return thanks to the moon and stars, which have given to us their light when the sun was gone.

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We return thanks to the sun, that he has looked upon the earth with a beneficent eye.

Lastly, we return thanks to the Great spirit, in whom is embodied all goodness, and who directs all things for the good of his children.

Sermon – *Guest at Your Table*

Out of sight and out of mind. That is often the solution to the world's problems. If we don't know about them, the problems don't exist.

But sadly out of our sight and out of our mind doesn't mean the problems – the hunger, the pain, the fear don't exist. They do, but as the other saying goes, seeing is believing.

When I was in college I worked for a short while as a clerk in a hospital. My job was paperwork, not patient work. For several weeks I worked on the same floor but mostly never saw the patients. I answered their intercom calls and told nurses about their specific needs and requests, but I didn't actually see anyone or physically help any of them.

One of the patients was a young boy just a few years younger than me who had had some sort of surgery where a pin was inserted in his spine. During his recovery he was immobile for weeks. I talked with him daily but the gravity of the situation near sunk in. One day he called needing something even I could handle and no one was around so I took it to him.

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Seeing this teenager, completely immobile really affected me. He was no longer just a voice. He was a living, breathing, human being. One who wasn't much different than me except for the fact that I could go and come as I please and he was completely bedridden. He was real and if this could happen to him I knew in theory it could happen to me or anyone.

He was no longer out of sight and out of mind. He was front and center in my mind and I felt great compassion for him. But it took seeing him and really meeting him for all of this to sink in. I was compassionate before about his situation, but seeing and meeting him made a big difference and obviously I've never forgotten him.

Sometimes when we know the people we have an opportunity to help, then we're a little more likely to actually help.

The UUSC helps people all over the world and they provide this help and assistance with our funding. The Guest at Your Table program is the UUSC's attempt to make the people they help known to each of us. They send out a nice little brochure and we'll hand it out. You can read about each person and the wonderful and inventive ways the UUSC has partnered with them to improve their lives.

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The UUSC also provides us with this nice little box with their pictures on it as another reminder of these same people.

Sometimes this works, sometimes it doesn't. Today I'm going to try something different. First Marcus is going to tell you a little about each of the countries our guests come from and then you'll get to meet and listen to our guests first hand.

Since we couldn't invite them here today from their distant countries, we'll have actors play the parts of our guests. So when your friends get up to assume a role as a guest, please use your imagination to see the person they represent, because the people they are speaking for are living, breathing, human beings, living somewhere on this planet this very minute.

We can't really see them, we can't really know them, but their pains, hungers, frustrations, and very difficult life situations are real nonetheless.

Marcus!

(Pause)

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Our first guest is Opoka Kenneth.

(Alex Norman)

Hello! Thank you for bringing me here to your country for this wonderful visit. My name is Opoka Kenneth but you can call me OK for short. I am only 19 and before my trip here to your country, I had never been out of my home country of Uganda.

On behalf of my wife and my two kids we thank you for all of your hospitality. I really enjoyed the Houston Dynamo's game. Soccer is a big sport in my country. My wife enjoyed the shopping trip. And thanks for babysitting our two young children. They have also had a good time.

Our lives have been hard and you have helped make them better through your support of the UUSC. My country has been at war since before I was born and I was actually born in a relocation camp. With your support I was able to return to my home village for the first time in my life.

Before I returned home I worried about what I would do when I got there. Once again with your support you helped us organize when we returned and we built and repaired homes.

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You also helped us buy several ox and plows which are now shared among several families.

I used the oxen in my own fields and I now grow sesame seeds, cassava and sunflowers. I recently sold a crop at the local market and for the first time in my life, I haven't had to totally rely on the aid given by others like you.

Thanks for giving me back my life and providing hope for my entire family. Thank you for your generous support.

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Our next guest is a young woman and her name is Maral.

(Amber Faust)

Thank you for inviting me into your home and your beautiful church. And thank you for allowing me to speak here today. In my home country of Afghanistan women are not always allowed to speak in public, even though the constitution says women and children have rights.

I have been amazed by the freedoms you have here in the USA. While on my tour of your great university Sam Houston, everywhere I went the women were in classes side by side with the men. It was a wonderful sight to see and I hope during my life I will see the same thing in my own country.

In my country few women or girls get to go to school because they don't know they even have the right to attend school. Because of our traditions, when many women and girls go out they have to wear a burqa and they must be accompanied by a male relative, usually a brother or a father. This makes it difficult to get an education and because of these problems only 1 out of 8 women in Afghanistan can read.

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I was lucky. My family was supportive and they allowed me to go to school. When I decided to become a teacher they even supported me with that. After I graduated from school I became a teacher in 2006. The last four years have been the most exciting of my life.

I am a strong believer in equality. I believe women are also creatures of God, born to have rights and live free like men, and no one has the right to take their freedom from them.

With your support through the UUSC, I was able to participate in the Human Rights Program you helped to create and take the training you offered. Along with many other teachers we learned some exciting and new ways to teach our students about equality and human rights.

I even joined the training center and now I'm training other teachers. We are now spreading an awareness and knowledge of our rights to women and girls all over Afghanistan.

Thank you for helping to make all this possible. Freedom and education are truly precious.

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Our third guest is Carmen Molina.

(Annie)

It is a real joy to be here with you today. Vacations are few and far between for me and a vacation to come here to the USA is a wonderful gift. I am Carmen Molina and I come from Izabal, Guatemala. Being here is almost like a dream.

I, like Maral before me, am amazed by the freedoms you all share here. We are fighting for women's rights while those same rights exist here. We are fighting to be a part of the system and near here in Houston you have a female mayor and Texas has a female senator. You have all what we are striving for.

Thanks to support provided by your UUSC we are making progress. Over 10 years ago I began working with an organization supported by the UUSC which helped to establish a network of women committed to social and economic justice in Central America. With your help we created curriculum and materials which have been used by the network of women to empower women with knowledge of our rights and the confidence to lead social change.

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I myself was the first woman elected to my own Banana Workers' Union executive committee. I am proud to report that through my involvement on the committee, gender equality is now a part of the union's collective bargaining strategies.

But we are not just about women's rights. We are also fighting to eliminate violence against women. The cover photograph of me on your Guest at Your Table program shows me on one of our local radio programs which raises awareness about women's rights in the home, at work, in other organizations, in the streets, well actually everywhere.

All of this has been possible partially because of your support and guidance. You have helped us help ourselves and affect real, positive changes. Women all over Guatemala are claiming their rights and improving their lives. On behalf of the women of Guatemala, Gracias!

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And our final guest is another woman, Carolina Lara.

(Pam Johnson)

Like my 3 friends before me, I too am deeply grateful to be here today. You have a beautiful country and church and you have been great hosts and hostesses. My name is Carolina Lara and I am from Guayaquil, Ecuador a city the size of your nearby neighbor Houston.

Just two years ago I was only 19 years old and the leader of a group of other young people called Mi Cometa. After thousands of complaints to the local water company, InterAgua, went unheard, we reached out to our neighbors and together we formed the Citizens Observatory on Public Services. Our goal was to report on problems with water, sanitation and other public services. These joint efforts were all made possible through funding provided by the UUSC. We tested water, gathered first hand testimony and attracted media attention to the lack of water and proper sanitation services.

Getting no response, we approached the World Bank, which previously backed InterAgua. The World Bank convinced InterAgua to negotiate with families and correct unfair water bills.

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We then tackled something I am deeply proud of. We wrote letters to the federal assembly asking them to include a human right to water as part of the new constitution they were writing. We went on to organize a bus tour which travelled around the country encouraging citizens to raise their voices to protect their rights. Believe it or not, we were successful and the new constitution passed and went into effect in September of 2008.

For us I think it was a breakthrough in the history of Ecuador, the inclusion of civil society in the construction of a constitution, and with the substantial scope for vulnerable sectors such as youth, and indigenous people in general.

We must all learn to dream – but not dream by ourselves. We must learn to dream together, learn to share the dreams. Only in this way will the dreams become a reality.

Once again, thanks for your wonderful hospitality and your support of the UUSC.

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This little box is a reminder, a reminder of the people you've just met, a reminder that there are many people in the world who are not as fortunate as we are.

There are people who have been displaced by war all their lives.

There are women who aren't allowed to go to school.

There are women who work just as hard as men and yet they still can't participate in the unions which were organized to protect their rights.

There are people who don't have access to clean water or acceptable sanitation.

This little box reminds us of all of these and many other people around the world and it also reminds us that we can do something about their problems. We may not be able to personally right their wrongs, but we can help in other ways.

And the UUSC is actually a lot like us. They aren't big enough to right all these wrongs alone. So they partner with other organization, both local and international, and together through these partnerships with the people they are intended to help, they

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work toward change, toward solutions, toward better and just lives for people in distant countries and in our own country.

This is a partnership we can be all be a part of. A partnership we can all be proud of. Please support the UUSC.

Sermon Response

Closing Hymn

Please join me standing as you are able singing our final Hymn, No. 121 “We’ll Build a Land” and remain standing for our Benediction.

Benediction – No. 686

John Pepper

Go in peace. Live simply, gently, at home in yourselves.

Act justly. Speak justly. Remember the depth of your own compassion. Forget not your power in the days of your powerlessness.

Crave peace for all people in the world, beginning with yourselves, and go as you go with the dream of that peace alive in your heart.

Adapted from Mark L. Belletini

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Extinguish the Chalice

Postlude