

COMING HOME, GOING FORTH: THE SPIRITUAL CYCLE OF LIFE

A Sermon Presented by the Rev. Phyllis L. Hubbell

Paint Branch Unitarian Universalist Church

September 7, 2008

Dark clouds are comin' like an army. . .

You will go just like you've gone before

One sad soldier off to war, enemies that only you can see

This service began with a dance to a song written by the folk-rock duo, The Indigo Girls called "Come On Home." The words tell of someone tormented by demons, unseen enemies.

The Indigo Girls plead with their loved one to come back, back where they will be safe together, back where together they will hold off "the river of your troubles."

For the last three weeks, we have heard so many of you share your joys and your sorrows. We all know from our own lives how many of our sorrows, our fears, our pain remain unspoken each week. Whatever our age, whatever our income, our education, our color, our sexual orientation, our abilities and our disabilities, many of us face hard times.

Church at its best is a place for healing and renewal, a home for the spirit, a home for the soul. Whether it is the music, the words, the dance, the silence, we hope that if you have walked through those doors this morning with a heavy heart, you will find something here that will take you through the week. May we find here something that will help us find meaning and strength and enable us to see the ordinary miracles in our lives even in the midst of hard times.

But while the spiritual journey includes times of healing and renewal, of coming home, it must also send us forth into the unknown territory of the outer journey. All our lives we are invited and challenged to growth, to transformation so that we may join up with a mighty ocean bringing peace, compassion and justice both in our personal lives – to our friends and family – and in the wider world. This, too, is the work of this church.

James Luther Adams, a Unitarian Universalist theologian and social activist used to tell the story of a Board of Trustees meeting at the First Unitarian Church of Chicago during the civil rights struggles in the last century. Adams was a Board member. This particular meeting had been a contentious one, lasting late into the night. The Board was discussing whether

to recommend to the congregation a by-law change that would eliminate the racial restrictions on membership. Yes, tragically, part of our Unitarian Universalist history in many of our older churches includes racial restrictions on membership. The First Unitarian Church of Baltimore's first by-laws limited voting rights to white male property holders. Had these historic churches thought of it, they most certainly would have excluded gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered folks.

There was one Board holdout at Adams' Board meeting. The Board wanted to present its recommendation to the congregation unanimously. Dr. Adams argued passionately with the holdout, until frustrated beyond measure, he asked the holdout what he thought the church was for? What did it exist to do? After a long pause, the Board holdout replied: "The purpose of this church is to change people like me."

The religious journey contains places of rest, of comfort, but if the journey ends with comfort, it ceases to be a spiritual journey. Spiritual journeys require times of testing, times of discomfort, times of wrestling with angels in the night. If we stay with the struggle, even embrace the struggle, seeking the gifts hidden from our eyes, we cannot help but change, we cannot help but be transformed.

Today, as we pour our waters into a common bowl, as we hear each others' stories of healing and renewal, wonder and awe, growth and transformation, may we join up down the river. We are one like the water, flowing above and around the stones and the rocks in the river bed, bearers of peace, bearers of joy, bearers of justice, bearers of life itself. My soul is a river. Your soul is a river. May we together fill a mighty ocean with peace.