

Bread Communion Ritual—Healing in Company

11 22 20—UUFM

Announcements

Let's now unpack our worship bags together: you have some pages to color while you listen, and crayons if you like those. You have a small chalice made of earth and topped by a soy candle. Perhaps this will be your worship chalice going forward. You have a prayer and some bread. Let's save these for later, ok?

Reading

Hear now these words of encouragement, comfort, and challenge from our Unitarian Universalist Associate President, the Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray:

“As we draw closer to the end of a year that has been full of challenges and heartbreak, I am grateful for the ways we have shown up for each other and for our communities. This year has made clear that our faith is not bound by the walls of a building. We connected with each other virtually in imaginative new ways and reached out to *millions* of people through UU the Vote during the historic election season.

“This spirit of creativity, impact and perseverance in times of great challenge and change is critical now as we look ahead. Many hearts ache as we anticipate Thanksgiving and the winter holidays in the midst of a global pandemic. We know that many plans and treasured traditions for gathering with family and friends must be cancelled or put on hold.

“This year, let us be mindful that many hearts in the Indigenous communities of New England and across Turtle Island ache on Thanksgiving Day every year. In Plymouth, Massachusetts, Indigenous people observe the holiday as a “Day of Mourning.” This year will mark the 50th anniversary of this Day of Mourning tradition, and the 400th anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims in Plymouth.

“In 2016, Unitarian Universalists voted to pay special attention to learning our history and rethinking Thanksgiving this year. Historically, UU ministers were instrumental in creating this U.S. holiday and the “Pilgrims and the Indians” pageant tradition that roots the holiday in an historically inaccurate and harmful colonial narrative. Many UU congregations in New England can trace their lineage directly back to early settler congregations that had a role in the genocide of Native communities. As a religious tradition, we cannot decide who we will be without reckoning with the truth of who some of our ancestors were.

[. . .]

“In truth, thanksgiving celebrations have a long and rich history that predates the landing of the Pilgrims and the founding of the United States. There are many, many ways that we can connect in gratitude and celebrate the abundance of the Fall harvest as a community without celebrating an ahistorical colonial origin story.

“This year, let us be grateful in a genuine manner. Let our gratitude flow from our deep, ongoing commitment to justice and equity. Let our gratitude grow from the opportunities we have to be together authentically—whether virtually or in person. Please join me as we reimagine this day and gather in community to honor Indigenous ancestors, experiences and traditions. May it be a time to reflect and find meaning in how our shared values connect us. “

Music

I bring you this “Thank You” song from Dakota youth in Dakota language. The truth is, I don’t know who these lovely young men are, and I am not rooted deeply enough in relationship with local Dakota people to ask them. I bring this song to you, with hope in its authenticity, with respect in enjoying it with all of you, and with commitment to deepen my relationships with Dakota neighbors in this town and region. I hope you will join me, and share your wisdom and connections as you can.

Blessing of the Bread—Introduction

Our shared breaking of bread, our togetherness as we fulfill in new ways a deeply-rooted ritual, this is only possible because of many loving hands working together. Let’s share those coloring pages with each other if you got them. Something to look at together, if not taste and smell together.

Let us give thanks to all who made our sharing possible. Thanks to Macey Forsyth for creating our worship bags. Thanks to Lee Ganske for slicing and packaging the bread for the bags. Thanks to Macey and Lee for packing the bags. Thanks to Macey and Treselia Greiner for video skills. Thanks to Lee and Nancy Cramblit for organizing our bakers. Thanks to all the bakers: the Cramblits, Diane Dobitz, Tony Filipovitch, Macey, Cathi Fouchi, Mae Gagnon, the Ganskes, Penny Herickhoff, Liz Kipp, DeeAnn Nelson, Sue Wiltgen, and yours truly. Thanks to Nancy and Dennis Cramblit for creating driving routes for deliveries. Thanks to all the drivers: Nancy Blethen, the Cramblits, Deb Fitzloff, Macey, Cathi Fouci, Barb Franchino, Mae Gagnon, Lee Ganske, Penny Herickhoff, John and Karen Knox, DeeAnn and Tom Nelson, Jane and David Schostag, Danielle Stedman, Sue Wiltgen, and yours truly. Thank you to all of you who are here this morning to share in this ritual.

Blessing of the Bread

Each of us is a blessing and each of us can give a blessing. A blessing is nothing more or less than a willingness to focus your best intentions and to bestow them, to send them out from yourself to the world. In a blessing, you take the ordinary and make it more meaningful and more significant than it usually is.

And bread is a blessing, when we have little and when we have much. For most of us, and for people around the whole world, bread is a most familiar food, the baseline, the familiar as well as quite specific to regions and ethnicity—wheat, rice, corn, teff, farro, millet, barley, sorghum, oats, spelt, amaranth, quinoa, and more. We make bread from all of this, bread that sustains our physical bodies. Bread like what you have in your house, in your bag, at your side this morning. Let us bless this bread with our hope for sustenance. Let us bless this bread with faith that we can endure change and hard times. Let us

bless this bread in community, knowing that we are never alone, we have each other to lean on, we take care of each other, we make our life good by honoring all the goodness we can see and taste and touch.

Closing Words—Healing in Community

In the great epics of the ancient Greek poet Homer, both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, all human beings are referred to as “bread eaters.” Bread eaters, not lotus eaters, lotus eaters who lose sight of the journey of life. Today’s bread communion links our present moment to our past and our future as a Fellowship, enabling our journey to continue. We are not asleep, despite the necessity that we isolate and distance, and thus we have faith in the power of our being together and working together in new ways.

In *Latin*, the word for bread is “*panis*,” and so the word “companionship” means “with bread.” Together, we share in each other. Symbolically and actually, we share bread as we share this time together. We journey with one another, and thus we are united in love. Loving community provides us acceptance and opportunity, provides us peace of mind so that we each may be a blessing to ourselves and to this Fellowship and to the world. Especially to the world.

Khalil Gibran reminds us to “See first that you yourself deserve to be a giver, and an instrument of giving.” How might we practice being givers, offering ourselves as bread? Dutch Catholic priest and theologian Henri Nouwen invites us to a practice remembering our ability to heal each other with our blessing, with our loving attention to the ordinary. He asks, “Did I offer peace today? Did I bring a smile to someone's face? Did I say words of healing? Did I let go of my anger and resentment? Did I forgive? Did I love? These are the real questions. I must trust that the little bit of love that I sow now will bear many fruits, here in this world and the life to come.”

When we are able to give, then we might unhardened our hearts and minds, grow soft as bread and face the world as it is. We can be grateful to this world—tough and changed as it is, ever the same in its brokenness, in its need for healing. With this awareness and commitment, we can rest in the words of Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray: “This year, let us be grateful in a genuine manner. Let our gratitude flow from our deep, ongoing commitment to justice and equity. Let our gratitude grow from the opportunities we have to be together authentically—whether virtually or in person. [. . .] May it be a time to reflect and find meaning in how our shared values connect us. “

With our words and deeds, we sow seeds of care in the here and now. May those seeds yield the bread of kindness and attention, the bread of blessing. There is a card in your bag with a Celtic prayer printed on it: from *The Open Gate* by David Adam. I invite you to join me in reading this prayer together:

Be gentle when you touch bread.
Let it not lie uncared for, unwanted.
So often bread is taken for granted.

Yet there is such beauty if bread—beauty of surf and soil, beauty of patient toil.

Wind and rain have caressed it.
Christ—and you—often bless it.
Be gentle when you touch bread.

Be gentle, my dear friends and most beloved people, be gentle with yourselves and with each other, be as saviors, facing the world as it is, imagining it as it could be, holding each other in companionship and compassion as you remember, today and every day, that you are loved, you are worthy, you are welcome, and you are needed. May you feel it so, may in be so, and may the people say “Amen.”