

Forgiveness--August 2014

UUFVB Covenant Groups

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,
but connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

Check-in: How is your spirit right now?

Opening Reading: "The Strain of Mercy" by Fred Chappell, from *Family Gathering*

Aunt Agnes takes it all in stride:

Uncle Einar's boorishness,
Cousin Lilia's need to hide,
Cousin Willoughby's sordid mess
He thinks is a "bohemian life,"
Aunt Alicia's wandering wits,
What Uncle Lewis did to his wife,
The way that Uncle Nahum sits
In his creepy corner and calculates,
Aunt Wilma's plans for sweet revenge,
Cousin Hubert in dire straits,
The inevitable and dreaded change
Coming to young Elizabeth,
Cousin Ellie's hordes of mates,
Uncle Ozzie's fear of death.

She recognizes what we are,
Yet holds us in affection
As steadfast as the morning star,
As if our faults had no connection
With the persons we are within.
She doesn't pretend an ignorance
Of our dark collective sin;
She only believes that circumstance
Has gone against us every one,
That by blind forces we were driven.

We make a painful silent moan
At being so horribly forgiven.

Topic Exploration: *What Forgiveness Means* by Harold S. Kushner

A woman in my congregation comes to see me. She is a single mother, divorced, working to support herself and three young children. She says to me, "Since my husband walked out on us, every month is a struggle to pay our bills. I have to tell my kids we have no money to go to the movies, while he's living it up with his new wife in another state. How can you tell me to forgive him?" I answer her, "I'm not asking you to forgive him because what he did was acceptable. It wasn't; it was mean and selfish. I'm asking you to forgive because he doesn't deserve the power to live in your head and turn you into a bitter, angry woman. I'd like to see him out of your life emotionally as completely as he is out of it physically, but you keep holding on to him. You're not hurting him by holding on to that resentment, but you're hurting yourself."

....Forgiving happens inside us, It represents a letting go of the sense of grievance, and perhaps most importantly a letting go of the role of victim. For a Jew to forgive the Nazis would not mean, God forbid, saying to them "What you did was understandable, I can understand what led you to do it and I don't hate you for it." It would mean saying "What you did was thoroughly despicable and puts you outside the category of decent human beings. But I refuse to give you the power to define me as a victim. I

refuse to let your blind hatred define the shape and content of my Jewishness. I don't hate you; I reject you.' And then the Nazi would remain chained to his past and to his conscience, but the Jew would be free.

Questions/Sharing

1. Can you think of a time in your life when you chose not to forgive? Share your story, and reflect on what it has cost you personally to not forgive.
2. Can you simply decide to forgive? How does forgiveness happen?
3. Are some things unforgivable?
4. Is it better to forgive and forget or to forgive and remember?
5. Does the person whom you're forgiving have to know you're forgiving them?

Check-out and reflection on today's session

Closing Reading

“Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; Therefore we are saved by hope. Nothing true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; Therefore we are saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; Therefore, we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as from our own; Therefore, we are saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.” (Reinhold Niebuhr)

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Housekeeping