

The Wit and Wisdom of Robert Fulghum

Paul Amaru, Pete Kersey, Joyce Levi
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Vero Beach
Sunday, June 25, 2017

"I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge, that myth is more potent than history, that dreams are more powerful than facts, that hope always triumphs over experience, that laughter is the only cure for grief. And I believe that love is stronger than death."

- Robert Fulghum, 2003

Welcome, Announcements and Greeting of One Another

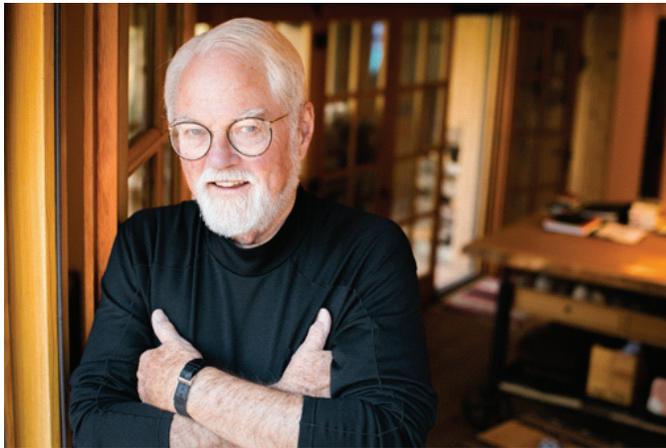
Paul Amaru and congregation

Introit

UUFVB Choir

Opening Words

Pete Kersey



Hymn #331 *"Life is the Greatest Gift of All"*

Kindling the Chalice Flame

Paul Amaru and Pete Kersey

Sung Response “Chalice”

*Chalice, chalice burning bright, help remind us with your light of
how we’d like to live each day, with love and truth helping lead the way.*

Time for All Ages - “The Eensy Weensy Spider” Pete Kersey



The eensy weensy spider went up the water spout
Down came the rain and washed the spider out
Out came the sun and dried up all the rain
And The eensy weensy spider went up the spout again

Children’s Recessional (sung as a round to the tune of

“Frere Jacques,” piano side of the congregation sings first)

*As you journey, as you journey, may you know, may you know,
love and hope go with you, love and hope go with you
learn and grow, learn and grow.*

Offertory

Joyce

(Today’s undesignated plate offerings go to Crossover Mission)

You’ll recall in the Fulghum Credo, one of the things he learned in kindergarten was: share. We now ask you to share in the work of this fellowship as we take up the morning offering.

AFTER, LEAD THE SINGING AND TAKE THE BASKETS

Congregational Response

*Rejoice in love we know and share, in love and beauty everywhere;
Rejoice in truth that makes us free, and in the good that yet shall be. Amen*

Community Connections and Sharing of Joys, Sorrows and Prayers

Paul Amaru and congregation

Hymn #123 “Spirit of Life” (hum once, then sing)

Spirit of Life, come unto me.

Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.

Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;

Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.

Roots hold me close; wings set me free;

Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me.

Meditation Reading

Joyce Levi

Robert Fulghum wrote: "I do not believe that the meaning of life is a puzzle to be solved. Life is. I am. Anything might happen. And I believe I may invest my life with meaning. The uncertainty is a blessing in disguise. If I were absolutely certain about all things, I would spend my life in anxious misery, fearful of losing my way. But since everything and anything are always possible, the miraculous is always nearby and wonders shall never, ever cease."

He wrote: "I come back again and again to a few themes that hold my concern fast. Questions, actually, that I keep on the front burner of my mental stove. Such as: How shall I achieve a living balance between the mundane and the holy? Between humor and grief? Between what is and what might be? Between self-concern and concern for the common good? Between the worst that I often am and the best I might well become? And is it really possible to do unto others as I'd have them do unto me, and why is it so damn hard?"

Anthem

UUFVB Choir

Sermon *"The Wit and Wisdom of Robert Fulghum"*

Buttons - Pete

One of the small-but-important changes across the course of my life is the development of buttons. The kind you push to make something happen. Once upon a time we had levers. Then came switches. Now it's a button.

There's a lot of touch-screen technology happening too. And soon, everything will be voice-activated. That's not really a new concept, though. When I was a kid much of my world was voice-activated. For example, when my father said, "Bobby Lee, get you skinny ass off the porch and mow the grass or you won't get your allowance." I was thereby activated. And my father was voice-activated when my mother said "Lee, take out the garbage or I will dump it in your underwear drawer."

My favorite button is the one on my CD player marked "Random."

I also like the one marked "Normal" on the washing machine.

And the “casual” button on the dryer.

Most of all I like the “Pause” button on several electronic devices. If you push it, things are momentarily on hold – not stopped completely – just in suspended animation. Push it again and the action continues.

These would be nice buttons to have on the console of my life. “Random” for surprise, “Normal” for secure predictability, “Casual” for relief on the uptight days, and “Pause” when the traffic of the day threatens sanity.

If I could give our new President...a power tool, I would provide him with these same buttons to use on a national and international scale – for the same purposes. Right now we need a big “Pause” button.

Australian Tourists - Pete, Joyce



J - Izzat whu ewe broosh yur teat width?

P - An owlish little woman. Fluffy grey hair, tiny beak of a nose, black rimmed glasses, giving the impression that any moment she may turn her head 180 degrees and look behind her for prey.

We are waiting in a supermarket check-out lane. She is pointing at the magnum size toothpaste carton in my cart. This latest version of the toothpaste has everything...mouthwash, flouride, chlorine, whitener, tartar fighter, WD-40, suntan lotion, a laxative, caffeine, bacteria combatant, glitter, some unpronounceable additives and a fresh fruit minty flavor. American ingenuity in a tube. WHAM-O in your mouth...Yes!

Where is this woman from, I wonder, with an accent like that? Australia, probably? All those people talk funny. They say they speak "Strain." Maybe I should reply by shifting into my own native tongue - West Texas slow-speak.

P - Well naw...M 'aam. Ah'm gonna spred it...on mah toest fur brakefuss... 'n squirt a shot N muh cawfee...grate stuff...cures athleets fut, jock itch, N hemorrhoidal complainst...N eye yuset it wunct, ta calk the bathtub. Wurked, too.

Not shure eye'd wanna put too much uve it own muh teat tho...day say it'll shrink yur teat.

J - Ware eye cum from, we broosh or teat width biking sota.

P - Rilly?

J - Riley. D same kine we yous ta bike bred.

P - Rat own! Eye yuse sand - organic sand...to clin mah teat. N din eye jus tayk em out N run a war broosh o'r em to get d grit N chunks off em.

J - Riley?

P - Yep, rilly. Wanna see muh teat?...Eye'll tayk em owt N sho yew.

J - Well...eye.. (*quick turn head to back*)

P - Suddenly the owly lady swiveled her head around 180 degrees to see if her husband was still there behind her. A lumpish sunburned Aussie hulk who looked like he was concentrating on passing gas as silently as possible.

J - D'yu wanna see's teat?

P - He smiled and said "No, tho mebbe we shud git sum of that teat pase he yuses." The owl snapped her head around at me and peered over her glasses. (*Head back front quickly*)

J - Oar ewe pulling m'leg? Ewe R, rn't ewe?

P - Yes Maam, eye em. It's my job to be colorful for the tourists.

J - Ewe 'merrycans R as nutbuggers as Strains.

P - I laughed, she laughed, her husband farted....we all laughed

Our town is full of foreigners these days. They've come to see the American West and experience the culture. We intrigue and amuse them, they intrigue and amuse us. That's a good thing.

Odd to be on the other end of the traveler's visit to the circus of the world. What are they doing here? The same thing I was doing there...We go to see the natives. They come to see the natives. And we're all us. And sometimes we delight in crossing the moat to mingle with the creatures in the zoo and find reason to laugh about something as mundane as toothpaste. As common as brushing our teeth, or passing gas...Rat own!

English may be a foreign language. Laughter is not.

J - Angish my be a forn langish. Laffter izzn't.

Married Life - Paul



Mermaids and Giants - Joyce

"Giants, wizards and dwarfs" was the game to play.

Being left in charge of about eighty children seven to ten years old, while their parents were off doing parenty things, I mustered my troops in the church social hall and explained the game. It's a large-scale version of Rock, Paper, and Scissors, and involves some intellectual decision making. But the real purpose of the game is to make a lot of noise and run around chasing people until nobody knows which side you are on or who won.

Organizing a roomful of wired-up gradeschoolers into two teams, explaining the rudiments of the game, achieving consensus on group identity – all this is no mean accomplishment, but we did it with a right good will and were ready to go.

The excitement of the chase had reached a critical mass. I yelled out: "You have to decide now which you are – a GIANT, a WIZARD, or a DWARF!"

While the groups huddled in frenzied, whispered consultation, a tug came at my pants leg. A small child stands there looking up, and asks in a small, concerned voice, "Where do the Mermaids stand?"



Where do the Mermaids stand?

A long pause. A very long pause. "Where do the Mermaids stand?" says I.

"Yes. You see, I am a Mermaid."

"There are no such thing as Mermaids."

"Oh, yes, I am one!"

She did not relate to being a Giant, a Wizard, or a Dwarf. She knew her category. Mermaid. And was not about to leave the game and go over and stand against the wall where a loser would stand. She intended to participate, wherever Mermaids fit into the scheme of things. Without giving up dignity or identity. She took it for granted that there was a place for Mermaids and that I would know just where.

Well, where DO the Mermaids stand? All the "Mermaids" – all those who are different, who do not fit the norm and who do not accept the available boxes and pigeonholes?

Answer that question and you can build a school, a nation, or a world on it.

What was my answer at the moment? Every once in a while I say the right thing. "The Mermaid stands right here by the King of the Sea!" says I. (Yes, right here by the King's Fool, I thought to myself.)

So we stood there hand in hand, reviewing the troops of Wizards and Giants and

Dwarfs as they rolled by in wild disarray.

It is not true, by the way, that Mermaids do not exist. I know at least one personally. I have held her hand.

Fathers and Sons - Pete

This is 1963 - From deep in the canyoned aisles of a supermarket comes what sounds like a small-scale bus wreck followed by an air raid. If you followed the running box-boy armed with mop and broom, you would come upon a young father, his three-year-old son, an upturned shopping cart, and a good part of the pickles shelf, all in a heap on the floor.



The child is experiencing what might nicely be described as "significant fluid loss." Tears, mucus, a drooling mouth that is wide open and making a noise that would drive a dog under a bed. The kid has also wet his pants and has all the signs of a child in a "pre-urp" condition.

The child is only scared and the father has had some experience with the uselessness of the "stop crying or I'll smack you" syndrome and has remained amazingly quiet in the face of the catastrophe.

The father is thinking to himself about running away from home, driving away somewhere down south, changing his name, getting a menial job, maybe a fast order cook. Something, anything, that does not include contact with three-year-old children.

Oh sure, someday he might find this funny, but now he is sorry he has children, sorry he grew up and above all sorry that this particular son cannot be traded in for a model that works. Of course he cannot say these things to anybody, ever.

So the mess is cleaned up and later the father sits in the car holding the sobbing child until he falls asleep. Home again, tucks the child into his crib. The father does not run away from home.

This is 1979. Same man, same son. The man paces, cursing. In his hand a letter from the son, now sixteen. The son says he hates him, never wants to see him again because he is a terrible father. The son calls him a jerk.

What the father thinks of the son right now is somewhat incoherent, and not very nice.

Someday, some long days from now, he may laugh about even this. For now there is only anguish.

He really is a good man, and a good father, the evidence is overwhelming. The son is quality goods as well.

"Why did this happen to me?" he wails. Well, he had a son. That's all it takes. You just have to live through it. Wisdom comes later. Just have to stand there like a jackass in a hailstorm and take it.

This is 1988. Same father and son. The son is 28 and has his own three-year-old son. Three mornings a week I see them out jogging together around 6 am. At a crossing, the son takes his father's elbow, to hold him back from the danger of oncoming cars. They laugh when they sprint for home...the son alongside, making no effort to run ahead.

They love each other, a lot. You can see it. They have been through a lot together, but it is all right now. One of their favorite stories is once upon a time in a supermarket.

This story is always. Literature is full of examples of tragic endings of this kind of story, but sometimes (more often than not I suspect) they come back and take their father in their arms. An old story, the father of the Prodigal son could tell you about it.

Getting Married - Paul

Holiday Story - Joyce

A Sunday afternoon it was, some days before Christmas. With rain, with wind, with cold. Wintergloom. Things-to-do list was long and growing like an unresistant mold. Temper: short. Bio-index: negative. Horoscope reading suggested caution. And the Sunday paper suggested dollars, death, and destruction as the day's litany. O tidings of comfort and joy, fa la la la la!

This holy hour of Lordsdaybliss was jarred by a pounding at the door. Now what? Deep sigh. Opening it, resigned to accept whatever bad news lies in wait, I am nonplussed. A rather small person in a cheap Santa Claus mask, carrying a large brown paper bag outthrust: "TRICK OR TREAT!" Santa Mask shouts.



What? "TRICK OR TREAT!" Santa Mask hoots again. Tongue-tied, I stare at this apparition. He shakes the bag at me, and dumbly I fish out my wallet and find a dollar to drop into the bag. The mask lifts, and it is an Asian kid with a 10-dollar grin taking up most of his face. "Wanta hear some caroling?" he asks, in singsong English.

I know him now. He belongs to a family settled into the neighborhood by the Quakers last year. Boat people.

Vietnamese, I believe. Refugees. He stopped by at Halloween with his sisters and brothers, and I filled their bags. Hong Duc (howng duk) is his name – he's maybe 8. At Halloween he looked like a Wise Man, with a bathrobe on and a dish towel around his head.

Belum - Pete

Americans, it is observed, prefer definite answers. Let your yea-yea be your yea-yea and your nay-nay be your nay-nay. Yes or no, no grays, please.

In Indonesia, there is a word in common use that nicely wires around the need for black and white. Belum is the word and it means "not quit yet." A lovely word implying continuing possibility. "Do you speak English?" Belum...not quite yet. "Do you have any children?" Belum...not quite yet. "Do you know the meaning of life?" Belum. It is considered both impolite and cynical to say "No" outright. This leads to some funny moments. "Is the taxi on fire?" Belum...not quite yet.

It is an attitude kin to that behind the old vaudeville joke, "Do you play the violin?" "I don't know, I have never tried."

Perhaps. Maybe. Possibly. Not yes or no, but within the realm of what might be. Soft edges are welcome in this great bus ride of human adventure.

Is this the best of all possible worlds? Belum

Is the world coming to an end. Belum

Can we do without the weapons of war?

I don't know, we never tried.

Is it hopeless to think we might?

Belum....Not yet.



Kindergarten of Life - Paul

Sabbath - Joyce

There's something missing when there's no Sabbath act of any kind in my life. No Rosh Hoshana, no Easter sunrise. Not even much of a Sunday anymore. We live in a world where it is thought great progress that stores are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and it is a sign of great entrepreneurial industry to work on weekends. I need more than a read through the Sunday paper to feel I've experienced a Sabbath ritual. If I don't have time to live my life well the first time, when am I going to find the time to go back and live it over?

Hymn #6 *"Just as Long as I Have Breath"*

Benediction - Joyce

Robert Fulghum wrote: "My grandfather says he blesses God each day when he takes himself off to bed having eaten and not having been eaten once again. 'Now I lay me down to sleep. In the peace of amateurs, for whom so many blessings flow, I thank you, God, for what went right! Amen.'" May small miracles occur for each of you day by ordinary day, and may life just work for you until we meet again. And when you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together. Amen.