

Morning Worship
Friday 3 March 2006

PRELUDE

Angel by Sarah McLachlan
Jeannie Gagne and Stan Strickland

CHANT

*Gathered here in the mystery of this hour, gathered here in one
strong body
Gathered here in the struggle and the power: Spirit, draw near.*

LIGHTING OF THE CHALICE

Katy Lowery

READING

Jon Bloomberg

CHANT

*Return again, return again, return to the home of your soul
Return to who you are, return to what you are
return to where you are born and reborn again*

MEDITATION

Victoria Safford

CHANT

*Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?
Mystery. Mystery. Life is a riddle and a mystery.*

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

Sunny by Bobby Hebb

THE LIGHTING OF THE CHALICE

The words for chalice lighting are adapted from the poet, Zelda.

Each of us has a name
given by the source of life
and given by our parents

Each of us has a name
given by our stature and our smile
and given by what we wear

Each of us has a name
given by the mountains
and given by our walls

Each of us has a name
given by the stars
and given by our neighbors

Each of us has a name
given by our sins
and given by our longing

Each of us has a name
given by our enemies
and given by our love

Each of us has a name
given by our celebrations
and given by our work

Each of us has name
given by the seasons
and given by our blindness

Each of us has a name
given by the sea
and given by our death.

READING

The reading is adapted from a passage in Parker Palmer's *A Hidden Wholeness*.

There was a time when farmers on the Great Plains, at the first sign of a blizzard, would run a rope from the back door out to the barn. They all knew stories of people who had wandered off and been frozen to death, having lost sight of home while still in their own backyards. Today we live in a blizzard of another sort. It swirls around us as economic injustice, ecological ruin, physical and spiritual violence, and their inevitable outcome, war. It swirls within us as fear and frenzy, greed and deceit. [And denial, depression and shame...] We all know stories of people who have wandered off into the madness and been separated from their own souls, losing their moral bearings and even their mortal lives; they make headlines because they take so many innocents down with them. [Sometimes they make no headlines at all.]

The lost ones come from every walk of life: clergy and corporate executives, politicians and people on the street, celebrities and schoolchildren... Some of us fear that we, or those we love, will become lost in the storm. Some are lost at this moment, and are trying to find the way home. Some are lost without knowing it. And some are using the blizzard as cover while cynically exploiting its chaos for private gain.

...But my own experience of the blizzard, which includes getting lost in it more than I like to admit, tells me that however we deny it or forget it, however lost we feel in the whiteout, still we dwell in the soul's backyard, with chance after chance to regain our own bearings. We can still tie a rope from the back door out to the barn, and survive the blizzard [of this life] without losing our hope or our way.

[Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*]

There's a story told about A.J. Muste, radical activist and pacifist, astute analyst of social, political and economic issues domestically and internationally, for many years director of the international interfaith organization, the Fellowship of Reconciliation. A native of the Netherlands and a student of Mahatma Gandhi, together with African American leaders Howard Thurman and Bayard Rustin, he was teacher and mentor to James Lawson and Martin Luther King and others, introducing them to the concept at the heart of Gandhi's nonviolent revolution, *satyagraha*, which King later translated as "soul force."

A.J. Muste was born in 1885; he died in 1967. The story goes that for a long period during the Vietnam War, he stood every evening outside the White House, holding a candle. An old man by that time, often he was alone, often he was not; sometimes hundreds and thousands of people were there (sometimes, I'm sure, some of you). He was heckled and shoved, he was thanked and applauded; he was often ignored. One rainy night, a reporter asked him, "Mr. Muste, do you really think you are going to change the policies of this country by standing out here at night with a candle?" Muste responded, "**Oh, I don't do it to change the country; I do it so the country won't change me.**" [I have heard this story in many versions; most recently in Anne Lamott's *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith*.]

Abraham Johannes Muste was a broad-minded, broad-hearted, intellectually open strategist and activist. He had been a Calvinist minister, but was forced to resign because his pacifist preaching was so unpopular during the first World War. With his answer to the reporter, he did not mean to imply that he wanted to live crouched within a narrow, closed world view, clutching unchangeable ideas. He believed, as we do, that revelation is not sealed. When he said, "I do it so the country won't change me," he was talking about holding on to convictions that are larger than opinions or ideas (which do change and have to, if you mean to grow and keep alive). He meant the bedrock of principle, the **deep, deep** embers of his own faith, his fidelity; he meant the **deep, deep** interior river of his own hope, which was more fluid than optimism and which was never passive but always engaged and thus replenishing itself. He meant his dedication to certain ideals which for him were realities under construction, and people are the builders of that dream. He spoke in the tradition of the old spiritual that became an anthem of the civil rights movement: *I'm on my way to freedom land*. A tangible understanding of the geography of that land was what he didn't want to have changed or blurred or forgotten or co-opted or sold out to developers. He meant the core of what he believed in as a person: justice, peace, the dignity of labor, the indignity of

poverty, the unacceptable failure of imagination that is war. He meant, *like a tree that's planted by the water, we shall not be moved.*

Forty years later we live in different times; you can't stand out in front of the White House any more with a little incendiary device, threatening the nation with nonviolent social change. But the need for candles and for principles that do not flicker has not gone away, has only grown more urgent.

The story makes me wonder, what are we doing now, what kinds of things do we do (on our own, quietly, and also together) - what do we do on purpose, deliberately, carefully, thoughtfully, not only to change the policies of our country (which is public, political work) but to guard against the country changing us? Where do you stand with your candle, rain or shine, in the dark, so the country won't change you, or the times (which are frightening and frustrating) won't knock you down, or fatigue or cynicism or sadness or the insidious suspicion of futility which can curl around your heart and block the flow of blood, the life blood of imagination? What little practices are you practicing these days? What prayer, where? Are there things that keep you steady and sane, but also faithful to something – something overarching, underlying, which is God, or truth, or integrity, or justice or love (in its broadest implication and most intimate requirements). “I'm doing this,” said Muste, “so the country won't change me.” So I wonder, what are we all doing these days to remember who we are?

Parker Palmer talks about farmers running a line from the barn to the back door so the blizzard won't blow them away. He talks about tethering your soul to something solid, because storms do rage around us, and within us, sometimes.

They all knew stories of people who has wandered off and been frozen to death, having lost sight of home while still in their own backyards. Today we live in a blizzard of another sort. It swirls around us as economic injustice, ecological ruin, physical and spiritual violence, and their inevitable outcome, war. It swirls within us as fear and frenzy, greed and deceit.. We all know stories f people who have wandered off into the madness and been separated from their own souls, losing their moral beings and even their mortal lives...

You don't want to lose hold of your rope, the bright thread of connection.

Changing the policies of a nation is a political discipline; changing yourself, or steadying yourself and quieting yourself so you can hear what the prophet called “the still small voice” within- this is a spiritual discipline, the counterweight.

Strangely, this religion of ours is like politics in that I don't believe you can do it by yourself, all alone. it's the most intimate work in the world to remember who you are, and it can only be done in community. We have to map the freedom land, imagine the country of justice, chart the geography of peace, explore and defend the territory of truth-telling, construct the house of hope - together, or else we dwell in isolated fantasy.

Now and here we come together, to listen and learn, to be a brief, bright community for now. All these talks and workshops are significant, small means – and all the conversations especially, the seemingly incidental sharing of stories, sharing of journeys (where we came from, what we are, where we think and pray and sometimes clearly glimpse that we are going) --

these are significant, small means always to a larger end: to remember who we are and what this life is for. And we'll go back soon, to our lives and our loves, to work we've chosen and work that's chosen is, perhaps more firmly tethered.

A woman writes:

My friends, do not lose heart. ... You are right in your assessments. The luster and hubris some have aspired to while endorsing acts so heinous against children, elders, everyday people, the poor, the unguarded, the helpless, is breathtaking. Yet I urge you, I ask you, I gentle you – to please not spend your spirit dry by bewailing these difficult times. Especially do not lose hope. ...the fact is we were made for these times... For years we have been learning, practicing, been in training for and waiting to meet on this exact plain of engagement.

The writer is Clarissa Pinkola Estes. She continues:

I grew up on the Great Lakes and recognize a seaworthy vessel when I see one. ... There have never been more able vessels in the waters than there are right now across the world. ... They are fully provisioned and able to signal one another as never before in the history of humankind. Look out over the prow; there are millions of boats... on the waters with you. The long-grained lumber [of your hull] comes from a greater forest and is known to withstand storms, to hold together, regardless.

... We are needed, that is all we can know. ... To display the lantern of [the] soul in shadowy times like these – to be fierce and show mercy toward others, both, are

acts of immense bravery and greatest necessity. Struggling souls catch light from other souls who are fully lit and wanting to show it. Stand up [on deck] and show your soul.

Each alone, and all together, may we stand up and shine our light.

BENEDICTION

from Mark Belletini

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.
Do not desire to be wealthier than your peers.
Practice forbearance.
Speak the truth, or speak not.
Take care of yourselves as bodies, for you are a good gift.

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.

(Singing the Living Tradition #686)