

Hillary Collins-Gilpatrick

Ministerial Intern

Follen Community Church

January 24, 2016

“Holy Hunger”

UU Communion Service

Call to Worship

Our opening words this morning come from the poet Denise Levertov.

“The world is not with us enough.

“O taste and see” the subway Bible poster said,

meaning The Lord, meaning

if anything, all that lives to the imagination’s tongue,

grief, mercy, language,

tangerine, weather, to breathe, bite,

savor, chew, swallow, transform into our flesh,

our deaths, crossing the street, plum, quince

living in the orchard and being

hungry, and plucking

the fruit.

In honor of January's monthly theme of "Bodies," this morning we will spend time reflecting on what we have, what we hunger for, and what nourishes our being. We will also offer a simple "communion" meal of water and bread. Everyone, of any religious belief and background, are welcome to take part in this meal, or not, as you wish. Despite the fact that we are not serving hot chocolate and warm waffles, I hope that you

can still taste and see all that is good through the ritual.

Reading from "I Sing the Body Electric," By Walt Whitman

I sing the body electric,
The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them,
They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them,
And discurrup them, and charge them full with the charge of the soul.

O my body!

I believe the likes of you are to stand or fall with the likes of the soul,
(and that they are the soul,)
Head, neck, hair, ears,
Eyes, eye-fringes, iris of the eye, eyebrows, and the waking or sleeping
of the lids,
Mouth, tongue, lips, teeth, roof of the mouth, jaws, and the jaw-hinges,
Nose, nostrils of the nose, and the partition,
Cheeks, temples, forehead, chin, throat, back of the neck,
Strong shoulders, scapula, hind-shoulders, and the ample side-round of
the chest,
Upper-arm, armpit, elbow-socket, lower-arm, arm-sinews, arm-bones,
Wrist and wrist-joints, hand, palm, knuckles, thumb, forefinger, finger-
joints, finger-nails,
Breast-bone, ribs, belly, backbone, joints of the backbone,
Hips, hip-sockets, hip-strength, inward and outward round,
Strong set of thighs, well carrying the trunk above,

Leg fibres, knee, upper-leg, under-leg,
Ankles, instep, foot-ball, toes, toe-joints, the heel;
The lung-sponges, the stomach-sac, the bowels,
The brain in its folds inside the skull-frame,
Sympathies, heart-valves, palate-valves, sexuality, maternity,
The womb, breast-milk, tears, laughter, weeping, love-looks,
The voice, articulation, language, whispering, shouting aloud,
Food, drink, pulse, digestion, sweat, sleep, walking, swimming,
Poise on the hips, leaping, reclining, embracing, arm-curving and
tightening,
The continual changes of the flex of the mouth, and around the eyes,
The skin, the sunburnt shade, freckles, hair,
The curious sympathy one feels when feeling with the hand the naked
meat of the body,
The circling rivers of the breath, and breathing it in and out,
The thin red jellies within you or within me, the bones and the marrow
in the bones,
O I say these are not the parts and poems of the body only, but of the
soul,
O I say now these are the soul!

Sermon

“Love your Body.” That was the title of the first sermon I ever preached. I delivered the message during a weekday chapel service while teaching at an Episcopal High School. At the end of it, I asked the gathered community, mostly teenagers, to say aloud, “I love my body, it’s a good body.” I asked them to repeat it again and again, until that timid self-consciousness that’s so prevalent with teenagers, wore off. I asked everyone to rise, not letting the equally self-conscious adults in the room get out of it either, and I asked them all to say it like they meant it. “I love my body, it’s a good body.” The reading from the prior morning’s chapel was from *Where the Wild Things Are*; “Say it like you’re starting a wild rumpus in here!” I exclaimed, “I love my body! It’s a good body!” “Like you really mean it! Like Beyonce would say it!” “I love my body, it’s a good body!”

Along this ministerial path, the question I keep asking asking colleagues, and keep asking myself, is “What’s your Gospel?” That is, what’s the good news you feel called to share publically with others? The question gleans lots of beautiful and insightful responses about sacred community, nature and divinity, and justice. Drawing nearer to the date when I will stand before the committee who ultimately decides if I am “fit for ministry” and ordination in the UU church, I’ve been spending a great deal of time reflecting on this Gospel of mine. I’ve realized that since writing that first sermon, my Gospel remains the same: “Love your body. It’s a good body.”

Our bodies. Really, they're all we have in this world. Literally, all that we can truly put our name on. And man, do they take a beating in this life. Not just from our culture, and our work, and the weather outside, they take a beating from us. So many people I know don't like their body. I don't blame them, in fact I'm one of them. It's no wonder really. We live in a world where the media only shows us air-brushed bodies, and a society that pressures us to fit perfectly into gendered boxes, and consumerist culture that teaches us that we are never enough as we are. We also share this world with people who spew hateful racist, sexist, homophobic and ableist speech daily, destructive words that lead to internalized discomfort and hatred for ourselves and others. It's so easy to dislike ourselves, , our bodies, the reasons not to seem infinite, and so easy to become biased about "good bodies" and "bad bodies." It's much harder to love our bodies, much harder to believe truly all bodies deserve love.

Which is so strange, when you really think about it. Cause, like I said, our body is all we really have. It's practically our soul, according to Walt Whitman. You would think that we would have the wherewithal to hold fast on our self-love, rather than being so quick to believe that we are bad because of our weight, our skin, our age, our desire, our appetite, our abilities, our class, our education, etc. etc. etc. But we don't hold on to loving ourselves. We deny ourselves love, in hopes that through denial we will achieve perfection. It reminds me of the story of the Buddha, and how when he first set out to get enlightened he thought that fasting would be the quickest route to the perfection of wisdom. So for six years he sat meditation and ate a grain of rice day. He lived this

way and experienced nothing but terrible pain. One day a woman passed by where he sat and approached him to offer him a bowl of milk and rice. He ate the food, thanked the woman, got up, went for a walk and achieved enlightenment later that day.

Denial of our needs, and love is one of our needs, does not lead to perfection.

So I preach this gospel, “Love your body, it’s a good body. “ Cause it’s the most radical thing I can think to say in this world, and the most challenging and spiritually enhancing lesson I can imagine putting into practice. To love our body, despite everything highlighting its imperfections, to believe it’s a good body, despite everything telling me it’s not as good as it could be, is the best work any of us can do with our lives. Why? Because it really is true that you must first love yourself, before you can truly love others.

A nun recently told me, until we love ourselves and believe we are inherently good, the love we feel for others will often manifest as a destructive desire for someone who can prove to us that we have worth and are worthy of being loved. When we truly love ourselves, we can love others unconditionally with much greater ease. We find peace in our lives and we have personal incentive to work on ourselves because we care and love ourselves. We do not expect others to fix us, and we do not get angry with them when they don’t give us what we want.

Love your body, it’s good for you and every body.

Where to start with this, well, there are lots of approaches. Our spiritual practice for the month of January is a body prayer that if done mindfully and intentionally, is a great way to witness the goodness of our bodies and all that they can do and symbolize. The alternative spiritual practice briefly mentioned last week – standing naked in front of your mirror and giving thanks for your body is also pretty great. (Though I recommend putting this one off until it warms up a bit out there.) Reading out loud “I Sing the Body Electric” and maybe even singing out loud the tune from fame and making up your own dance moves to go along with it, would be a fine daily practice to pump up your self-love. As would letting the wild rumpus of your good body begin by exclaiming “I love my body, it’s a good body” throughout your days.

Another practice is to participate in a ritual meal, with others or alone, wherein, simply, you feed yourself. You can take the purely humanist route on this practice and take the time to make yourself and perhaps others a meal with the pure intention of nourishing your hungry, deserving, good body. If you veer from humanism towards more of an esoteric or religious understanding of hunger and nourishment, I invite you again to partake in a ritual meal, but to visualize the food filling the void of your holy hunger, your desire for self love. Take the time to make yourself a meal, not just with the intention of feeding yourself because you are hungry at the end of the day, but because your body hungers for your love and attention. Make yourself a meal as though you were an honored guest at your table. Make yourself a meal so that you acknowledge the hunger that exists in you, and that ties all humans

together. If you do not have the resources to make yourself a wholesome, nourishing meal, I encourage you to contact Rev. Claire, and through the ministerial discretionary funds, and we can work to find a way to soothe your hunger this winter together. All bodies deserve love, all bodies are good, all bodies need to be fed.

This morning we will be offering Communion, a ritual meal of simple foods, bread and water, which together we will make holy through our intentions, our love for ourselves, and our love for each other.

For some a Communion meal is a sacrament, a sacred practice of remembering the life and good works of Jesus Christ, who, in his Last Supper with his disciples asked that they eat this bread and drink this wine in memory of him. For others taking Communion is a way of honoring the longstanding practice of sitting and eating a meal together. In this sense, the communion ritual becomes a ceremony that honors the universally shared experience of eating and drinking, with the added bonus of doing in a sacred space with a beloved spiritual community. For others communion can be a practice of giving thanks for community, for food and drink, for your spiritual life. In the morsel of bread you receive you can mindfully take in these all of elements, feel them, taste, and see, all that is good. I invite you today to participate in this ritual with an intention that best serves you, and your good body.

No matter religious background or beliefs, or gluten intolerance, all are welcome to this simple holy table, and likewise, no one is required to participate if they do not wish.

In a moment we will rise and say together the responsive reading written in your order of service. Following the reading, our deacons for the day will come to each row and pass down a basket of bread, we ask that you take a piece of bread from the basket and pass it to your neighbor. If you wish you can offer your neighbor a simple blessing of peace or love. There will be separate portion in each basket of rice cakes for those allergic to wheat. Please pass the basket back to your deacon and eat the bread in your own time. Following that passing of the bread, a deacon will again come to your row with a tray of water, simple, amazing, clean, lead free tap water – something to give endless thanks for in and of itself. When the deacon reaches your row, we ask that the person sitting on the end pass cups of water one-by-one down the row until everyone who wishes to drink, can do so.

I ask that once you have eaten bread and drunk the water you remain silent as others are fed, taking the time to reflect, pray, or honor stillness in your own way. Once everyone has been served I will offer a concluding prayer, and we will rise and sing our final hymn.

Please join with me in reading the bold type in our response prayer.

Responsive Prayer

(Edited from the Communion Liturgy used by First Parish Lincoln, MA)

Minister: I was hungry and you gave me food.

People: I was thirsty and you gave me drink.

Minister: I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

People: I was naked and you clothed me.

Minister: I was sick and you visited me.

People: I was in prison and you came to me.

Minister: We share bread because bread is a staple of life, and because as many grains of wheat are formed into one loaf, so many people have come together here as one congregation.

People: As we pass this bread, may it remind us that there are people who are hungry and who need our help.

Minister: We drink water to remember the deep mystery of the story we share as a people of faith.

People: As we pass this water, may we remember all those who thirst.

Minister: On this day we come to celebrate the living Spirit of God in the world, which surprises us, questions us, forgives us, and now invites us to this table.

People: We come to make peace.

Minister: The friendship we share this day is sacred.

People: The stillness we share this day is sacred.

Minister: I know that I am worthy. I know that I am welcome.

All: All are worthy. And all are welcome.

Concluding Prayer

Taste and see the world is good.

Taste and see that you are good.

Please offer your blessing on this sacred meal together by saying aloud,

I love my body, it's a good body.

Again.

Again.

Please rise as you are able and say with me,

I love my body it's a good body.

Like you mean it.

I love my body, it a good body.

Amen, Let the wild rumpus begin.