

Covenant Group session for April, 2018  
Follen Community Church, Lexington, MA

## MERCY

### CANDLELIGHTING AND OPENING WORDS:

The quality of mercy is not strained.  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

*The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare

### SILENCE

#### Check in:

1. Tell us about your experience with this month's spiritual exercise. (See below) Or,
2. Tell us about a time when you felt blessed in either giving or receiving mercy.
3. What is draining your spirit or lifting up your spirit?

**April Spiritual Exercise: Mercy** A favorite Bible verse of many Unitarian Universalists is the one from the book of Micah: And what does God require of you, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? --*Micah 6:8*  
Reflect: What does it mean to *love mercy*? How might you show a love of mercy in your daily life?

### SILENCE

#### MAIN READING: "Mercy"

Mercy is radical kindness. Mercy means offering or being offered aid in desperate straits. Mercy is not deserved. It involves absolving the unabsolvable, forgiving the unforgivable. Mercy brings us to the miracle of apology, given and accepted, to unashamed humility when we have erred or forgotten. Charge it to our heads and not our hearts, as the elders in black churches have long said.

Mercy, grace, forgiveness, and compassion are synonyms, and the approaches we might consider taking when facing a great big mess, especially the great big mess of ourselves – our arrogance, greed, poverty, disease, prejudice. It includes everything out there that just makes us sick and makes us want to turn away, the idea of accepting life as it presents itself, and doing goodness anyway, the belief that love and caring are marbled even into the worst life has to offer.

In many spiritual and wisdom paths, it is written that God created us to have company and to be God's loving eyes and hands on earth. But in certain African Christian catechisms it says that God created us because He thought we would like it.

This stops me in my tracks. We would like it? Yes, of course we like the friendly, warm, or breathtaking parts of life. But it's so hard for almost everyone here, the whole world over, let alone my own beloved. You cannot believe what the people I love most have lost this year. God thought we would like puberty, warfare, and snakes? I could go on and on – senescence, global warming, Parkinson's, spiders?

Yes, because in the words of Candi Stanton's great gospel song, "hallelujah anyway." Hallelujah that in spite of it all, there is love, there is singing, nature, laughing, mercy.

*Hallelujah Anyway: Rediscovering Mercy by Anne Lamott*

1. Sometimes everything really does seem to be a great big mess. How has mercy, compassion, or forgiveness, to others or yourself, helped you live this reality without giving up?
2. Think of a time when giving or receiving mercy affected your life? Big or small, fleeting or lasting – what is your story?
3. How did the Spiritual Practice extend, deepen, or relate to the main reading?

## **AFFIRMATIONS**

This is a time for the whole group to consider quietly what was experienced or spoken, to describe what might have shifted for you or someone else, or to express gratitude or appreciation for something that you or another person revealed or expressed. The purpose of this section is to reflect silently on what was moving or meaningful, and then to offer a single comment into the circle without further response or conversation.

**CHECKOUT – Like/Wish/Wonder:** This is a time to consider the experience we have had together, and share gratitude, appreciation, concerns, or ideas. Try to start your sharing with "I like..." "I wish..." or "I wonder..."

## **CLOSING WORDS:**

The first to apologize is the bravest. The first to forgive is the strongest. And the first to forget is the happiest. Author Unknown

**Until we meet again, let us go forth, sharing the gifts of Sacred Listening. The light within me honors the light within you. Go in peace.**

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE FOR MAY

### May – Beyond

This month's worship theme embraces the human hunger for *more*. UU theologian, Henry Nelson Wieman, once referred to this pull as "The Divine Lure." What do you yearn for? This exercise helps us pay attention to what we yearn for and what is luring us—divine or otherwise.

The instructions are simple. For a week, start and end each day filling in the blank to the following questions:

**"This morning, I yearn for today to contain more \_\_\_\_\_."**

**"Today left me yearning for more \_\_\_\_\_."**

Attached is a week's worth of blanks to fill in. Of course, you may find yourself wanting to write more than one blank line allows. If so, maybe a real diary is what you need.

Come to your group prepared to share how you filled in the blanks. Consider just reading the sentences as you completed them, before you explain or elaborate.

Have you ever experienced justice, mercy, and humility together, either given or received?  
How did that unfold?

How has giving or receiving mercy affected you spiritually? Think of a specific time. Tell us your story.

Think of a time when you gave or received mercy. How did that affect you?

What did the people you love most lose this year? Can you say hallelujah anyway?

How are love and caring marbled into the worst life has had to offer you? Can you accept life as it presents itself and do good anyway?

In spite of it all, there is love, singing, nature, laughing, mercy. How do such things help us to say "hallelujah anyway?"

The first to apologize is the bravest. The first to forgive is the strongest. And the first to forget is the happiest.

Anonymous

[www.nosweatshakespeare.com](http://www.nosweatshakespeare.com)