



UNIVERSALIST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF HAVERHILL

“Be Grateful, My Soul,”
a homily given by Julie Lombard
on June 21, 2015

On April 18th I went to Reading, MA to partake in a regional workshop to learn about the Future of Small and Medium Size Churches. I was there with ninety other UU's from five of the six New England states. There was a lot to consider and so the leader broke us into small groups to explore the questions we were supposed to think about. The groups were pre-determined and churches were linked with nearby churches, Haverhill sat with Danvers. That day, just over two months ago, I couldn't imagine that their church would be having a special congregational vote on this day about me serving them next year. Last Sunday, as beach balls bounced around this sanctuary, I was preaching in Danvers at North Shore UU Church. You could say it was the final part of my interview for the ministerial position there.

I preached a sermon I originally wrote for my home church last summer titled, “Return of Delight”. This sermon was one that took on a life of its own. I would preach it and requests to preach it elsewhere kept coming. I preached it six times before bringing it to Danvers. It was a sermon about what happens when a person's passion is cross-pollinated with their mission. It was about Delight Reese and how she earned UUCH's 2014 Unsung Hero Award. It seems fitting that today we honor this year's recipients of this same award- Cil and Sandra, perhaps their story will end up in another one of my sermons.

See, here, you all have been a great inspiration to me. You all have been my unsung heroes from Frank all the way to Delight. Like all unsung heroes, you may not have done what you did, taken me in as your intern, to be noticed. But when your intern is asked to serve another church before she is out of the oven, so to speak, it's because you are such good cooks. You may have not cooked up another intern because you wanted to be noticed, you did it because it's your passion crisscrossing with your mission. I am not your first intern and hopefully I will not be your last. You have a history of preparing folk for ministry. It is part of who you are, it's in your DNA, and it's your own call to ministry.

This learning laboratory is full of rich learning and excellent teachers. Where else will I find a church with a Drop-in Center & Food Pantry in its basement. Where else will I find a community that loves to reach out in love through community meals, 30 hour fast, through its service trip to Nicaragua, who is willing to take a Leap of Faith? Only in Haverhill will I find a beloved community that dares to strive and stretch itself to always meet the city's needs. This is a special place and it my soul will always be grateful for my time here.

The reading today is a poem written by Delight Reese. She shared with me her collection of poetry and this particular reading seemed appropriate for the image of me as your ministerial intern. As I took first took flight here, it was a wonder I could get off the ground. I was a flying puzzlement which defied logic- this woman who seems to laugh too easily and is too playful to become someone as serious as a minister. At times it must have been comical to watch as I bumbled along seeking to fulfill my sweet mission. I went about my learning moving along with the flow of your breeze, a one-stop shopper gathering a rich diet of church pollen and nectar.

And now with my stomach filled with your sweetness and my ministerial pollen baskets packet, it's time to take flight again. I might be a marvel of ministerial engineering, only God knows how I carry this load forward. Alas, God knows because as God called me to learn with you, I am also called to bring the gifts you have shared with me to North Shore UU. I leave on a steady course with golden treasures to my new home just down the road. You filled me with love that built me up and gave me courage to say, "Yes!" You are the garden from which I have grown, you are the flowers filled with the rich pollen and nectar that I will take to my next destination. Deep in the woods of Danvers there is a little church that stands in a garden of many trees. There in the shade of that forest is a bell from one of their earlier building that no longer stands. It still rings out the sound of times gone by as it stands nearby a modern cell tower. They don't have stained glass windows but they do have birds that nest in the windows and from those nest the birds come and worship with the human parishioners as turkeys court by the bell and fox creep trying to go unnoticed by the church youngsters. It may not be the same sort of Drop-in Center you host here, but it offers its own kind of sanctuary for the wild. It somehow seems apt that this bubbling Bombini Bombus would land there.

"Be grateful, my soul" are the tender words that touch me deepest from Dr. Capek's prayer that Bill read earlier during the Flower Communion Ceremony. I have altered a couple of pronouns and added a word or dropped two- "I have lived amidst eternity. Be grateful, my soul, my life in Haverhill was worth living. She who was pressed from all sides but remained victorious in spirit is welcomed into the choir of heroes. She who overcame the fetters giving wing to the mind is entering into a golden age." This golden age is sweetened by your generous nectar which this bee has turned into honey. It is my pleasure to share it with the wider world.

May our product nourish those who have longed for its taste. May we be blessed by our brief stretch together. Let us all be grateful souls for we have lived in this garden of Eden a life worth living.

May it be so. Amen.