

## **Reading and Sermon "Positively Loved" by Margaret Weis, January 2, 2014**

### **Reading: "Affirmation" by the Rev. Barbara Merritt**

It's time somebody told you that you are lovely, good and real; that your beauty can make hearts stand still.

It's time somebody told you how much they love and need you, how much your spirit helped set them free, how your eyes shine full of light. It's time somebody told you.

It's time somebody told you that with all your flaws and weaknesses, you are an extraordinary person, well-worth knowing.

No one - especially not God or the people who love you - expects you to live without making mistakes or stumbling occasionally.

It's time you looked at your own life with more kindness, gentleness and mercy.

It's time someone told you that you are not on this earth to impress anyone, to dazzle us with your success, to conquer all obstacles with your competence, or to offer one brilliant solution after another.

We are happy you are here with the rest of us struggling souls. We are all striving to be as faithful as we can be to the truth that we understand. No more is required.

It's time someone told you that the work you do to increase your capacity to love and to pay attention is more important than any other activity. As you advance closer to what is ultimately true and life-giving, you bless others.

It's time somebody told you how absolutely beautiful your laughter is. You bring joy into our world.

Just possibly, messages of love and acceptance have always been circulating in our midst. The hardest part is not seeking out these positive and creative affirmations that remind us that we are loved.

The hard part is taking in the love.

It's time someone told us all that we are valued and infinitely worthwhile.

And it's time we believed it.

## **Sermon: “Positively Loved”**

Recently, I came across a YouTube video about a series of science experiments involving rice. Perhaps some of you came across the same experiment? Now, these were not like some other food experiments you may have seen online about people keeping their McDonald’s happy meals for seven years and realizing that they are still edible – that would be cause for a whole different sermon!

This experiment was a little different. The doctor who performed these experiments was Dr. Masaru Emoto, and he’s done other experiments before. Dr. Emoto is known for his work in the area of intentions and the impact of words on energies or outcomes. Most notably he is known for his work with blessing water and altering its composition with the power of intention and words. His work with water shows the impact of positive energy to transform and heal the molecules in the water.

In this particular experiment, Dr. Emoto placed rice into three separate containers and covered the rice with water. On one container he wrote the words “thank you,” on another container he wrote the words, “you fool,” and on the third wrote no words ... nothing. For a month, Dr. Emoto spoke the words to the three containers. To the first, everyday, he would say “thank you.” To the second, he would say, “you fool.” And he ignored the third container altogether. He said each phrase with intention.

After 30 days, the container that was thanked looked like normal rice – white and relatively fluffy. It had even fermented and began to give off a pleasant aroma. The container that was told, “you fool” was brown and gray and had spores of mold on it. The third container, the one that had been ignored, was rotten and very dark and sticky.

If you’re like me, you’ll find these results interesting, surprising, and somewhat unbelievable! Lots of other folks found them unbelievable too! So, after watching the YouTube video of Dr. Emoto’s experiment, I scrolled through some others. Hundreds of people have attempted to recreate his experiment. Some used the same words and others adapted them somewhat, but the results came out the same way. Nearly all of the rice that was affirmed and spoken to with positive words and energy was cleaner and in better condition than those that had been verbally harmed or neglected.

So what does this all mean? What was the intention behind this experiment?

Dr. Emoto reflects on this experiment and what it might mean for our daily lives. He says that these results can be translated to the ways we treat our children. He says we must engage them in conversation, give thanks for their gifts, and show them they matter. He speaks to the power of our intentions and our words.

I tell you about this experiment because I agree with Dr. Emoto. That doesn’t mean that I don’t have questions or wonderings about this experiment. It doesn’t mean that I think intentions

and words tell the whole story of healing and growth, but it means that they play a significant role in that story.

Whether you believe this experiment to be good or not; true or not; factually based or not – the results are fascinating! Take a moment and remove the issues of technique and scientific method. Think simply on the overarching message.

What we say matters. The messages we give others, and perhaps more importantly, the messages we give ourselves, matter! These intentional words of encouragement, thanksgiving, and gratitude are not just essential for our children, but for people across the lifespan. This is a lesson in true engagement and authenticity in our relationships. It is also a lesson in taking things as they are and truly living into a sense of gratitude.

So, what if our thoughts really matter? What if we can help determine the outcomes of our lives?

I am currently serving as a chaplain at a large hospital in Connecticut. In my time there I have spent hours upon hours with patients and families in some of the most vulnerable times in their lives. I have witnessed moments of intense joy and wonder, and of immense sadness and loss. It has simply been one of the most amazing years of my life and my ministry. The resiliency of the human spirit continuously places me in a position of awe and wonder.

Oftentimes, in those moments of struggle and uncertainty, I am asked to pray. Now, as a lifelong Unitarian Universalist, this idea of prayer has been a struggle for me. I have wondered what that word means, for others and for myself, and I've wondered if my prayers really count! When I first started this journey in ministry, at first I thought, "surely there is another chaplain that is better equipped for this!" I mean, if I am with a Hindu family, or a Muslim family, or a Catholic family at the moment of their loved one's passing ... can my words really speak to that moment and its meaning?

And what I have learned is that they absolutely can. If my words are authentic, and true, and real... they can hold that space. This is speaking the truth in love. These prayers are bearing witness to the struggle and challenge of the human condition and the suffering and potential healing in our lives. Because, when it comes down to it, our struggles are the same.

Whether we believe in a god or not, or believe in salvation or not, or believe in heaven or not... we share our tears and our grief and our hearts breaking just the same. We might find our hope in different places, and have different containers for that hope that we call religion or faith, but the hurt is the same. That feeling of hurt, of brokenness, doesn't just exist in the waiting areas of Emergency Rooms or hospitals – it's here with us now. Each of us is carrying our own hurts and brokenness, our own moments of feeling stepped on or harmed.

I am a firm believer that we spend all too much time worrying about those hurts. We spend too much time worrying about where we fall short, or don't quite make it. In our competitive

culture we focus on how we measure up to others and how we can work to surpass them in our intellect, speed, or accomplishments. This idea that we can always be better, stronger, faster is slowly but surely making us feel like fools. Sure, I can appreciate some healthy competition as much as anyone else, but at the end of the day I want to feel like I am enough and my presence matters.

I am enough.

You are enough.

Whatever this life will throw at us, and things will inevitably be thrown; we are enough. We are beautiful and amazing creatures. It's about time we believed it!

Many years ago a religious educator named Sophia Lyon Fahs reinvented the approach to religious education in our movement. She transformed the way that folks thought about education. Rather than focusing mostly on teaching facts and ideas, Fahs challenged students to study themselves.

She said, "one of the tragic ironies of history is that such original and creative geniuses as Buddha and Jesus have been extolled as perfect patterns for all to emulate. In the very struggle to be like someone else rather than to be one's own true self, or to do one's own best in one's own environment, a child is in danger of losing the pearl that is really beyond price - the integrity of his (or her) own soul."

The integrity of his or her own soul.

Now, be assured that Reverend Fahs was not suggesting that we should not learn about and seek to understand such important religious figures as Buddha and Jesus. But she went a step further to ask all of us, and even the youngest among us, to seek to understand those figures through our own lens – through *our* lived experience.

As my fellow resident at the hospital, Marta, who is a Buddhist, would tell me, "we all have a true Buddha nature – if we only take the time to realize it." She has gone on to tell me about a 15<sup>th</sup> century Zen Buddhist saying that goes something like this: "we do not look at the moon and wish for more brightness, or look at the flower and wish for more color. So how it is that we look at one another and wish for more than is there."

In essence, if we approach life expecting everything to be more beautiful or more full, we miss the beauty and fullness that is right before our eyes. Here, in religious community, we have a tremendous opportunity – to speak the truth in love about one another and ourselves. We have the gift of intentional community. As Barbara Merritt notes in our reading this morning, "we are all striving to be as faithful as we can be to the truth that we understand. No more is required."

We are enough.

Because let's be honest here – there are so many things that can bring us down, and it is time somebody told you how beautiful and inherently wonderful you are.

I remember when I was little and in school and we would make folders in our class for Valentine's Day. We would spend what felt like hours decorating our red and pink construction paper "mailboxes" in preparation for the big valentine exchange that would happen in class. Everyone was expected to give a valentine to everyone else – so no one would feel left out. My favorite valentines were always the ones that were homemade. I loved the messages written in my friends' handwriting, with crossed out words and scribbles where mistakes had been made. And I loved making the cards for the other kids in my class.

We were told to write something nice about the person on their valentine – something we liked about them. And it might have been the first time in the school year – all the way in February – that I would let that quiet and shy boy in the second to last row know that I think he is funny, or tell the quirky girl with the mismatched socks that I wished I got to wear glasses too, because hers were really cool. And I would learn things about myself too – that someone who wrote in purple marker thought I was funny too, and another kid liked that I let him cut me in line for the water bubbler.

But, what I learned to like the most was that it was a chance for me to *see* every person in my class - even if it was fleeting - even if it didn't change the social dynamics. Because we want to know that we are loved. It is an inherent human need to feel connected and appreciated. We are each uniquely ourselves, with our failings and brokenness. We have quirks and hang-ups, and we even stumble sometimes. But we are lovely, and good, and real.

So, I challenge us to try our own experiment with this idea of honest and intentional words. This experiment does not involve rice or water or containers. It requires a pen and paper, or an email, or some other way of communicating with others.

The experiment I am suggesting has to do with being honest and open about the people in our lives who inspire us. So, I invite you to take a moment and think about a person who inspires you. Think of someone who makes you look at things from a different perspective. I'm not necessarily suggesting someone famous, or brilliant, or even considered "important" by society – but I guess someone like that could work. Think of a person you appreciate, and care about, and who makes you want to be the best version of yourself. Think of a few things you would want to say to them about how wonderful they are. Think of how they have made you feel, inspired you, challenged you, helped you change your perspective on the world or your place in it. Hold those thoughts in your heart.

When you go home today, or maybe in the next few days or weeks, write them a letter, or an email, or a post-it note and share these thoughts with them. Just as we appreciate the moon as fully bright and the flower as fully colorful - take this opportunity to appreciate them fully as the person they are, and to tell them why. I'll do it too. And let's see what happens. Let's see how things turn out.

These messages of gratitude, beauty, and hope are our prayers. They are the intentional placement of our energy and life source out into this world in hopes of fostering growth, love, and appreciation of our unique selves. These messages are speaking the truth in love. They help us see the Buddha nature in each of us – the integrity of our soul.

May we reach beyond ourselves and name the sources of beauty in our midst.

May we seek to appreciate the gifts in our lives – sometimes people, sometimes connections, but very rarely things.

May we speak our truth in love, connection, and community with one another.

May it be so. Amen. Blessed be.