



November Monthly Theme

WORTH-SHIP

the practice of holding what matters

The intention of the themed year is to help Unitarian Universalists build a robust spiritual and ethical vocabulary. The themes are points of departure for religious liberals seeking to think, speak and act theologically, prophetically and prayerfully. The themes reclaim religious language, casting old terms in a new key to deepen spiritual grounding and sharpen moral reasoning. More at: wbuuc.org/themes or sign up for a circle at wbuuc.org/classes.

QUESTIONS

Toward what do you lean in reverence that is larger than yourself?

What practices or places help you hold what matters?

In a busy world with so much information, how do you decide what matters enough to pay attention to and reflect on?

What matters most to you in this moment?

How do you determine your own self-worth?

QUOTES

We cannot think of being acceptable to others until we have first proven acceptable to ourselves.

- Malcolm X

I do know one thing about me: I don't measure myself by others' expectations or let others define my worth.

- Sonia Sotomayor

The moment I have realized God sitting in the temple of every human body, the moment I stand in reverence before every human being and see God in them - that moment I am free from bondage, everything that binds vanishes, and I am free.

- Swami Vivekananda

A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behoves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshiping we are becoming.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

POETRY

Worth For Ruben Ahoueya

Today in America people were bought and sold:
five hundred for a "likely Negro wench."
If someone at auction is worth her weight in gold,
how much would she be worth by pound? By ounce?
If I owned an unimaginable quantity of wealth,
could I buy an iota of myself?
How would I know which part belonged to me?
If I owned part, could I set my part free?
It must be worth something—maybe a lot—
that my great-grandfather, they say, killed a lion.
They say he was black, with muscles as hard as iron,
that he wore a necklace of the claws of the lion he'd fought.
How much do I hear, for his majesty in my blood?
I auction myself. And I make the highest bid.

- Marilyn Nelson

vii (gyfu)

A gift is the grace and praise of men
and warmth and worthship to all exiles
sustenance for him who is stripped of all else

- *Anonymous; translated by Miller Oberman*

If God said,
"Rumi, pay homage to everything
that has helped you
enter my
arms,"
there would not be one experience of my life,
not one thought, not one feeling, nor any act,
I would not bow to.

- Rumi

The Summer Day

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean-
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

- Mary Oliver

READINGS & EXCERPTS

...we live under the tyranny of things in space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation; from the world of creation to the creation of the world.

- Abraham Joshua Heschel

A Committee on Common Worship refers to the ancient English root of the word worship (woerscippen) which can be translated into “considering things of worth.” They said that the purpose of worship was to lift up the highest and holiest of human values...Within our [diverse liberal tradition] we are able to say: “Worship means praising, confessing, and discerning the word of God.” We are able to say: “Worship is a private transformation done in the context of corporate ceremony and ritual.” We are able to say “Worship is when we hold up things of worth and value. It is our link to the past and a gateway to our future.” We are able to say: “No matter what our definitno of worship might be, we have an embodied experience of being in worship together, and that is what is most important.”

- Wayne Arnason and Kathleen Rolenz, in *Worship That Works for Unitarian Universalists*

To make bread or love, to dig in the earth, to feed an animal or cook for a stranger—these activities require no extensive commentary, no lucid theology. All they require is someone willing to bend, reach, chop, stir. Most of these tasks are so full of pleasure that there is no need to complicate things by calling them holy.

And yet these are the same activities that change lives, sometimes all at once and sometimes more slowly, the way dripping water changes stone. In a world where faith is often construed as a way of thinking, bodily practices remind the willing that faith is a way of life.

- Barbara Brown Taylor, from An Altar In the World: A Geography of Faith

Unlike almost every other thing we take time to do on purpose, worship makes nothing, accomplishes nothing, sells nothing, yields nothing. It is its own end. In our liberal communion, it has no direct object; grammatically, the verb is intransitive. We don't worship anything, any single thing, but draw instead upon the oldest meaning of the word, from the Old English, *woerthscippe*, worth-ship: to consider that which is of worth, to hold that which is worthy. To remember what has worth, once a week, for a little while, together.

To honor what is worthy of honor, to notice what is worthy of notice, to grieve the losses and the sorrows that are worthy of our tears, to tell stories about and sing about, to celebrate, to draw closer to, be more mindful of, more alert to, what matters; to name, in the clearest possible language, with the best possible music, through the deepest possible silence, a few significant things.

Of the 168 hours in a week, we set one aside precisely for this work that is not exactly work, this activity that isn't very active (and yet nor is it passive), and which yields no product -- except sometimes a kind of deepening. A shifting of perspective. An interior transformation. A revelation. Sometimes, by luck or grace, there may come glimpses of something that's invisible; a sense of reassurance, or acceptance, or comfort or peace - peace of mind or peacefulness of spirit sufficient for the hours, days and week ahead. There may come gratitude, forgiveness, resolution. There may be felt an unwelcome and uneasy challenge to calcified conviction, or an unexpected stirring to more concerted courage, or a calling to more outrage, more actionable outrage, when outrage is what's needed in the world beyond the self.

These things are immeasurable, intangible. They are not felt by everyone at once. Worship for us is communal and yet essentially private; who knows how far anyone may travel between the Prelude and the Closing Words?

- Rev. Victoria Safford