



November 2017 Monthly Theme

BALANCE

the practice of grace

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

What does it mean to live a balanced life? Is it possible to live a balanced life? How do you know when you are not living a balanced life?

What is grace?

How does balance in the life of the spirit open you to the possibility of grace?

QUOTATIONS

Music nurtures the natural order of things. It does not compete or compare, it does not complain and explain. A spiral process, it flows through past, present and future. Blending but not forcing, bonding but not joining, balanced, it effects balancing.”

~ from *The Tao of Music* by John M. Ortiz

Balance is the keynote of spiritual attainment.

~ Hazrat Inayat Khan

Silence is balance.

~ Ohiyesa

Transformation requires balance.

~ Amy Schmidt

POETRY

The Peace of Wild Things

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's
lives may be,

I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the
great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief.

I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

~ Wendell Berry

We Are Movement

We are movement.
The rising of the sun and winding winds,
We dance along with the moon and waves.
We are the grace of sound.
We are the rise of hands and glide of feet.
We are movement.

~ Kudzai Mhangwa

Color and Light

Order. Design. Composition. Tone. Form.
Symmetry. Balance.

~ Stephen Sondheim

Balance

In life
one is always
balancing

like we juggle our mothers
against our fathers

or one teacher
against another
(only to balance our grade average)

3 grains of salt
to one ounce truth

our sweet black essence
or the funky honkies down the street

and lately i've begun wondering
if you're trying to tell me something

we used to talk all night
and do things alone together

and i've begun

(as a reaction to a feeling)
to balance
the pleasure of loneliness
against the pain
of loving you

~ Nikki Giovanni

READINGS & EXCERPTS

The Church Where Everything Goes Wrong by Elea Kemler

Six weeks into the church year, I have realized that I am the minister of a church where things usually go wrong. This morning the copy machine jams repeatedly. The bulletin describing the order of worship has been copied with the second page first and also upside down. No one has remembered to turn on the lights in the sanctuary before the service, so it is dark because it is raining outside. The microphone is buzzing and lets out a painful, high pitched squeal, which makes people wince. We have just started the service when someone runs up with a bunch of flowers for the altar, just as someone else runs in with one of the silk arrangements we keep for the mornings when no one brings real flowers. There is laughter as the two flower bearers meet at the altar. They decide on the real flowers, and things settle down for a while until a baby starts crying, which sets off another baby crying. I try to speak over the wailing as their fathers hustle them down the aisle and try to distract them in the back. Usually, I love watching the tall, gentle fathers who bounce their babies in backpacks at the rear of the sanctuary, but today I am annoyed because I want it to be quiet and holy and lovely and things are definitely not shaping up that way.

The woman who is helping with worship gets up and, instead of giving the announcements, introduces the candle-lighting time, which comes later. People call out, "Not yet!" More laughter. The organist starts playing the wrong hymn and a couple of choir members yell over the din for him to stop; a few minutes later, during the period for prayerful silence, he accidentally falls onto the keyboard, causing the organ to emit horrible, gassy noises. Shrieks and snorts of laughter. All pretense of Sunday morning decorum is lost and something inside me, some furious, bossy desire to have "my worship service" go according to my plan, finally slides free and I can laugh with them.

This will be the first of many times that I laugh at Sunday morning details gone awry. It is also the first of many times that I imagine that God is watching, looking up or down or over or out at us from wherever God sits on Sunday mornings, slightly amazed and maybe at a loss for words because we, God's people, are so funny and wonderful and odd all at the same time. In moments like these I imagine God as a sturdy old woman with her hands on her hips, or perhaps as a rabbi pulling on his long, white beard. I imagine a God shaking his or her head and saying, "What in the world are they doing over there? This is what they call church? What were they thinking?"

But I also imagine a God who is touched and maybe a little honored by our efforts, however halting, to worship and give praise. I imagine a God who is moved by our attempts to care for one another and to name the things we know as holy. There is a warmth in this congregation that is new to me, a simple friendliness that shines through the fumbblings and failures, a love that makes the ragged edges smooth. I have always wanted to believe, really believe, that our mistakes aren't the most important parts of us. I have always wanted to believe that kindness and compassion matter more than anything. I sense that I can learn this here.

Grace by Joy Harjo from *In Mad Love and War*

I think of Wind and her wild ways the year we had nothing to lose and lost it anyway in the cursed country of the fox. We still talk about that winter, how the cold froze imaginary buffalo on the stuffed horizon of snowbanks. The haunting voices of the starved and mutilated broke fences, crashed our thermostat dreams, and we couldn't stand it one more time. So once again we lost a winter in stubborn memory, walked through cheap apartment walls, skated through fields of ghosts into a town that never wanted us, in the epic search for grace.

Like Coyote, like Rabbit, we could not contain our terror and clowned our way through a season of false midnights. We had to swallow that town with laughter, so it would go down easy as honey. And one morning as the sun struggled to break ice, and our dreams had found us with coffee and pancakes in a truck stop along Highway 80, we found grace.

I could say grace was a woman with time on her hands, or a white buffalo escaped from memory. But in that dingy light it was a promise of balance. We once again understood the talk of animals, and spring was lean and hungry with the hope of children and corn.

I would like to say, with grace, we picked ourselves up and walked into the spring thaw. We didn't; the next season was worse. You went home to Leech Lake to work with the tribe and I went south. And, Wind, I am still crazy. I know there is something larger than the memory of a dispossessed people. We have seen it.

Accepting Grace by Mike George from *1001 Meditations*

There is sometimes a reluctance to receive because deep down we believe ourselves unworthy. Yet we are all entitled to receive grace (special gifts that we feel we have done nothing to deserve) simply by virtue of who and what we are —spiritual beings in human form. Trust in the abundance of the world around you and know your true worthiness. Receive all gifts with joy and gratitude. In doing so you allow the flow of grace to continue as you give back to others the joy you have received.

RESOURCES FOR YOUTH

Peaceful Piggy Meditation by Kerry Lee MacLean

Master of Mindfulness: How to Be Your Own Superhero in Times of Stress by Laurie Grossman

The Thankful Book by Todd Parr

Sitting Still Like a Frog : Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (and Their Parents) by Eline Snel