

Interfaith Thanksgiving Eve Service
by the Rev. Ann Schranz
Claremont Interfaith Council Thanksgiving Eve Service
November 25, 2009

How wonderful to be together at this annual Thanksgiving interfaith service! Present in our midst are people of many faiths, as well as people who are ambivalent about faith. Welcome to one and all. My name is Rev. Ann Schranz, and I serve Monte Vista Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Montclair. Unitarian Universalism draws from these sources of wisdom:

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life
- Jewish and Christian teachings in particular, which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit
- Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions, which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct people to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature

This evening, we take time for reflection in a setting of notable religious and philosophical diversity. Thankfully, we need not think alike in order to love alike, to use the phrase of the 16th century religious leader Ferenc David.¹ Our ability and willingness to love alike whether or not we think alike has great impact on the world.

¹ Ferenc David of Transylvania in the 16th century: "We need not think alike to love alike." See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferenc_D%C3%A1vid.

Perhaps you know the traditional story of the ferocious dog. It is a story from India. “There was once a perfectly normal little dog – neither fierce nor timid. One day, this little dog wandered off to a nearby fairground and found itself inside the hall of mirrors. The little dog took one look around and saw hundreds of dogs staring back at it.

Terrified at being so surrounded, it began to bark and to bare its teeth. To its horror, every one of the hundreds of other dogs did the same. Suddenly the ordinary little dog was in the midst of a hostile army of strange and fearsome looking animals. Its barking grew even more frantic and its growl more vicious. It tried to bite the other dogs, but as soon as it got near to them, they too growled and tried to bite.

This might have gone on all night, but the little dog’s owner came looking for it. As soon as the little dog caught sight of its owner and heard the familiar call, it began to wag its tail and jump up and down for joy. And yes, all the other dogs did the same. And the little dog went home thinking that perhaps the big, wide world was not quite as terrifying as it had first thought.”²

Religious maturity includes attending to the surface dimension and to the depth dimension of life -- behavior and intention, action and reflection. It comes down to this: How deeply do we long to be in conversation with one another? This longing to be in conversation with one another is important because there is far more in our lives than meets the eye. To act and reflect in solitude or isolated among those who share our beliefs is to run the risk of seeing little except for our own reflections in a hall of mirrors. To act and reflect in the company of others is to run a different risk. It is to run the risk of calling forth greater religious depth in ourselves and in others.

Unitarian Universalist minister Peter Tufts Richardson speaks of this depth in his poem “Far More than Meets the Eye”:³

² *One Hundred Wisdom Stories from Around the World* edited by Margaret Silf, The Pilgrim Press, Cleveland, Ohio, 2003, p. 108.

³ *Sunday Meditations for Liberal Religious Worship* by Peter Tufts Richardson, Red Barn Publishing, Rockland, Maine, 2009, p. 101. See <http://www.redbarnrockland.com/>.

“There is far more in our lives than meets the eye.
We live in a small part of all which we know.
Beneath our conscious existence
stretches a vast universe of human experience,
emerging from fathomless time.

There is far more than meets the eye:
beyond horizons of Earth’s atmosphere,
beyond where gravity’s pull is lightened,
great systems open in outer space.

There is far more than meets the eye.
Within the brain are endless dendrites
stretching further than the Milky Way;
and behind the brain, the mind.

There is far more than meets the eye
in simple human feeling,
in love, the gaze of the lover upon the beloved
carries numberless waves of awareness, in time.

There is far more than meets the eye
as a mountain stream flows smoothly like ribbon candy,
one continuous band of water folding
over rocks innumerable.

There is far more than meets the eye.
Leaves turning brilliant into burning orange,
falling into currents of wind, carried, churning,
are crushed beneath feet into numberless grains of soil.

There is far more than meets the eye.
Through the southern window pours a yellow beam of sunlight.
Children know this transformation of the unseen,
gazing in rapt fascination at millions of dust motes whirling.

There is far more than meets the eye
when the human voice sings alleluia,
the breath flowing along inward passages
and the song flowing through cadences of melody.

There is far more than meets the eye.
Who can imagine the emergence of God,
beyond the flow of gratitude, beyond evolution or even love?"⁴

In this season of gratitude, may we be open to what may lie beyond the flow of gratitude, beyond evolution or even love. May we long to be in conversation with each other, to know and to be known, to understand and to be understood. We need not think alike to love alike. May it be so!

⁴ *Sunday Meditations for Liberal Religious Worship* by Peter Tufts Richardson, Red Barn Publishing, Rockland, Maine, 2009, p. 37.