

JOURNEYS

Theme Packet for January 2015

The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough

the Holy



*The doors of the temple stand open, night and day, before every person,
and the oracles of truth cease never.*

The holy cannot be received second-hand.

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

If you've picked this up in a hard copy, and would like to receive these monthly packets by email, sign up to be on UFP's email list, by sending a request to unitarianchurch@cogeco.net.

WONDERINGS *on the theme of* The HOLY

I don't know what it means to be holy, and I'm not sure what the word holy means. We use the word 'holy' in all kinds of ways (as indicated in the border around this page.) But as I've grappled with the word in preparation for January's theme, I realize that I'm pretty clueless.

'Holy' is an adjective, and so it makes sense that it is used as a qualifier, a descriptor...and some of the long list of possible definitions are below, but they seem to indicate how it is used, not really what it means. And, our theme is "THE holy" which makes it into a noun...an object, a thing, a being, an essence, a quality. But I still don't know what it really means. What makes something or someone holy? Who determines holiness? How do we recognize THE holy?

In a sermon called "Home of the Holy," Rev. Thom Belote tells the story about a youth group 'confessing' to him that they had egged the church building. They were worried about what was going to happen...not in the usual way of punishment or consequences, but because they sensed there was something sacred about a church building, and were feeling uneasy about what they'd done. Even as UU youth, they wondered if maybe this might make God angry. You can read more about it here: <http://revthom.blogspot.ca/2013/04/sermon-home-of-holy-delivered-4-7-13.html>

But there's nothing inherently holy about a building, right? So, what makes something holy?

The UU musician Peter Mayer has written a lovely song called "Holy Now." David Berger has sung it several times here in Peterborough, and there's a link to Peter singing it on the resources page. He sings about how in his childhood, holy things were relegated only to Sunday school and church, but now, now everything is holy...reading the question in a child's face, another new morning come, seeing a little red wing bird shining like a burning bush and singing like a scripture verse....everything is holy now.

In Mayer's interpretation, it would seem that the holy is something that we create through the way that we see something, or notice something.

But what is The Holy? Simply a mystery? I'm looking forward to exploring this with you in the weeks ahead.

Embracing life, and the holy, with inquiry and wonder,

Julie

ho·ly

adjective \ ' hō-lē \

1. religious or morally good; Living or undertaken with highly moral or spiritual purpose; saintly
2. worthy of complete devotion or regarded as deserving special respect or reverence
3. having a spiritually pure or divine quality
4. Regarded with veneration or specified for a religious purpose
5. Belonging to, derived from, or associated with a divine power; sacred
6. inspiring fear, awe, or grave distress
7. used in phrases that show surprise or excitement—often as a mild oath

Origin of HOLY: the Old English word *hāhlig*, an adjective derived from *hāl* meaning "whole" and used to mean "uninjured, sound, healthy, entire, complete".

STORIES *about* The HOLY

This tells of an historical incident that dates from a little over two thousand years ago, from the year 63 BC.

The mighty Roman Empire was reasserting its sway in dominating the Middle East. The little Jewish state, which had only recently become precariously independent, put up a surprisingly stiff resistance to Pompey, the Roman general. But his powerful army eventually crushed this opposition, the city walls of Jerusalem were breached, and the Romans poured in.

There remained only the inner citadel, the fortified Temple Hill on top of which stood the Temple itself, the centre of the people's life and religion. After a desperate struggle this too was taken by storm and Pompey stood at the doors of the Temple.

Inside, he knew, was the secret of the stubborn resistance these people had put up against such overwhelming odds. Like the other nations he had conquered, they had put their hope and trust in their particular god as their defender. What, he wondered, would this god be like? A massive human form, or one of the fantastic animal forms as in the temples of Egypt? He gave the signal, his men broke down the doors, and he strode in.

They moved through the outer courts and into the inner court, the place of sacrifices to be entered only by the priests. Beyond it lay the Holy of Holies, screened by heavy curtains and to be entered only by the High Priest on the most solemn of occasions. The Romans went over to the great curtains, swept them aside, and Pompey walked boldly in.

A gasp went up from everyone as they saw what was inside.

No image, not even a picture. Nothing. The Holy of Holies was totally empty, and there was no evidence that it had ever been otherwise. This great Temple that had been defended so tenaciously had only empty space in the middle. Void.



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_of_Holies

This second story was found in the resources provided by "Soul Matters", a UU collective for Theme Based Ministry. The story has no title, or any further information about its author. But I think this very personal story tells of a particularly holy perspective on the realities of life

Some months ago my wife delivered twin sons one minute apart. The older is Joseph and the younger is Liam. Joseph is dark and Liam is light. Joseph is healthy and Liam is not. Joseph has a whole heart and Liam has half. This means that Liam will have two major surgeries before he is three years old. The first surgery-during which a doctor will slice open my son's chest with a razor, saw his breastbone in half. And reconstruct the flawed plumbing of his heart -is imminent.

I have read many pamphlets about Liam's problem. I have watched many doctors' hands drawing red and blue lines on pieces of white paper. They are trying to show me why Liam's heart doesn't work properly. Blue lines are for blood that needs oxygen. Red lines are for blood that needs to be pumped out of the heart. I watch the markers in the doctors' hands. Here comes red, there goes blue. The heart is a railroad station where the trains are switched to different tracks. A normal heart switches trains flawlessly two billion times in a life; in an abnormal heart, like Liam's, the trains crash and the station crumbles to dust.

There are many nights just now when I tuck Liam and his wheezing train station under my beard in the blue hours of night and think about his Maker. I would kill the god who sentenced him to such awful pain, I would stab him in the heart like he stabbed my son, I would shove my fury in his face like a fist, but I know in my own broken heart that this same god made my magic boys, shaped their apple faces and coyote eyes, put joy in the eager suck of their mouths. So it is that my hands are not clenched in anger but clasped in confused and merry and bitter prayer.



QUESTIONS for reflection on The HOLY

- Do you seek out experiences of the holy, or even notice them when they come along?
- Is there anything you regard as holy? What is it? Where is it found, or where do you keep it? What do you call it?
- When was the last time you felt you were standing on holy ground? Were you altered by it? Have you ever been 'wholly dissolved' by an experience of the holy?
- How does the holy make itself known? Sound? Voice? Presence? What sensations do you feel when you are aware of the holy? Tingling? Fear? A gasp?

I talk to God more than I admit. "Why did you break my boy?" I ask. I gave you that boy, he says, and his lean brown brother, and the elfin daughter you love so. "But you wrote death on his heart," I say. I write death on all hearts, he says, just as I write life. This is where our conversation always ends, and I am left holding the extraordinary awful perfect prayer of my second son, who snores like a seal, who might die tomorrow, who did not die today.

~ Brian Doyle

INSPIRATIONS *on* THE HOLY

Study how water flows in a valley stream,
smoothly and freely between the rocks. Also
learn from holy books and wise people.
Everything - even mountains, rivers, plants and
trees - should be your teacher.
~Morihei Ueshiba

Reason, observation, and experience; the holy
trinity of science. ~Robert Green Ingersoll

Never lose a holy curiosity. ~Albert Einstein

Just to be is a blessing. Just to
live is holy.
~ Abraham Joshua Heschel

Anybody can observe the
Sabbath, but making it holy
surely takes the rest of the
week. ~Alice Walker

We don't need holy wars. What
we need is tolerance and
brotherhood and simple
humanity. ~Arlen Specter

If there is a God, the phrase that
must disgust him is - holy war.
~Steve

Allen

Plant the love of the holy ones within your spirit;
don't give your heart to anything, but the love of
those whose hearts are glad. ~Rumi

Each of us has an inner room where we can visit to
be cleansed of fear-based thoughts and feelings.
This room, the holy of holies, is a sanctuary of light.
~ Marianne Williamson

When I sing, it's the most solitary state: just me,
and the microphone, and the holy spirit. It's not
about notes or scales, it's all about emotion.
~ Sinead O'Connor

Did you hear it? she asked and I shook my head no
and then she started to dance and suddenly there
was music everywhere and it went on for a very
long time and when I finally found words all I
could say was thank you.
~ "Unheard Music," Brian Andreas

A holy day, after all, is a day for considering
everything you otherwise think too little about.
~Pico Iyer

I'm a holy man minus the holiness. ~E. M. Forster

It is the chief joy of all holy beings to witness the
joy and happiness of those around them.
~Ellen G. White

I knew the profanity used up and down my street
would not go over the air... So I trained myself to
say 'Holy Cow' instead. ~Harry Caray

Dreams grow holy put in action.
~Adelaide Anne Procter

Man makes holy what he believes. ~Ernest Renan

“**However many
holy words you
read, however many
you speak, what
good will they
do you if you do
not act on upon
them?**”

Buddha
Saturday - Sep 15, 2012 (11:25 pm)

We do not create marriage from
scratch. Instead, in the elegant
language of the marriage ceremony,
we 'enter into the holy estate of
matrimony.' ~Nancy Pearcey

Now celebrity has taken on a holy
status all of its own, and we look to
the stars to provide us with the
transcendental experience that was
once achieved through religion.
~ Alison Jackson

Listening moves us closer, it helps
us become more whole, more
healthy, more holy.
~Margaret J. Wheatley

There are times when the art world seems like a
religious empire. There are great cathedral galleries
and pilgrimage sites where treasured art pieces are
displayed like holy relics, and this can certainly be
a great pleasure on a rainy Sunday afternoon.
~Michael Leunig

Yes, I was born in Coney Island. The Holy Land.
~Arlo Guthrie

Joy is the holy fire that keeps our purpose warm
and our intelligence aglow. ~Helen Keller

As a white candle in a holy place, so is the beauty
of an aged face. ~ Joseph Campbell

The holy time is quiet as a nun. Breathless with
adoration. ~ William Wordsworth

Love is so holy, so confusing. It makes a man
anxious, tormented. Love, how can I define it?
~ Gao Xingjian

For everything that lives is holy, life delights in life.
~William Blake

PRACTICING THE HOLY

1. Creating the Holy

A kindergarten teacher asked one of her students what she was drawing a picture of. The little girl said, "I'm drawing a picture of God." The teacher replied, Oh, honey, nobody knows what god looks like." Without missing a beat, the little girl replied, "They will in a minute."

The holy is alternately described as a void and wholeness, both beyond us and found within. Do an art project, or write a poem, that tries to capture the conundrum that is 'the holy'. Or, capture the holy on your phone, or camera. Over the next few weeks take a handful of pictures of 'the holy'. This might be snapping a picture of a child's face mesmerized by a snowfall. Think about that perfect sunset or a clear night sky splashed with stars. Or an intimidating wall of clouds rolling in and making way for a storm. Or maybe it's just sneaking into your 5-year-old son or grandson's room and snapping a shot of his face while he sleeps.



After you've 'created the holy', spend some time before looking for identifying traits. What about it/them reflects your unique definition of the holy? Consider sharing your artwork and what it's taught you.

2. Take A Walk Until the World Lights Up

You might want to start early in the morning or in the evening right after dinner. You could also set aside a Saturday afternoon. But whenever you start, your one rule is that you can't stop until the holy has crossed your path. In a sense, this exercise is an act of faith – faith that the holy is scattered all over the place waiting for us to notice it rather than believing that it is this rare thing that only shows up a precious few times in our lives.

Is there a particular place that you consider holy? Go there.

Keep yourself open, through all of your senses, for experiences of the holy. Look for the sacred portals...the ways through which the holy speaks and reaches out to you. Where are you? How did you come into the presence of the holy? You might want to pick, or create, something that symbolizes that access point, that sacred portal.

3. Namaste

This greeting is used to express the ability to see the divine in another person... "Namaste. I see the holy in you." Practice saying this aloud, or in silence, to everyone you meet. Look for the holy in them. What does it look like? Does it change anything for you to believe each person contains a spark of holiness?

Resources on THE HOLY

On the Web

Existential Bummer (transcience):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yb-OYmHVchQ>

Awe: Does the experience of awe create a sense of the holy?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRNqhi2ka9k>

Murmuration Is this a holy moment?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRNqhi2ka9k>

The Burning Bush scene from The Prince of Egypt

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5BQWubuC8g>

Music

Holy Now, Peter Mayer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KiypaURysz4>

Books

Breakfast at the Victory: The Mysticism of

Ordinary Experience by James Carse

A Private History of Awe by Scott Russell

When God is Gone, Everything is Holy: The

Making of a Religious Naturalist by Chet Raymo

Dawn Light: Dancing with Cranes and Other

Ways to Start the Day by Diane Ackerman

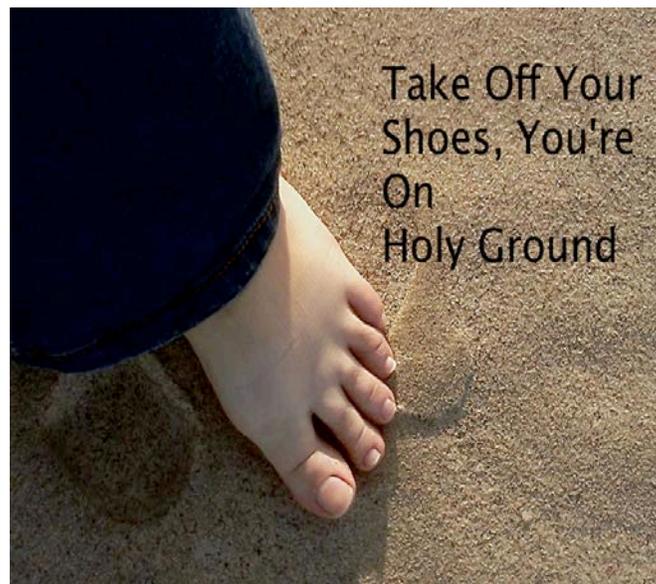
An Altar in the World by Barbara Brown Taylor

On The Threshold: Home, Hardwood, and Holiness

by Elizabeth Jarrett Andrew

Movies

- *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975- PG) King Arthur and his knights embark on a low-budget search for the Grail, encountering many very silly obstacles.
- *Rivers and Tides: Andy Goldsworthy Working with Time* (2001, Documentary, Germany) Portrait of Andy Goldsworthy, an artist whose specialty is ephemeral sculptures made from elements of nature.



www.gopixpic.com

- *John Brown's Holy War* (2000 - TV Docu) Tells of the entire life of Brown and chronicles his evolution from an ordinary guy to a rabid abolitionist--one who was willing to kill or even foment revolution to end this evil institution. (*The American Experience: Season 12, Episode 10*)
- *Brothers...on Holy Ground* (2004 NR, Documentary) Filmmaker Michael Lennon sat down with over a dozen firefighters, a dispatcher, a few Manhattan residents, and a handful of 9/11 widows. With utter simplicity, each of the participants telling his or her story.
- *The Klezmatics: On Holy Ground* (2010, Poland, NR Documentary) An engaging portrait of some remarkable musicians and of the improbable careers they've managed to make for themselves. The music is the main thing, as it should be.
- *In the Light of Reverence* (2001, Documentary) Tells the story of three indigenous communities and the lands they struggle to protect: the Lakota of the Great Plains, the Hopi of the Four Corners area, and the Winnemem Wintu of northern California.

Children's Books on
THE HOLY

The Velveteen Rabbit by Margery Williams
and William Nicholson
*Holy Crocodile!: Stories of Saints and the
Animals Who Helped Them* by Caroline Cory
Somewhere by Jane Baskwill
Charlotte's Web by E.B.White
The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-
Exupery
Winnie the Pooh by A.A.Milne
The Stars Will Still Shine by Cynthia Rylant
(a New Year's Book)

Chalice Lighting on THE HOLY

We light this chalice in the spirit of
devotion and with an attitude of reverence,
that we may we find in this sacred time
the grace we need to love ourselves,
our beloved community, and our world.

May the Holy meet us in this place
and guide our hearts and souls in our
search

for truth and understanding.

May we rejoice and be present in this holy
place during our time together.

~ Christopher A. Rothbauer (adapted)

Table Grace on THE HOLY

Spirit of Life and of Love,
As we sit down to eat, we are aware of life's
recipes; of how we are made of "carbon,
hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen, a little calcium,
a dash of sulphur, a light dusting of other very
ordinary elements . . . and that's all."

We are both miraculous and mundane.

We live in a world too immense to begin to
imagine, yet we are made of particles
too small to conceptualize.

We give thanks for these little lives of ours, and
for the "holy recipe box of world" which offers
us family, friends, clean water,
and exquisite natural beauty.

We give thanks... for hands that can make and
break bread and a mind that,
albeit unscientifically,
can contemplate the heavens.

Amen.

Inspired by This Little Life of Mine,
by Julie Parker Amery

<http://www.uuworld.org/2005/03/affirmation.html>

Next month's theme: **VULNERABILITY**
Do you have ideas for resources?
A favourite novel, blog, poem, or movie?
Maybe you've taken a photo or done some artwork
for the front page?

Email your suggestions to
unitarianchurch@cogeco.net

*Thanks to all who helped create this packet by
writing text, suggesting resources, offering artwork,
sharing their words, and providing feedback!*

*We subscribe to "Soul Matters" a curriculum from
Rev. Scott Taylor. Service Leaders and Covenant
Group Facilitators work with Rev. Julie Stoneberg
to incorporate the theme into our programming &
Sunday Services.*

Would you like to share your talents?

The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
Sunday Services @ 10am @ 775 Weller St
www.peterboroughunitarian.ca
unitarianchurch@cogeco.net
705-741-0968
Sunday Service at 10am