

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY SERVICE  
UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP OF PETERBOROUGH  
MARCH 11, 2018

**DECLARATION**

~ *Clarissa Pinkola Estés*

"I once dreamt I was telling stories and felt someone patting my foot in encouragement. I looked down and saw that I was standing on the shoulders of an older woman who was steadying my ankles and smiling up at me.

I said to her, "No no come stand on my shoulders, For you are old and I am young."

"No no" she insisted, "this is the way it is supposed to be."

I saw that she stood on the shoulders of a woman far older than she, who stood on the shoulders of a woman even older, who stood on the shoulders of a woman in robes, who stood on the shoulders of another soul, who stood on the shoulders..."

**OPENING WORDS**

~ *Jennie McCain Peterson*<sup>1</sup>

We seem to stand, upon the borders of  
An unknown world, where life takes on  
A grander meaning, Where chains of circumstance  
No longer bind the human soul, but, free to work  
In fields of knowledge, truth and usefulness,  
It gathers riches that we know not of;  
And deep within the recesses of being,  
We feel the power to be the soul we dream.  
The acorn, in its mossy bed, might dream,  
That o'er the spot where then it slept,  
A mighty oak had grown;  
That in its branches, wild birds built their nests,  
And squirrels leaped from branch to branch,  
And gathered in their winter's store of food;  
That under its protecting arms, the flocks and herds,  
Found shelter from sun and storm;  
And, 'neath its welcome shade, the traveler paused  
To cool his brow and rest his weary limbs.  
Years pass and where the acorn slept the oak has grown,  
And in its branches wild birds build their nests,  
And squirrels leap from bough to bough,  
And flocks, and herd, and traveler, all are there,

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<sup>1</sup> Jennie McCain Petursson is one of the women highlighted in a book about unsung women in Canadian UU history. Jennie, along with her husband Bjorn Petursson, founded the First Icelandic Unitarian Society in Winnipeg in 1891.

A grand fulfillment of the acorn's dream.<sup>2</sup>

This morning, let us feel the power to be the soul that we would dream to be...to build a world where every girl, every woman, every person can find that grand fulfillment.

**STORY FOR ALL** *Wangari's Trees of Peace* ~ Jeanette Winter

*(This is the true story of a woman who began planting seedlings to restore the forests of Kenya. Her efforts led to the planting of 3 million trees, restoring the green canopy after years of clear-cutting.)*

**READING** ~ adapted from a prayer by Rev. Victoria Weinstein

We reflect in thanksgiving this day for all those whose lives have nurtured ours.

The life-giving ones, who heal with their presence, who listen in sympathy

Who give wise advice ... but only when asked for it.

We are grateful for all those who have held us gently in times of sorrow

Who have celebrated with us our triumphs -- no matter how small

Who praised us for taking risks, who took genuine pride in our success,

and who expressed genuine compassion when we did not succeed.

On this day that honors women

let us remember those who, from somewhere in their being,

have freely and wholeheartedly given life, and sustenance, and vision to us.

May we in turn be granted life-giving ways...

strength for birthing, and a nurturing spirit,

that we may take attentive care of our world,

our communities, and those precious beings

entrusted to us by biology, or by destiny, or by friendship, fellowship or fate.

Give us the heart of a woman today.

## **WOMEN NURTURE**

Who has nurtured you? Who has affirmed your very being? Did you happen to pick up a card about a woman who exemplifies nurturance? If you would like to say a few words about a woman who personifies that nurture for you, from your personal life, or the woman whose card you hold<sup>3</sup>, I invite you to come now to speak. We have time for maybe three people to share.

*(Becky Wood shared a story and a song about a woman who has nurtured her.)*

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<sup>2</sup> As quoted in *Invisible Influence: Claiming Canadian Unitarian and Universalist Women's History*; Jean Pfleiderer, Heather Fraser Fawcett, and Kathy Sage, Editors, (Kingston Unitarian Press, 2011) p.73

<sup>3</sup> Short bios of influential women, taken out of the books "Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls" were handed out to everyone present. All were invited to come to share a story. In addition, in each section, one prepared story was shared.

Steph Curtin said of these books: "I first heard of these books from an ad that Amy Poheler posted on her smart girls page on Facebook. The books are meant to inspire young girls with the stories of extraordinary women. And each book is packed with bedtime stories about the life of 100 extraordinary women from the past and present, illustrated by 60 female artists from all over the world. Each story is written in the style of a fairy tale...but empowering."

## WOMEN INSPIRE

One might wonder why, in this day and age, after so much as been accomplished, we would dedicate a service to International Women's Day. Canada is currently 18<sup>th</sup> among 159 world countries<sup>4</sup> in gender equality...an index measured by three factors...reproductive health, empowerment and economic status. 18<sup>th</sup> is not bad by some lights, especially when noted that Afghanistan is #154 of 159 (I'm so thankful that we are currently sponsoring three women from Afghanistan.) But, we are 10<sup>th</sup> in the human development index...which if all things were equal, ought to mean that we placed 10<sup>th</sup> in gender equality as well. That's quite a discrepancy...from 10<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>. Not to mention the continually unfolding revelations in the #MeToo movement, and the very appropriate anger behind the #TimesUp crusade. And, as we know, there are hundreds of missing and murdered Aboriginal women; the lack of attention paid by authorities, is a glaring example of injustice and violence being done to women in this country.

As there is not gender equality in our country, there continues to be much work to be done. Unitarian Universalism draws wisdom and inspiration, values and moral guidance, from several sources, one of which is, the "Words and deeds of prophetic people who challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love."

Having noted women who have nurtured and supported us, we pay attention now to those women who, by their example, by their work, by the risks they have taken, have inspired us. Who is it that has inspired you? If you would like to say a few words about a woman who personifies that inspiration for you, from your personal life, or the woman whose card you hold, I invite you to come now to share. Again, we have time for maybe three people to speak. (*Casey Summers shared about how Harriet Tubman has inspired her.*)

## WOMEN LEAD

Women do inspiring things. Their prophetic words and deeds have broken down many systems of injustice, and women who lead take us to places where we have been afraid to go, or have not thought to go. Who exemplifies that leadership for you? How have they done that? If you would like to say a few words about a woman who personifies leadership for you...again from your personal life, or about woman whose card you hold, I invite you to come now to speak.

(*Steph Curtin shared her respect for the work and leadership of Oprah Winfrey.*)

## READING

~ Beverly Harrison<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/table-4-gender-inequality-index>

<sup>5</sup> Beverly Wildung Harrison was a professor of ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, where she taught for thirty-four years. She was a feminist and a theologian. Professor Harrison died in 2012. Excerpts taken from Beverly W.

...Since the nineteenth century we have been taught to believe that women are, by nature, more passive and reactive than men...

If we modern women acquiesce in the seductive invitation to think of ourselves primarily as onlookers, as contemplators, as those who stand aside while men get on with the serious business of running the (public) world, we should at least recognize what a modern “number” we are doing on ourselves! ...

Women have been the doers of life-sustaining things, the “copers,” those who have understood that the reception of the gift of life is no inert thing, that to receive that gift is to be engaged in its tending, constantly...

Our world, and our faith, is transformed, for good or ill, through human activity. A feminist moral theology needs to root its analysis in this realm of radical moral creativity. Such freedom is often abused, but the power to create a world of moral relations is a fundamental aspect of human nature itself...

We dare not minimize the very real historical power of women to be architects of what is most authentically human. We must not lose hold of the fact that we have been the chief builders of whatever human dignity and community has come to expression.

## STORY

There's one more story that I want to lift up.

Buffalo Calf Road Woman was Cheyenne. When settlers and government soldiers were trying to take their land, she took her gun and joined the men to fight back. Some protested because she was a woman, but she had already charged into battle. During the fight, she saw that her brother was trapped in a gully and surrounded by soldiers. Fearlessly, she rode in and grabbed him...bullets flying all around. The Cheyenne men felt diminished by her courage and agreed never to talk about her bravery. But one of them spoke up, which is why we know this story.

Clearly she was a brave woman. But I wanted to share this story because of the man, whose name was Wooden Leg, who valiantly spoke up and told of her bravery. I wanted to share this story for all those who identify as male in the room, on this day when we are celebrating women. Because if we are to achieve equal rights for all, men have a role to play. As Emma Watson expressed in her speech to the UN about the 'He for She' campaign<sup>6</sup>, men are also being imprisoned by gender stereotypes, and when they are free, things will change for women as a natural consequence. For example, “if men don't have to be aggressive in order to be accepted women won't feel compelled to be submissive. If men don't have to control, women won't have to be controlled. Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive.

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Harrison (1981), 'The Power of Anger in the Work of Love' in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, vol. xxxvi, pp. 41-57, a key article in feminist theology.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/9/emma-watson-gender-equality-is-your-issue-too>

Both men and women should feel free to be strong.” Watson called on men to take action “so their daughters, sisters and mothers can be free from prejudice but also so that their sons have permission to be vulnerable and human too.” So that all of us can “be a more true and complete version of [ourselves.]” This is the world that observing International Women’s Day calls us to envision and to create together.

**READING**

~ Beverly Harrison<sup>7</sup>

And one way we might create that world is to embrace and use our anger. Here are some more words from Beverly Harrison’s work, “The Power of Anger in the Work of Love”:

...In the dominant ethical tradition, moral rationality is disembodied rationality. [Yet]... all our knowledge, including our moral knowledge, is body-mediated knowledge. ... We know and value the world, if we know and value it, through our ability to touch, to hear, to see. ...Feeling is the basic bodily ingredient which mediates our connectedness to the world.

... Feelings deserve our respect for what they are. There are no “right” and “wrong” feelings. [But] The moral question is not “what do I feel” but rather “what do I do with what I feel?”

It is my thesis that we Christians have come very close to killing love precisely because anger has been understood as a deadly sin. Anger is not the opposite of love. It is better understood as a feeling-signal that all is not well in our relation to other persons or groups or to the world around us. Anger is a mode of connectedness to others and it is always a vivid form of caring. To put the point another way: anger is – and it always is – a sign of some resistance in ourselves to the moral quality of the social relations in which we are immersed. ... We must never lose touch with the fact that all serious human moral activity, especially action for social change, takes its bearings from the rising power of human anger. Such anger is a signal that change is called for, that transformation in relation is required...

**\*CLOSING WORDS** *Go Boldly* ~ Jean M. Olson<sup>8</sup>

In the words of Valerie Kaur, a Sikh lawyer and community activist<sup>9</sup>:

“What if all the [ancestors] who came before us, who survived genocide and occupation, slavery and Jim Crow, racism and xenophobia and Islamophobia, political oppression and sexual assault, are standing behind us now, whispering in our ear: You are brave.”

And now, the words of Jean Olson:

May you be brave enough to expose your aching woundedness

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<sup>7</sup> Excerpts taken from Beverly W. Harrison (1981), ‘The Power of Anger in the Work of Love’ in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, vol. xxxvi, pp. 41-57, a key article in feminist theology.

<sup>8</sup> *Becoming: A Spiritual Guide for Navigating Adulthood*, ed. Kayla Parker, Skinner House Books

<sup>9</sup> <https://speakola.com/ideas/valerie-kaur-interfaith-watch-night-2016>

and reveal your vulnerability.

May you speak your deepest truths, knowing that they will change as you do.

May you sing the music within you,

composing your own melody, playing your song with all your heart.

May you draw, paint, sculpt, and sew, showing the world your vision.

May you write letters, poetry, biography, slogans, graffiti, the great novel,  
laying bare your words to love and hate.

May you love even though your heart breaks again and again.

And until the end of your days,

may your life be filled with possibilities and courage.

Go now and use your anger and your passion, and your creativity, and your voice...for  
transformation. Blessed be.

## **EXTINGUISHING THE FLAME**