

Spiritual Surrender Memorial Day Service 2006

Kate Lehman

*The ones who call the shots won't be among the dead and lame,
And on each end of the rifle, we're all the same.*
John McCutcheon

Sounding of the Bell

(Please remain silent until the tone of the bell can no longer be heard.)

Prelude: American Hymn

Molly Leikin

Pat Killian, Greg Galluccio, Dan Weymouth

I have seen a summer day
that slowly opens like a rose
along a quiet road that wanders by
And I have smiled and wonder'd
Where it goes

I have stumbled through the night
Alone as any man can be
Then found a silent canyon full of stars
And in my heart I heard them telling me
I was home

The gentle winds, the rains that fall
The tallest trees, and I'm part of it all;
I've seen the silver mountain tops
And golden prairies on my way.
Now everywhere I go across the land
I stand so proudly in the sun and say
"I am home."

I've dreamed of Eden all my life
I find it more and more each day
Now everywhere I go across the land
I stand so proudly in the sun and say
"I am home."

Opening Words: (edited)

Sophia Lyon Fahs

Voice One: We gather in this, our spiritual home, on this almost-summer day.
May we fling wide the windows of our souls – the bright beams of morning are warm.

Voice Two: Together may we pause in reverence before the wonder of life,
the wonder of this moment,
the wonder of being together, so close, yet so far apart,

each hidden in a secret chamber,
each listening, each trying to speak,
yet none fully understanding,
none fully understood.

Voice Two: Together may we pause in reverence before all intangible things,
that eyes see not, nor ears can detect,
that hands can never touch,
that space cannot hold,
and time cannot measure.

Voice One: We gather in this, our spiritual home, on this almost-summer day.
Let us fling wide the windows of our souls – the bright beams of morning are warm.

Unison Chalice Lighting Words:

Peter Weller

As we light this chalice, may we be reminded that we can recognize the value of light only when we know, as well, the importance of darkness. So, as we celebrate the awakening, the visual delight, and the opportunity to find our way that the morning brings, we also give thanks for the rest, repose, and renewal that are the potential gifts of the night.

***Hymn: 112**

Do You Hear?

We enter into this season of Memorial Day surrounded by a cloud of witnesses.

We remember, first of all, the women and men who are currently serving in the armed forces of our country and we pray for their safe return. We also acknowledge that there are women and men who will not return. On this Memorial day, may we not only grieve their passing, but contemplate we can best honor their service and their sacrifice.

So, too, we gather to give thanks for all the women and men who have in the past served in the nation's armed services. Those who have not served cannot fully imagine the experience of war; however, we do know the aftermath of war and the toll that war can take on the human heart.

Memorial day remembers and acknowledges loss and so do we remember those whom we have loved and lost. We hold their names and their faces in our mind's eye. We recall the gifts they gave to us through the strength of their being, the depth of their love, the courage of their dying, and the fullness of their living. And let us recall how through our lives, their lives and deaths must stand for peace and a new hope – or they will have died for nothing.

In December 1914, World War I had been raging for less than five months, yet hundreds of thousands of men had been killed, wounded or reported missing during its brief course.

Along the front lines, conditions were inhuman. It was a landscape of fortified ditches of lice, rats, barbed wire, fleas, shells bombs, underground caves, corpses, blood, liquor, mice, cats, artillery, filth, bullets, mortars, fire, and steel. In addition, latrines were nearly nonexistent.

Christmas was approaching...The Pope had called for a cease-fire, but the idea was quickly rebuffed by both sides as “impossible.” Thus, both sides expected no letdown in the war. Separated by the miserable waste of No Man’s Land as Christmas approached, troops seemed likely to enjoy nothing of the holiday’s ambience – not even mere physical warmth. Cold rain had muddied and even flooded many trenches, and decomposing bodies floated to the surface.

Yet in this nightmare of war, a basic human yearning for peace bubbled up from the soldiers, often against the direct orders of their commanders. So it was that on Christmas Eve, the enemies laid down their arms and celebrated the holiday together in a spontaneous gesture of peace and good will toward all.

Although it is known that the truce began among the lower ranks, no one was certain exactly how and where it had begun. Even so, one legendary story symbolizes the spirit of the truce.

In the German trenches, on Christmas Eve, a determined pastry cook from Berlin, Alfred Kornitzke, had decided that no one could take this holiday away from him.

Seizing a small pine tree, he lifted it high, and still wearing his white baker’s cap, ran toward the enemy lines. The enemies were baffled by the apparition; they watched in amazement as Kornitzke run until he reached the halfway point of No Man’s Land. There he set the tree down, calmly took some matches, and in the frosty, star-filled night, lit the candles on the tree one by one. He then shouted – in French, German and English – “Merry Christmas.”

Suddenly there was silence. Kornitzke stumped back to his lines. Then the singing of Christmas carols could be heard; although the words were sung in the varied languages of those gathered, the melodies were familiar to all. These yuletide carols initiated a tentative courtship that developed into greetings shouted across lines; then soldiers from both sides gathered to bury their dead; before long, the soldiers were talking and smoking together and playing impromptu soccer games, not only among themselves, but with the “enemy.”

The singing and the truce did not last. After a silent night and day, the war went on. It was not the troops in the trenches who wanted to fight on, but their respective leaders.

In retrospect, the event appears some how unreal, incredible in its intensity and extent, seemingly impossible. Yet, the Christmas Truce of 1914, which was documented in French, German, and

English newspapers, evokes the stubborn humanity within us, and suggests an unrealized potential to burst its seams and rewrite a century.

The unchanged reality of war is that the shots ordered by increasingly remote presences are absorbed by ordinary humans. However, Christmas of 1914 reopened imaginations to the unsettling truth that at each end of the rifle, men were indeed the same.

Responsive Reading: The Young Dead Soldiers

Archibald MacLeish

One: The young dead soldiers do not speak.

All: Nevertheless, they are heard in the still houses; who has not heard them?

One: They have a silence that speaks for them at night and when the clock counts.

All: They say: We were young. We have died. Remember us.

One: They say: We have done what we could but until it is finished it is not done.

All: They say: Our deaths are not ours; they are yours; they will mean what you make them.

One: They say: Whether our lives and our deaths were for peace and a new hope, or for nothing we cannot say; it is you who must say this.

All: They say: We leave you our deaths. Give them some meaning. We were young, they say. We have died. Remember us.

Meditation: Memorial Day Prayer

Barbara Pescan

Spirit of Life
whom we have called by many names
in thanksgiving and in anguish—

Bless all those who mourn.
Send peace for the soldiers who did not make the wars
but whose lives were consumed by them.
Let strong trees grow above graves far from home;
Breathe through the arms of their branches.
The earth will swallow your tears while the dead sing
“No more, never again, remember me.”
For the wounded ones, and those who received them back,
let there be someone ready when the memories come,
when the scars pull and the buried metal moves
May there be forgiveness for the ignorance of those of us who were not there.
And in us, veterans in a forest of a thousand fallen promises,
let new leaves of protest grow on our stumps.
Give us courage to answer the cry of humanity’s pain
And with our bare hands, out of full hearts, and with all our intelligence, let us create the peace.

Music: Better Life

Patrick O. Killian

Pat Killian, Greg Galluccio, Dan Weymouth

Why must they take the ones so young, so kind, so gentle?
I'd love to talk to the one who decides,
To him our lives must be purely accidental,
It doesn't matter who lives or dies.

Chorus

The grief flows in, the tears flow out
The anger rises in my throat, and I have to shout
Then I resolve to live a better life
To be more loving to my kids, and to my darlin' wife
But life goes on, I pay my bills I answer the phone,
My grief it fades, resolutions gonna have to wait for another day

It's times like these I really need to believe in heaven,
People walkin' around in the clouds,
Sweet reunions with their friends and loved ones,
Their faces free of care and doubt.

Chorus

This ain't no time to lose your faith,
Become the cynic, fall from grace,
Cause life goes, there's a rhythm about it,
Can we really change? It's hard, but I don't doubt it,
Cause life goes on, we pay our bills, we answer the phone.

And how might we create peace, using just "our bare hands, out of full hearts, and **all** our intelligence? One answer is contained in the following story.

Reading: The Woodcutter's Advice

a variation of a Russian folktale

Once there was a woodcutter who lived in a tiny village. Although he was very poor, he always saw himself as rich because he had a loving, wonderful, intelligent, creative, hard-working and devoted son.

The son had a horse who was very wild and seemingly could not be broken. One day, while trying to train the horse, the younger man was thrown, breaking his leg in several places. The horse ran away.

All the village came to see the old man, and all stated their belief that he had been cursed by a terrible misfortune: it would have been bad enough for the horse to run off, too, but it was even worse that his son had been so seriously injured. "What," they asked, "could have been worse?"

The woodcutter responded: "Don't speak too quickly. Say only that my son's leg has been broken. Say only that the horse is not in the stable. That is all we know; the rest is judgment. If

I've been cursed or not, how can you know? How can you judge? All we can see is a fragment. Who can say what will come next."

The people of the village laughed. They thought the man was crazy.

A few weeks later, the leader of the land declared war on the neighboring country: he drafted all able-bodied young men, and declared that all of the horses in the country were needed to help fight his war. However, because of his broken leg, the woodcutter's son could not be drafted; and, of course, his horse was missing.

Within weeks the king had been defeated. Many of the young men of the village were either killed, or returned with serious injuries. Most of the horses that had been conscripted had been killed in battle or had had to be killed because of injuries.

Once again the village people gathered around the woodcutter and spoke, "Old man, you were right and we were wrong. What we thought was a curse was a blessing. Please forgive us."

The man responded. "Once again, you go too far. Say only that my son could not be drafted, nor his horse taken for the war effort. But don't judge. How do you know if this is a blessing or not?"

In time the woodcutter's son's leg healed, leaving him with little more than a minor limp. And after several months, the horse returned from the large woods surrounding the village, bringing with him fifteen more horses.

This time the villagers did not tell the woodcutter that he was blessed. Instead, they remembered what he had said before: "You see only a fragment. Unless you read the whole story, how can you judge? You read only one page of a book. Can you judge the whole book? You read only one word of a phrase. Can you understand the entire phrase?"

"Life is so vast, yet you judge all of life with one page, or one word. Don't say that what is a curse and what is a blessing. No one knows. I am content with what I know. I am not perturbed by what I don't know."

Offertory Words: (edited)

Jacob Trapp

Our offering is an extension of our gratitude for this, our spiritual home, where we are invited simply to be, and to let things be as they speak wordlessly from the mystery of what they are.

The morning offering will now be taken.

Offertory Hymn: 9

No Longer Forward nor Behind

Shared Thoughts: Sweet Surrender

Kate Lehman

On this Memorial Day Sunday, I am reminded of a story told by Kurt Vonnegut in his book *Breakfast of Champions*. According to Vonnegut, who, by the way is a Unitarian Universalist, there was an alien named Zog who knew the secrets to bringing about world peace and curing cancer. Zog, who was a compassionate alien, decided to share this knowledge with the people on earth, and thus it was that one night he landed in spaceship in a field in the middle of Iowa. He went into the dark house, and looked for the residents, who were sound asleep. Zog awakened them, and then began to share how world peace could be established and a cure for cancer found.

Unfortunately, Zog communicated by tap dancing and ... passing gas... (that's not the word Vonnegut used, but I'm certain you get the meaning). Frightened, the farmer took out the golf club he kept under his bed and beat Zog to death. Thus it is, concluded Vonnegut, that we don't know how to bring about world peace or to cure cancer.

So what does this story have to do with spiritual surrender? And how can spiritual surrender help us discover the way to world peace? (I'll go over my time limit if I try to address how spiritual surrender can help those diagnosed with cancer – however, the principles are more or less the same as what is required to bring about world peace.)

For most of us, the word *surrender* has negative connotations. OK, **very negative** connotations. We think surrendering means waving the white flag and giving up. We're taught from childhood that quitters never win and winners never quit. Surrender is the last thing we want to do.

Our dictionaries give the word the same negative spin. Webster defines *surrender* as “to give oneself up to the power of another.” And indeed, think of ways in which this definition of *surrender* is used: “The criminal *surrendered* to the police officer;” or “The soldier who had parachuted behind enemy lines *surrendered* to the enemy.”

A further definition begins more positively, even passionately. “Abandon or devote oneself to something without restraint, reservation, or further resistance.” But it quickly adds the cautionary example: “The individual has *surrendered* himself to destructive ideologies.”

As if such images of *surrender* aren't bad enough, many Unitarian Universalists have trouble with the whole concept of *spirituality*. “What,” we may ask ourselves, “can it possibly mean to ‘Let go and let God’?”

For starters, spiritual surrender is the recognition that we are *not God*. In other words, we are not in total control of everything that happens to us, to our friends and loved ones, and in the world around us.

Second, spiritual surrender recognizes that there are times when it is necessary to go beyond our rational abilities. In many situations, reason is a powerful tool to use for solving problems; however, it's not the only hammer in the box. When we've used our powers of reason, but nothing we've tried has worked, and we're beating ourselves bloody in our continued efforts, then it's time to surrender spiritually. Or to put it another way, it's time to try another too.

How many times, in the midst of a crisis, have we said to someone else – or ourselves – “Don’t just sit there; **do** something!”? In order to surrender spiritually, we need to follow the opposite advice, which is “Don’t just **do** something; sit there.” In other words, we need to stop whatever it is that we’ve been doing, turn off the chatter that fills our heads, and listen to the message of our hearts, our emotions. Specifically, and this is the third step toward spiritual surrender, we can ask ourselves what it is that is filling us with feelings of fear.

Most of us live in a state of free-floating fear. Fear is such a part of our everyday existence that we hardly notice it, except when it is extravagantly called to our attention by some horrific news report. When we pile all those event-driven fears on top of our continual anxieties about trying to pay the bills, keep our relationships together, and prove to the world (and ourselves) that we are adequate, we have one big fear-feast.

There are indeed some things of which we should be afraid. But often our fear points not to real external dangers as much as to internal threats such as anger, guilt, envy and greed. And this points to the fourth and fifth steps in spiritual surrender, which are to examine and acknowledge these feelings so that we can then let them go.

And why should we let go of these feelings? Elie Wiesel, the Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Laureate, lived through the murder of his parents, unimaginable cruelty and unendurable suffering. Yet he says, “There are moments of anger, others of gratitude, but never of bitterness or hate. To hate would be to reduce myself. Hate destroys the one who hates as much as the victim.” The same is true for many other corrosive emotions.

To be certain, this letting go is not easy. However, consider this thought: It would seem that the one thing we’re truly afraid of is – surrendering our fear. At times when I’m having trouble letting go, I find that it helps to ask myself if perhaps my fear of the unknown is even greater than the fear I experience in this known situation. But we can go further than asking ourselves that question.

Indeed, a more pertinent question – and this is the next step in the art of spiritual surrender – is to ask, “What is it that I love?” and then to move toward that. An example of how moving toward what we love can help us to escape from fear is given by Wendell Berry, who writes:

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.

To rest in the grace of the world – I can't think of a better way to translate the concept of "Letting go and letting God."

Notice that Berry says he rests in the grace of the world for "a time." Spiritual surrender does not mean that we "give up" and wait for some force "out there" to solve our problems. As an old Native American proverb puts it, when our canoe is about to go over the falls, we can call on God, but it's still necessary to row in the opposite directions. But by resting in the grace of the world for a time – even if it's after we have saved ourselves from plunging into the waterfall – we can see and accept what really is true in our lives, and then move forward toward that which we love.

While moving toward that which we love can be quite purposeful, the art of spiritual surrender also opens us to unforeseen opportunities that come our way, opportunities that would never have occurred to us had we not taken time out to let go of fear so as to embrace what we love.

However it is that we move ahead toward that which we love, resting in and coming to trust in the grace of the world makes it easier to let go of our rigid, control-oriented, will-centered ways of interacting with the world. An example of rigid, control-oriented, will-centered ways of interacting with the world is illustrated by an old joke about the devoutly religious man who was caught in a flood. He climbed to the roof of his house and prayed to God to be saved. A raft, a rowboat, and a helicopter tried to rescue him, but he rebuffed them all, saying he was waiting for God. The water continued to rise, and eventually the man drowned. When he met God in heaven, the man was really ticked off. "I trusted you," he said. "I put my faith in you? Where were you? Why didn't you save me?"

God replied: "I sent you a raft, a rowboat, and a helicopter. What more did you want me to do?"

Trusting in the grace of the world makes it easier to surrender expectation, and to release our attachment to specific results, which is the final step in spiritual surrender. I can think of no better example of giving up expectation than that offered by the story of the woodcutter told earlier this morning. Pema Chödrön gives another insight to the idea of releasing attachment to specific results. She writes: "You could also say, 'Give up all hope,' or 'Give up,' or just 'Give.'"

So how can spiritual surrender lead to peace in the world. If we avoid struggling against that which we fear, but can instead move toward what we love, we cannot help but to achieve a greater sense of internal peace. So, too, by working with what we love rather than struggling against what we fear, we are better able to feel our connection to other people in such a way that we know deep in our hearts that what happens to others not only matters but also happens to us. We will come to realize that

The ones who call the shots won't be among the dead and lame,
And on each end of the rifle, we're all the same.

As we learn the art of spiritual surrender, we will come ever more increasingly to see that we're all the same; from this perspective, we will be better able to share what we love with others, and to accept the gifts of love they offer to us. Based upon such a mutual sense of connection, we will surely come to see that all people desire peace. May we connect, only connect, so that we may become more whole. And may this enhanced sense of our wholeness evoke the stubborn humanity within us, so that we might realize the potential within, among, and between us by which we can burst our seams and rewrite the coming century.

Music: Hey You

Pink Floyd

Hey you, out there in the cold
Getting lonely, getting old
Can you feel me?
Hey you, standing in the aisles
With itchy feet and fading smiles
Can you feel me?
Hey you, don't help them to bury the light
Don't give in without a fight.

Hey you, out there on your own
Sitting naked by the phone
Would you touch me?
Hey you, with you ear against the wall
Waiting for someone to call out
Would you touch me?
Hey you, would you help me to carry the stone?
Open your heart, Im coming home.

Hey you, standing in the road
Always doing what you're told,
Can you help me?
Hey you, out there beyond the wall,
Breaking bottles in the hall,
Can you help me?
Hey you, don't tell me there's no hope at all
Together we stand, divided we fall.

Unison Closing Words: Being Peace

Thich Nhat Hanh

If we are peaceful, if we are happy, we can smile and blossom like a flower, and everyone in our family, our entire society, will benefit from our peace.

Sounding of the Bell

(Again, please remain silent until the tone of the bell can no longer be heard.)

Extinguishing of the Chalice

Please stand in body or spirit and join hands.

Benediction:

Kathleen McTigue

May the light of this chalice shine within our hearts and guide our footsteps so that we might hold fast to the best and most righteous that we seek.

May this light of this chalice shine within our hearts, and give us the faith to know that the darkness around us can nurture our dreams and give us rest so that, refreshed, we can give ourselves to the work of our world.

May the light of this chalice shine in our hearts, helping us to see the wholeness of our lives, the weaving of light and shadow in this great and astonishing dance in which we move.