

Dia de los Muertos

October 26, 2014

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and
Rev. Eric Meter

Gathering, Welcoming, Centering, Kindling, Opening:

We are here

after a week of both autumn clouds and sunshine

to refresh ourselves in the warmth of one another's company

and to celebrate the possibilities which arise

when we remember the lasting promise that love

lasts longer than we can possibly imagine.

And so, in this common house of life and love, may we lead lives of welcome, wisdom and kindness. Bestowing ourselves bountifully to the common good, let gratitude and question displace any easy assumption. Knowing that we are within this hurting, amazing world, not outside it, we approach our earth and social equity mindfully. Let each day express our amen.

Opening

This morning, we are here ó one room many generations. It is our second all-ages worship service of the church year at First UU. Today will be a different kind of worship service. A service where the voices of children can sometimes be heard, a service where we may hear more stories or may sing more. The gift of these all-ages worship services is that we get to come together on Sunday, to be in one space. We get to explore different ways of worship, to experiment with things we have not tried before. Come, join us on this Sunday, in this space, as we celebrate the Day of the Dead together.

Praising #1001 Breaths

Ingathering the story of La Calavera Catrina

This is a story about the Day of the Dead, or Dia de Los Muertos. Day of the Dead happens each year at the beginning of November in a country called Mexico. It's a time to celebrate the lives of people we know who have died. On this day, family members and friends decorate the graves of the people they know. They gather together for a big celebration with a parade and with music. People also build altars in their homes. These altars contain favorite foods of those we know who have died; they have sugar skulls on them to bring bright color to a day of celebration. See, Dia De Los Muertos is not a day that is sad, though some of us may feel sad about missing the people we know who have died. But Dia De Los Muertos is actually a celebration, a festival. It is about remembering the joy that people bring to our lives, it is about sharing funny stories and laughing together, it is about singing, about our grieving.

And it is from that place of joyful remembrance that our story begins. This is the story of La Calavera Catrina (repeat back). In Spanish, the term calavera means skull. Can anyone point out a skull for us all in this room? See, La Calavera Catrina is unlike any of the other skulls. What do you see that is different? She is dressed in fancy clothes and she wears a large hat with a feather in it. I wonder why she would dress so differently...

La Calavera Catrina was created by an artist, a painter named Jose Guadalupe Posada. This image is very old, dating all the way back to 1910. Catrina was drawn during a time when people from Europe were entering Mexico and were telling people in Mexico that they were better than them. The Europeans said they were better than Mexicans because they were more civilized ó meaning they had more money, and they had more political power. Jose Posada thought he would show them! It's not very respectful to come into another culture's country and tell them you are better than they are. Posada decided to answer this by creating a silly print image ó an image of a woman dressed in fancy clothes, a skeleton dressed in European, òcivilizedö clothing. And thus Calavera Catrina was born ó an image to poke fun at these Europeans who thought they were better than these Mexican folks. That way, the Mexican people would have an image to laugh at when these Europeans were making fun of them. It turned a very serious situation into a very joyous one.

Has anyone here ever been made fun of? Have you ever thought of using art as a way to get back at that person? See, Jose Posada is quite a creative man. And the Mexican people knew they needed to resist these European folks. Resist- it means not letting someone else bring us down, it means saying we are going to be joyous in the face of people trying to take our joy or our personhood away. We Unitarian Universalists understand this when we see injustice in the world. We understand this perhaps when our friends ask us about our religion, and tell us it is not real because we have different beliefs.

And now La Calavera Catrina is everywhere. Her image has become central to Dia De Los Muertos. She is a sign of joy, a sign of laughter, and she is even in your Order of Celebration today to be colored in by you! Keep your eyes open for when you see her next. And when you see her, I invite you to give a hearty laugh her way!

Please return to your seats to sit with your families as we continue the service.

Greeting

Singing #359 When We Are Gathered

Communing

We move now into the center of our time together this morning, a time marked by the stillness that will follow the sound of our temple bell. May these words guide us into this time of reflection...

Let Me Die Laughing, by Mark Morrison Reed, 1991

We are all dying, our lives always moving toward completion.

We need to learn to live with death, and to understand that death is not the worst of all events.

We need to fear not death, but life ó

empty lives,

loveless lives,

lives that do not build upon the gifts that each of us has been given,

lives that are like living deaths,

lives [in] which we never take the time to savor and appreciate,

lives in which we never pause to breathe deeply.

What we need to fear is not death, but squandering the lives we have been miraculously given.

So let me die laughing, savoring one of life's crazy moments. Let me die holding the hand of one I love, and recalling that I tried to love, and was loved in return. Let me die remembering that life has been good, and that I did what I could. But today, just remind me that I am dying so that I can live, savor, and love with all my heart. May caring be the touchstone of our lives.

bell

And because we care, this morning our concern stretches from this room to the families in Marysville, Washington whose lives were forever changed in the tragic shootings there late this week. Caring does not protect us from grief, but living, even when our hearts are broken, is still the best way to bring our love into the world.

Let us now make space, not only to lift up those we know, love and mourn, but also the families who are injured and grieving in Marysville:

Naming

Shaylee Chucklenaskit, Gia Soriano, Nate Hatch and Andrew Fryberg. Jaylen Ray Fryberg.

Love has so many names, yet its reach is beyond our ability to name. For this we need music and the gift of song.

Reading *Bringing the Dead to Life* (excerpted) by Peter Morales

Lane: The rich sound of congregant Sue Saum's flute filled the sanctuary with a soft, pensive tune as members of the Unitarian Church of Davis, California, came up quietly to a simple but colorful altar, placing on it photographs and mementos of loved ones. As part of a regular Sunday service, I had delivered a homily about death and remembrance, then invited the congregation to take part in a special ritual. I began by placing on the altar a photograph of my mother, Oralia, who had died a few months before.

Eric: I was overwhelmed by the depth of feeling I had unwittingly touched. It was only the third service I had led, and the ritual of remembrance, which I'd adapted from the Mexican Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) tradition, was something of an experiment. I was so worried it might not work at this highly intellectual congregation in a university town that I had made sure there were some skulls in the pews.

Lane: Part of the genius of the Día de los Muertos is the way it mixes celebration and mourning. Like a good UU memorial service, it both affirms life and gives us a chance to share our grief.

The Día de los Muertos is an annual November holiday that combines the Roman Catholic All Saints and All Souls days rituals with 2,000-year-old Mexican Indian traditions. Unlike Halloween, where the dead are seen as threatening, the Mexican holiday honors and remembers them with two days of feasting, processions, pageantry, and religious rites that sometimes include fireworks.

Eric: Yet if we dismiss the Day of the Dead as pure superstition, we can easily miss the profound spiritual and psychological insight that makes this tradition powerful. A Mexican boy spending the night at his uncle's grave has a connection across time with his forebears that our children do not. While we dwellers in a technological age are connected to the World Wide Web, cellular phones, and cable TV, have message machines, voice mail, pagers, and call waiting, we have cut ourselves off from the web of time. Traditional cultures, with their mediums and ghosts and reincarnations, have understood intuitively something we've repressed: the dead don't die; they live on.

Lane: I'm not speaking metaphysically or theologically. I'm talking about the very real stuff of memory, history, and molecular biology. Look in the mirror. The DNA of your ancestors is alive in you. Look at your children and grandchildren and see yourself and your ancestors. Think of the decisions made by your parents and grandparents. Their choices shaped your life. And the choices we make every day shape the lives of those to come. The interconnections stretch across time.

Eric: This is what the Día de los Muertos reminds us of, and this is its power. A simple ceremony of remembrance puts us in touch with our place in time and our mortality, and it reminds us that to live is to create a legacy that endures for generations.

The idea is not to mimic the Mexican tradition but to draw from its wisdom.

Watching Dia de los Muertos, a short film by
 Ashley Graham, Kate Reynolds and Lindsey St. Pierre, 2013

Telling stories of those we have known (Eric)

This year I want to talk to you about my grandmother Margaret, who I always called Gram.

Gram was born in Menominee, Michigan ó the southernmost part of the Upper Peninsula, and was the eldest of the ten children in her family. When her father died suddenly, Margaret was still in high school. While she did graduate, classes took a back seat to helping keep the family going from that point on. She worked afternoons and weekends, and became, in most respects, the second mother to her younger brothers and sisters.

Margaret, and she insisted on being called that, never Marge or, worse, Maggie, was my grandfather's second wife. Bethel, whom he had married earlier, died giving birth to my father.

My Dad was ten when Margaret and my grandfather Clarence finally married. I don't know how long the two of them were dating before they married, but from the stories that were passed down to me over the last several years, it sounds like Margaret finally had to put her foot down, and may have felt the need to say something like, "Clarence, I know you are scared to marry again, but I'm a

strong woman, and you WILL make an honest one of me. Either you put a ring on my finger, or I'll find someone else who will.

Gram could be direct like that.

After my own father died, Gram and I flew together from Minneapolis to Nebraska where we interred some of his ashes. It was not an easy trip for any of us.

On the way back to her home from the airport, our taxi driver must have wished he was on a roller coaster, because that's what he turned the ride into. I had never held my grandmother's hand for any length of time before, but, in the back seat of that taxi, we held on to each other for dear life, both of us with white knuckles the whole way.

I've never known if it was that ride, or the grief over burying her son, that broke her heart. She died the next day of a heart attack.

But despite the hardship in her life and my grief from losing her, what I remember most about Gram is something else entirely. The memory of her I keep closest to my heart is from her 83rd birthday party, just a few weeks before the trip to Nebraska. There, on her back porch, she sat wearing robins' egg blue shorts & varicose veins be damned & eating ice cream, and loving every minute of it.

Every summer, I toast an ice cream cone to her memory, and smile, but not for too long & she never liked ice cream to melt.

Singing #395 *Sing and Rejoice*

Telling stories of those we have known (Lane)

He was a voice present throughout my childhood, in deep, formative years. His ability to be silly, his sing-songy comedy, his influence on my family's life was joyful and boisterous. In the warm glow of the television or the movie screen, I learned what it was like to laugh until my sides hurt. This morning, I want to share with you all my experience as a child, born in the eighties, growing up watching Robin Williams and I want to share the impact he had on my life.

Each Friday for the past six months, I have volunteered with Kaleidoscope Youth Center, a drop-in center that serves lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning youth. Friday nights are movie and pizza night, they are the busiest night at the center, and this work brings me great joy. About a month ago, the program director of Kaleidoscope rented the Disney movie *Aladdin*. If you want to know about the impact Robin Williams has had on the youth and young adults of today, you would need to listen to all of these voices joining in singing "You Ain't Never Had a Friend Like Me" or "Prince Ali." Robin Williams brought these songs to life. His humor, his impersonations

(which are hilarious when repeated by a crowd of 15 youth) and ability to embody satire, to embody humanity's many quirks, is inspiring. I had forgotten about all of this.

When I was serving as a chaplain in a hospital in Kansas, we watched clips from *Patch Adams* when addressing the healing power of laughter and humor in the medical arena. I remember watching him play an adult Peter Pan in *Hook* on a vacation to visit my grandmother in New Jersey. My mother still does impressions of his character, Batty, from *Fern Gully*, a children's movie that taught me about the need for care of our sacred earth. And I share older memories of staying up late in my family's living room to watch reruns of *Mork and Mindy* on our old television with the dial on the side to change channels.

There was a depth and a healing to Robin's work. He was an actor and yet he was so much more. His work spoke to the need for laughter and joy in our lives. His work spoke to our heart's desire for realness, authenticity, and beauty.

I wonder what your memories of Robin Williams are. I wonder what comes to you when you think of his face or his name.

This past August, Robin Williams died. Today is not a day for focusing on the sadness of his complicated, difficult death, though that sadness is still there. It's real.

Today is a day to celebrate the joy he brought into our lives. It is a day to celebrate the ways we laughed at Robin Williams, even if he was acting too silly, even if what he was doing was ridiculous. Today is the day we say, remember how funny that guy was? He was hilarious! So let us remember.

Singing #395 *Sing and Rejoice*

Parading

Each year, at this time, we take a moment to honor the people who have gone from our days, but not from our hearts. In a moment, we may come forward and place a picture on one of the three altars around the room of someone we have loved who has died. If you have forgotten a photo, or didn't bring one, there are marigolds provided in vases at each altar for you to place a flower on the table to honor your loved one. We are also invited to circle the altar closest to us, to gaze upon the beauty we have created together as a community by bringing together our memories and weaving them into these gorgeous altars. Following the service, you are encouraged to take time to look at all of the altars throughout the Worship Center, to honor all the memories shared. We take part in this ritual in silence. Nathan has graciously offered to play some music to move us through this ritual. I want to ask us to take this time to reflect on the joy these people brought into our lives, to embrace the joy we feel in our hearts when we remember them. Let us begin by bringing our pictures forward and parading around the nearest altar in silence.

Returning

Every face is in you, every voice, every sorrow in you,
Every pity, every love, every memory, woven into fire.
Every breath is in you, every cry, every longing in you,
Every singing, every hope, every healing, woven into fire.
Every heart is in you, every tongue, every trembling in you,
Every blessing, every soul, every shining, woven into fire.

Offering

(Steve)

Singing #1051 *We Are...*

Blessing