

## **AFTER YOU'RE GONE, #2 –Will You Be Missed?**

Rev. Jack Donovan – Unitarian Universalist Church - St. Petersburg, Florida - 5/13/18

### **READINGS** (texts below, after sermon)

<b><u>Gathering</u></b>	<i>Iniquity and Kindness</i> , The Bible's Book of the Exodus, chapter 20 <i>The Web of Life and Ourselves</i> , Chief Seattle, 1852 <i>Love and Mourning</i> , from "All Souls" by May Sarton
<b><u>Meditation</u></b>	<i>The Growing of the Soul</i> adapted from Mary of Nazareth in Luke ch. 1
<b><u>Reading #1</u></b>	<i>Generation to Generation</i> by Antoine de Saint-Exupery (Hymnal, #649)
<b><u>Reading #2</u></b>	<i>I Have Been to the Mountaintop</i> , Martin Luther King, Jr, Memphis, 1968
<b><u>Closing</u></b>	<i>Letter from Birmingham Jail</i> , Martin Luther King, Jr, (adapted excerpt)
<b><u>Scorecard</u></b>	<i>Scorecard/Report Card on Fulfillment of Potentials</i>

### **SERMON**

Last Sunday we considered the comforts and joys we have received or missed so far in the course of the personal development of our human potentials in relationship with Self, Others, and Source – SOS. This morning I'd like you to consider what comfort and joy you have given or have missed out on giving so far in the course of your personal development of your potentials in relationship with these same three - SOS – again, from the perspective of after you've died. It's a looking back, a reflection on things past – an after-death experience - as if your life is over and there is nothing else you could do – sort of an "Our Town" thing. It's a way of asking whether you want your epitaph to read, "Gone, But Not Forgotten" or "Gone, But Not Forgiven."

My brother and I wrote the epitaph for our parents' joint gravestone. It reads, "Educators for a better world; two of God's most gracious." But really, they themselves had written that epitaph with their own lives – as in the poet Stephen Spender's tribute to his fellow soldiers in World War One – "I think continually of those who were truly great – who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history ..., endless and singing.... Born of the sun they traveled a short while towards the sun and left the vivid air signed with their honor." That's a way to get an epitaph.

Wherever you travel, you can see a variety of markers of remembrance, celebrating and grieving those who are missed and even marking those who missed their mark. I have felt a telling spirit rise in me at each of these markers: the great pyramids of the Sun and Moon in Mexico, milk from a coconut offered at meal time on a Pacific island in thanks to ancestors, white domed tombs amidst rice paddies and mementos and photos on house altars in Vietnamese villages, roofless stone houses preserved on the starved-out moors of captive Ireland. I have read all the lengthy epitaphs carefully chiselled into the two and three and nearly four hundred year old slate slabs of my hometown's oldest burial ground. On the altars of America, I have even seen memorials of the life and death and life again of God. On the walls of our own church I see plaques and pictures of remembrance. In my church office and in

my study at home, I have photos of loved ones all around, perhaps just as you do – some gone, but not forgotten, and often silently missed and thanked, often for what they might have even taken for granted – togetherness in life and struggle and beauty and love.

It seems to me that life does not want to miss out on life. And blessed are they not too late in seeing what it is to be missing life. They know in time to learn what is truly great in them – the sprouting of the soul’s potentials into the spirit of life - and how not to be missing from the circles of gratitude that radiate to one thousand generations.

What is truly great? Since today is Mother’s Day, and since it may well be argued that no category of person is more missed when absent than mothers – and in the spirit of Unitarian Julia Ward Howe who first called for establishing a Mothers’ Day for Peace - let us look first to the Madonna, the Great Mother of fabled story – called by the Church, Mary of Nazareth.

To the delight of her cousin Elizabeth, Maid Marian came to her and sang a potent song of joy and gratitude which we today call *The Magnificat*. And thereafter Mary raised a potent child of joy and grace. As it is written, Mary lived out the greatest potential – that the human soul, the divine seed of being, can grow a spirit of blessing and of joy – transcending lowliness, transcending oppressive power, proving the promise of heaven on earth is for all.

As with all great poetry, do not Mary’s song and story become real if we believe in their message for ourselves – that from our souls can grow the spirit divine?

Today is also the Sunday before Pentecost, which is this coming Friday. In Judaism, Pentecost is the festival held fifty days after the second day of Passover. It signifies the end of the Passover harvest season - and so, the end of the exile and exodus.

The leader of that exodus is known as Moses. At the end of the wandering exodus through the wilderness, Yehovah, Being of beings, called Moses to the mountaintop overlooking the Jordan River, and Moses looked over and saw the promised land. He knew he would not live to inhabit it. But he probably didn’t care, for he knew that the Being of his being was everywhere in all being and there was no place where It was not. For forty years he had led the people and now he had delivered them – and that was enough - *dayenu*.

Moses died and was buried down in the Moab Valley, no one knows exactly where. But if archeologists ever find his marker, I imagine that the epitaph on the headstone will read, “Yehovah, the Being of our beings, spoke to me and said, ‘I am the single and singular Source of power that liberates and fulfills all. Don’t be fooled into relying on any power short of this.’”

Moses is remembered as one who transcended the mountain of self-concern, who saw the Being of all beings face to face, and saw his people clearly enough to become their greatest prophet. He is remembered with reverential gratitude; and in troubled times, it is his spirit that is missed. Christendom, at its replication of Pentecost, does the same for a new Moses renamed Jeshua, who, it is written, lived the promise.

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Given adverse conditions and divisive information, and driven by survival impulses, all humans become murderous and genocidal. Jesus himself could have been so, if not for preparation by his mother and father and if not for the Canaanite woman who stood up to him faith to faith when he defamed her and her people as dogs. The kind of fierce ethnic division the Canaanite woman experienced from Jesus becomes fatal competition, unless common ground is found upon which appreciation and cooperation are founded.

In the arc of the universe, competitive and genocidal people are remembered. But are they missed? Even if they come to rule the land and bend its arc of history toward suffering and write its recorded history in partisan falsehood, are they ever missed?

Are not the people who are missed the ones who bring comfort and joy? Blessed are the peacemakers and those who hunger and thirst for justice. Gratitude is our response when they are with us. Missing them is our response when they are not. If they are only out of sight, it is good to stay in touch. If they are gone from time and space, it is good to celebrate them together and to give thanks in the community that misses them.

Tomorrow in Washington, D.C. and around the country in over 30 State capitols, we will be honoring one of the most missed persons in history -- Martin Luther King, Jr. Like Moses, Martin went to the mountaintop -- a mountaintop of perception and devotion. With the clarity of that position, he looked over and saw the promised land of America. He knew he would never live in that promised America. But he knew there is a possible future where all our posterity can -- America the beautiful.

The human potentials that Martin Luther King, Jr., fulfilled exemplify the highest levels of what is required of us if we want to be missed -- the power to dream what the people are dreaming most deeply, the power to help all of us see the dream as our potential, the power to see that we can serve and be great, the power to see that our country's promise is not lessened, is not bankrupt, is not dead because ours is not.

Many are missing who have dreamed the dream -- and they are missed,. But, from what I've seen, the dream itself is not missing. From what I've seen, it is a dream deeply rooted in the human soul. From what I've seen, our souls are forever dreaming the dream and from that seed is always growing a spirit of blessing and joy -- transcending lowliness, transcending oppressive power, proving the promise of heaven on earth is for all.

If we do not miss on seeing this, we will not miss fulfilling our potential for growing our spirit of comfort and joy for all posterity. And so, in gratitude, they will miss us.

... Dream on. In contemplation, in gratitude, in caring, dream and grow. It is a good thing -- and it will be enough.

## READINGS

### Gathering Thoughts

*Iniquity injures four generations; Lovingkindness blesses one thousand.* - from Exodus 20: 5-6  
*We did not weave the web of life – but what we do to it, we do to ourselves.* - Chief Seattle 1852  
*Did someone say there would be an end to love and mourning?* from “All Souls” by May Sarton

**Meditation**     *The Growing of the Soul* adapted from Mary of Nazareth in Luke ch. 1

“From my soul, the seed of divine being, is growing a spirit of blessing and of joy – transcending lowliness, transcending power, proving the promise of heaven on earth for all.”

**Reading #1**     *Generation to Generation* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery (Hymnal, #649)

**Reading #2**     *I Have Been to the Mountaintop*, Martin Luther King, Jr, Memphis, 1968

Something is happening in Memphis; something is happening in our world. ... Now that's a strange statement to make, because the world is all messed up. The nation is sick. Trouble is in the land; confusion all around. That's a strange statement. But I know, something is happening in our world. The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, the cry is always the same: "We want to be free." ...

Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!

And so I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man! Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!!

**Closing**     *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, Martin Luther King, Jr, (adapted excerpt)

*With the Source within, with the World we're in, may we be where we ought to be for justice, duty, and life. May we carry truth beyond our self-interests for the greatest good. May we not be righteous in word and deed while immoral in an immoral society. May we persist and stop the destruction of lives and world. And may I add, if we persist, we will be missed – and that would be a good mark to aim for. Thank you.*

**Scorecard**

*Scorecard/Report Card on Fulfillment of Potentials*

***“WILL YOU BE MISSED?”***  
**A SCORECARD/REPORT CARD**  
**ON THE FULFILLMENT OF POTENTIALS**  
**FOR HELPING THOSE WITH WHOM WE ARE IN RELATIONSHIP**  
**TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE**

	WITH SELF	WITH OTHERS	WITH SOURCE
LEARNING (understanding life & living – for childhood and thereafter)			
LOVING (caring in relationship – for childhood and thereafter)			
LABORING (productivity sharing – for adulthood and elderhood)			
LEADING (creative liberating – for adulthood and elderhood)			

