

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Chalice Circles:

Do you believe our survival on planet Earth is being threatened?

Kitsap Unitarian Universalist Fellowship 2006-2007

Kitsap Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Bremerton, WA, Rev. Liz Stevens, 2006-2007

Opening Reading:

from “After the Apocalypse” by Rebecca Parker in Blessing the World: What Can Save Us Now

According to popular religion, we are living on the eve of the Apocalypse. A catastrophic cosmic struggle is coming, when God’s forces will battle the forces of evil. Evil empires will be destroyed, and from their collapse will rise a new heaven and a new earth.

Religious liberalism has its own variation on the apocalyptic dream. Our vision doesn’t imagine that old worlds are destroyed and new ones created by the act of the transcendent god. We put ourselves into the drama. We assign ourselves the task of dismantling evil empires, and we go to work hammering together the New Jerusalem.

I am grateful for the energy, commitment, and service liberal faith inspires, but I have begun to believe that this theological worldview may no longer be adequate for our times. If we can imagine that the Apocalypse is not ahead of us but already behind us, consider how we might regard our religious task differently...

In the aftermath of the Apocalypse, the religious enterprise can be imagined as a kind of salvage work, recognizing the resources that sustain and restore life—resources that are ready at hand, not in some distant promised land. After the Apocalypse, we accept our dependence on sources of life greater than ourselves and open our hearts to receive survival knowledge from those who have already found restoration. We know ourselves to be living in a time of breakdown and breakthrough, chaos and creativity, fragmentation and resourcefulness, pain and grace. Our tasks include tending to injury in ourselves and others, collecting resources buried in the rubble, and constructing shelters for body and spirit, family and community.

Discussion Questions:

Do you think we are living in a pre-, mid-, or post-apocalyptic age? Or do you reject the notion of apocalypse entirely? How does your theology around the “end times” impact the “now”?

Rebecca Parker identifies the three central tasks in the post-apocalyptic world as “Truth-telling”: providing a clear-eyed and honest description of the world, “Salvaging”: sifting through the rubble and determining what of history and tradition ought to be saved, and “Choosing our guides”, turning to those who have survived violence, discrimination, grief, oppression, and found their way to lives of dignity, honesty, creativity, and activism. Do you agree or disagree?

What truths do you have to tell? What truths do you want to hear? What would you salvage?
Who are your guides?

Closing Reading:

from “Cornerstones” by Rebecca Parker, *ibid.*

The San Jose Church (UU) laid a cornerstone that says “service,” and down the street the Muslim center laid a cornerstone that says “God is one,” and across town a synagogue laid a cornerstone that says “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Next door the Baptists have laid a cornerstone that says “religious freedom,” and the Methodists one that says “Do all the good you can,” and the Catholics one that says “If you want peace work for justice.” The Buddhists have laid a cornerstone that says “Practice compassion,” and farther out in the valley, the Native Americans have assembled stones on which it is written, “Everything begins in Beauty. We are all children of one life.” These are the cornerstones of hope.

Our task is to raise these cornerstones from the rubble of our failures and, in partnership with people down the block and around the world, to build and rebuild the foundations that make the promise to Jacob become a promise to all people: You and your children and your children’s children will survive and be blessed. Let us shelter our dream that life can survive in blessing, and to that hope let us rededicate our resources and our lives.