

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Experiencing Wonder & Awe

First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Delaware, by Rev. Michelle Collins, 2012

Chalice Lighting, by Janet Vicker

Breath of the divine, light a flame of reflection in all that we do.

Breath of strength, light a flame of courage to be who we are: sentient, vulnerable, and diverse.

Breath of creation, light a flame of connection in our circle of care.

Breath of wonder, light a flame of inspiration to cultivate participation.

Breath of this moment, light a flame of celebration for our future unfolds the covenant of this day.

Check In

Reading – Excerpt from “Something Far More Deeply Infused,” by Rebecca Parker (from *Blessing the World: What Can Save Us Now*)

Discussion & Sharing Questions:

- What does wonder mean to you? What about awe? When do you know that you’re experiencing them (what’s going on for you then)?
- Can you think of a specific time that you are willing to share when you experienced wonder or awe or amazement...
 - What happened? Was it serendipitous or planned?
 - Tell about a feeling that you had related to or during the experience.
 - Did this experience affirm any of your beliefs, values, or assumptions? Did it challenge them?
- Do you have any regular activities or spiritual practices where you are likely to experience wonder or awe?
 - If so, what? If not, what might something like that look like for you?
 - Is it possible to plan wonder?

Closing Thoughts

Extinguishing the Chalice

Reading: “Something Far More Deeply Infused,” by Rebecca Parker

I grew up in a small corner of southwest Washington in a town named Hoquiam, at the southern edge of the rain forest of the Olympic National Park. It’s so rainy in Hoquiam that when I was a child, I believed summer was a one-day-a-year holiday, like Christmas. We had 160 inches of rain annually; our whole world was wrapped in mist and moisture and gray skies.

It was our family tradition to spend our summer vacations hiking the high country of the Olympic and the Cascade Mountains. As teenagers, my two brothers, Howard and Theodore, and I used to go hiking by ourselves on occasion. One of our most memorable trips took us up to a place where we’d never been: Spray Park Meadows, a high alpine meadow on the shoulders of Mount Rainier. Like almost every hike we ever went on, this hike began in the rain.

We hiked through the quiet, soft, drizzling rain for the first three-quarters of the day. Toward late afternoon, we found we were no longer hiking in the rain. We had walked right into a cloud. By the time we ascended through the forest up to the edges of the alpine meadow, the cloud encompassed us so thickly that we could only see the muddy trail ahead of us by staring straight down at our feet.

We made our camp up against the edge of a high, protective boulder. When our camp was set up, my brother Howard unfolded the geological survey map, studied it, and pronounced, “Mount Rainier must be around here somewhere!” We gathered around and stared at the compass. The arrow wavered unsteadily to the north, but even with an uncertain compass, we managed to figure out where we were. Howard traced our route, “Here’s where we came, and here’s where we must be right now, which means Mount Rainier must be right... there!”

Now, this really happened. The instant Howard said, “Mount Rainier must be right...there,” we all turned our heads and looked into the pea-soup fog. Just as we turned, the fog opened, like two opaque sliding glass doors pulling away from each other, and Mount Rainer was...there. Filling up the entire sky. It was just that moment of twilight when the sun was sinking over the Pacific Ocean, and the last long gleams of light were skimming across the snow-crested peaks of the Olympics. The upper edges of Mount Rainier were outlined with glints of gold, and the crevasses and valleys were deepening from magenta into purple into midnight blue. Behind the mountain the sky was turning into that shade of evening blue that cannot be named.

The hair on the back of my neck literally stood up. We held perfectly still, transfixed by this stunning beauty. And then the fog rolled back in on itself; the opaque sliding glass doors closed. We were wrapped once more in fine mist and couldn’t see beyond our toes.