

What is Enough?

Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA, Lynn Hanson, Ministerial Intern, December 2005

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting: *From William Ellery Channing:*

To live content with small means,
to seek elegance rather than luxury,
and refinement rather than fashion,
to be worthy, not respectable, and wealthy, not rich,
to study hard, think quietly, talk gently, act frankly,
to listen to stars and birds, babes and sages, with open heart,
to bear all cheerfully,
do all bravely,
await occasions,
hurry never ---
in a word, to let the spiritual, unbidden and unconscious,
grow up through the common.
This is to be my symphony.

Reflection/Personal Sharing/Prayer (approximately 30 minutes):

(The facilitator should briefly remind the group of confidentiality/anonymity, that this is not the time for cross conversation, etc.)

Focus Reading: *From Kathleen Norris' "DREAMING OF TREES" in THE CLOISTER WALK:*

The small town where I live, like most towns in the western Dakotas, was plunked down on a treeless plain. The immensity of land and sky in the western Dakotas allows for few trees, and I love the way that treelessness reveals the contours of the land, the way that each tree that remains seems a message-bearer. Cottonwoods need more water; their presence signifies ground water, or the meanderings of a creek. Nearly every morning I walk past a young tree---some sort of locust---that signifies survival against all odds.

Our ... treelessness is, as so much in life, a matter of perspective. One summer both my father-in-law and my mother were visiting. He was raised in New York State and couldn't get over the lack of trees. I think he found it terrifying. My mother kept telling him that there were many more trees here now than when she was a girl, so many that the countryside seemed luxuriant. Maybe trees are a luxury here; the question then becomes, How many do we need?

When, each December, I visit my family in Honolulu, I travel from the wintry Plains to what I call the green world. It is profligate to the extreme. After that, I find it an odd joy to return to winter, to a stark white landscape. And I dream of trees, wondering if sometimes I would rather dream of trees than have so many close at hand.

If scarcity makes things more precious, what does it mean to choose the spare world over one in which we are sated with abundance? Does living in a place with so few trees bring with it certain responsibilities? Gratitude, for example?

What would I find in my own heart if the noise of the world were silenced? Who would I be? Who will I be, when loss or crisis or the depredations of time take

away the trappings of success, of self-importance, even personality itself? Could the trees of my beloved Plains, or the lack of them, help me to know?

The wisdom of the few, struggling trees on the Plains, and the vast spaces around them, are a continual reminder that my life is cluttered by comparison. A perfectly simple room, with one perfect object to meditate on, remains a dream until I step outside, onto the Plains. It always makes me wonder: What is enough? Are there enough trees here? As always, it seems that the more I can distinguish between my true needs and my wants, the more I am shocked to realize how little *is* enough.

Focus Questions:

Are you more like Kathleen's family that enjoys living with a lush landscape, more like Kathleen who finds pleasure in the simplicity of a scarce landscape and would prefer a more simple, Zen-like decorating style, or do you fall somewhere in between? How do things (or lack of things) surrounding you feed your soul?

At this time of year, as the stores try to push a desire for abundance upon us, what are some of the feelings you have about scarcity and abundance in regard to the winter holidays?

What are luxuries for you?

What do you feel would be "enough" for you to live a happy life?

Of the four seasons (winter, spring, summer, and fall) – and perhaps the holidays that go along with them -- do you have a favorite time of year? What makes it your favorite? What about it is abundant? What about it is scarce?

Do you feel it's a human need to try to "fill up emptiness?" If so, what do you feel causes us to have this need?

Checkout/Likes and Wishes:

(This is the time for facilitators to ask participants what they liked about this meeting and what they might wish for future meetings. This is also the time for any discussion of logistics.)

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice: by Mark Belletini:

Go in Peace. Live simply, gently, at home in yourselves.
Act justly. Speak justly.
Remember the depth of your own compassion.
Forget not your power in the days of your powerlessness.

Do not desire to be wealthier than your peers
And stint not your hand of charity.
Practice forbearance.
Speak the truth, or speak not.
Take care of yourselves as bodies, for you are a good gift.

Crave peace for all people in the world,
Beginning with yourselves,
And go as you go with the dream of that peace alive in your heart.