

## "Secret Inheritance"

Rev. Annie Holmes

I offer a Chinese prayer as a gift to you today, a prayer that I pray often ...

*"When all the people of the world love  
Then the strong will not overpower the weak.  
The many will not oppress the few.  
The wealthy will not mock the poor.  
The honored will not disdain the humble.  
The cunning will not deceive the simple.  
And love will make this old world new."*

Is it only a prayer we whisper in our hearts and know in our psyches that it will never be true? Or is it a prayer that as we place ourselves in the middle of this church community we begin to know in a very deep, abiding way, that by belonging, all things will be made new. That we are changed by this church, and that the church itself is changed because we are here and participating. Think for a moment of all the ways your life has been changed because you have attended this church. Well, know also that this church has been changed because you are here.

Belonging.

~ When you have 70 people of all different opinions what do you have? Now, you're supposed to say, I don't know what do you have? A UU Church!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

~ They have all sorts of new services today. They even have a dial-a-prayer for UUs. You call the number and nobody answers.

Belonging.

~ Home, it is said, home is where when you go there they have to take you in.

A church home, it is said, is where when you go, you are invited in.

Ah yes, Belonging.

For example:

~ As UUs it is said we don't have 10 commandments, we have 10 suggestions.

~ The children of a UU Sunday school were drawing pictures.

The Sunday school teacher asked one child, "What are you drawing a picture of?" "I'm drawing a picture of God," the child replied. "But nobody knows what God looks like" objected the teacher. "When I get done with my picture they will!"

~ What does a cross between a Jehovah Witness and a UU do at your door? Knocks incessantly for no apparent reason.

~ You know why UUs are not very good at singing hymns? Because they are always reading ahead to see if they agree with the words.

~ What is December 25th to a UU? Why the birth of Socrates!

In belonging here, we have been given a secret inheritance. It is now our time to share it with others. There is a secret in receiving an inheritance. The secret is revealed little by little. All of us can look around this room this morning and ask, who are the ones who are going to lead this congregation in this the new millennium? Who will it be who will do the work of this church in the world? Well surprise! We are the ones, we are the ones we've been waiting for. There are no other hands than ours. There are no other minds than ours. There are no other imaginations than ours, to breath the breath of life into those 7 principles we hold so dear.

Surely goodness and kindness will follow us all the days of our lives. A response could be: We are here for each other. As we enter this building each Sunday and take the hand of a member or visitor, as we look into each other's eyes and call this gathering our community, let us remind each other, We are here for each other.

Out of what world view do people come to us seeking the kind of religious freedom we offer? We are here for each other. But what could that mean? We smile politely when we see each other, or are we really and truly here for each other. By our listening, our caring, our giving we help the ways of church to be powerful in the world.

As we light our candles for joys and concerns and share the deepest parts of our lives and ourselves may we do so in a judgment free, and safe environment. We are here for each other.

Reality has always been a seamless web of interrelated systems. No one else but us can take the next right step for this church. We are a volunteer organization. We are the ones we have been waiting for. To be a volunteer in this church means that you are participating in a definition or redefinition of the meaning of freedom in our society. By joining this organization, you are exercising your individual power through an organization which is totally free.

Your membership, your belonging means that you will participate in the process of making church and social decisions. You are part of making the Democratic process in the United States made stronger by your participation in this volunteer organization. Your membership has literally furthered the cause of democracy! Think of the power that voluntary associations have had in our world:

- . the establishment of schools and colleges
- . conservation of natural resources
- . protection of all people's civil rights
- . attacking the poverty issues
- . improvement of race relations
- . interfaith groups seeking ecumenism
- . the suffrage movement for women's vote
- . demand for welfare and the establishment of unions

A UU church is a special place to grow, because each of us, when we become members, commits to actively creating a safe place where growth can be nurtured and fostered. Each of us has and will be changed in a dramatic way because of our

involvement in this volunteer organization.

~ your inner life now takes shape as you live out your moral dreams within this community

~ integrity of you as an individual grows

~ relationships to other persons is strengthened

~ individual power is strengthened, as is the power of the church in the community where it dwells is felt

~ members learn first-hand how the democratic process works.

Freedom of churches and religious freedom go hand in hand with the democratic, liberal principles of one person, one voice, one vote. And a church separate from the state cannot force someone to give financial support to the church, the members affirm responsibility to participate in the shaping of the policies of that church and then funding the dream. All done in freedom, with non-coercion, from a person's sense of duty from their own conscience.

Our democracy, our country, our church will only be as strong as the volunteer associations remain. Totalitarian governments, authoritarian systems, and dictatorships will never allow a strong volunteer strata of society. How do you know you are a part of a strong, healthy voluntary association? The institution can articulate easily its purpose for being, one can see the strong commitment, the energy that is expended, and of course a separation of powers so the organization is free to do what it formed itself to do.

We may feel that government with a large "G" whether it be federal, state or local may be on top with all the power, while those in our society; the sick, the mentally ill, the addicts, the homeless, the children, and those in grief or stress, have no voice or power. But in a healthy society there is that middle group who make up the hundreds and thousands of volunteers who have power and who cannot be bought off. And you, these volunteers I'm talking about, need to

realize you can make this society better.

Belonging to this church is the beginning of power and transformation; personal and societal. James Luther Adams, UU theologian tells us: "Volunteers have found, first through the church, then through other groups, the real, true power in society is found in living in a democracy where an individual may not properly be coerced into any obligation they had not assumed freely upon entering that association."

Through volunteering here, we learn about our world and our culture. We learn skills in listening, discussion and organization. We speak out on issues near and dear to us, but not just with one voice, but in many voices. We learn how to be together, how to live together, how democracy works in a smaller milieu.

Voluntary associations have brought about prison reform, prevention of cruelty to children and animals, often in opposition to the world around them. Margaret Mead reminds us: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

We take on public responsibilities as well as private nourishment when we become a member of this church. We search our whole lives for identity. So members, welcome once again to the identity of being Unitarian Universalists in the world. I believe the chief end of human existence is dwelling together in unity and as the Chinese prayer reminds us; in love.

After being here for awhile, it doesn't take long to realize that many people give of their best to keep this church growing and maturing. I remember marveling to hear that people would serve two terms on the Board of Trustees because there was a need. I marveled to hear that people have stayed up late at night putting together procedures for a new mission statements and by-law changes and long-range plans. I marvel to know people care so deeply for the future of this congregation that they give and give and give. We are all the recipients of that giving and those dreams.

Our life together in this church is not about a contract. No one can keep you here if it is not your will to be here. I bet most of us have had to do things we were not comfortable doing in our jobs because our contract with a company demanded that we do this thing. Unfortunately that is the way of the work world, but not here, oh no, not ever here. There is real, true power in volunteering, because it has something to do with a word called covenant, not contract. What is the difference? The difference is between being coerced and making a decision out of trust. It is the difference between duty and love. Orders of Service...

Responsive Reading “From Cage to Covenant” by James Luther Adams

L: What are the major ingredients of a covenant?

P: Human beings individually and collectively become human by making commitments, by making promises.

L: The human being is a promise-making, promise-keeping, the promise-breaking, promise-renewing creature.

P: Covenant is a promise that two sides of the agreement agrees to maintain.

L: This covenant with the creative, sustaining, commanding, judging and transforming powers, which may be interpreted theistically, non-theistically, or humanistically. It is something we cannot control but something upon which we can depend, even for our freedom.

P: The covenant is for the individual as well as for the collective.

L: We are responsible not only for our individual behavior, but also the character of the society – also for the love and preservation of nature.

P: The covenant responsibility is especially directed toward the deprived.

L: Whether these be people suffering from neglect and injustice or those who are caught in the system that suppresses them, it is the gap between the covenant and the system, between ideals and behavior, which creates deprivation.

P: Good healthy covenant must include a law of love.

All: The covenant depends not so much on law as on the faithfulness nerved by loyalty, by love. Violation of the covenant is a violation of trust. Ultimately the ground of faithfulness is the divine or human love that will not let us go.

If we are then to live a life of fulfilling this covenant, this agreement, this promise, this pledge that we make not only to ourselves as members and friends of this church, but to the world at large, how do we do this marvelous thing for our world?

1. We learn to link, not rank people or experiences or pieces of life
2. We learn to honor diversity, knowing that everything, even that which is different is still and always connected.
3. We know on a deep level and are reminded we are within, not separate from the dance of life. Don't be afraid of things you don't understand. Keep an open mind, remember all in this life is connected, and understanding and peace will come.
4. enlarge the scope of your interests, as individuals and as a church community. Risk, try something new,

- celebrate the rhythms of life together; birth, rites of passage, and of course death.
5. make a covenant with creation that embraces all life's decisions.
  6. attend worship services, committee meetings, annual meetings and vote, use your voice and your power
  7. know life does not have to be any certain reality. Life is fluid and easily shaped in healthy systems as the potter's clay
  8. and finally, never assume you have all the right answers to any given question, keep searching.

I offer you now a poem from Starhawk. Think of this poem as a gift from me to you as you continue your spiritual religious journey as Unitarian Universalists. And Starhawk tell us;

Out of the bone, ash  
 Out of the ash, pain  
 Out of the pain, the swelling  
 Out of the swelling, the opening  
 Out of the opening, the labor  
 Out of the labor, the birth  
 Out of the birth, the turning wheel, the turning tide.

This is the story we like to tell ourselves  
 In the night...  
 When the labor is too hard, and goes on too long

When the fire seems nothing but dying embers winking out  
 We say/ we remember a time/ when we were free  
 We say that we are free, still and always  
 And the pain we feel is that of labor  
 And the cries we hear are those of birth.

And so you come to the fire where the old ones sit  
 You are young, just on the edge of ripening  
 They are ancient, their faces lined with spider webs or wrinkles  
 Their face brown, bronze, cream, black  
 Their eyes are wells of memory  
 They say...

"Listen child, this is your night of passage  
 And it is time to learn  
 Your history  
 Tonight you will run free, out into the wild  
 Fearing only the spirit of your own power  
 And no one in this world would harm you or lay

A hand on you  
But there was a time/ when children were not safe  
And the dark held rape and death and terror  
We remember that time

Go to the stream, kneel down, drink the sweet water  
As you can anywhere water runs in this world  
For it runs clean, and breathe the clear air  
And know that there was time  
When the waters and the very air itself  
Were poisoned, and the people died  
We remember that time

Look around the circle, look at our faces  
Each one different, each one special  
And we so love the hue of our different skins  
And carved planes of our faces  
But there was a time  
When people feared each other  
And hated what they saw in different eyes  
We remember that time.

And look up into the sky, see the stars, see the moon  
Know that there is nothing in the sky to threaten or harm you  
But there was a time when we were all targets and we  
Didn't know, from one day to the next when the bombs might come  
Whether we would have a world to leave to you  
We remember that time.

They are silent  
They wait  
You look into their eyes, you breathe deeply  
and it's as if you know the world they speak about  
You feel its fear seep into your blood  
and you feel also something else  
A memory of strength or courage  
Look at the old ones  
See the power in those old eyes and frail, cupped hands  
Breathe it in  
Know it is your own power, too  
You are one of them  
They live in you as you in them  
And you marvel at them  
How did they survive? How did they stand it?

They wait

You realize they are waiting for you  
And you wonder what it is they want you to do  
And you think maybe they want you to ask them something  
So you say,  
"Tell me, old one  
How did you do it?  
How did you change it?"  
And they smile

Listen ~Hear what they say to you...

"We struggled  
We held out our hands and touched each other  
We remembered to laugh  
We went to endless meetings  
We said no  
We put our bodies on the line  
We said yes

We invented, we created  
We walked straight through our fears  
We formed the circle  
We danced  
We spoke the truth  
We dared to live it  
We know, we are the ones we've been waiting for."