

Depression's Silver Lining
October 21, 2018
Janice Holz, Service Leader

Welcome:

Invocation In Hard Times

by Maureen Killoran

Welcome, you who come in need of healing,
you who are confused, or have been betrayed.
Welcome, with your problems and your pain.
Welcome, too, your joys and your wonderings,
welcome your need to hope, your longing for assurance.
Instead of answers, here may you find safety for your questions.
Instead of promises, may you find community for your struggles,
people with hands and hearts to join you
in engaging the challenges and changes of our day.

Opening Words/Chalice Lighting:

Let There Be Light!

by Gordon B McKeeman

"Let there be light!"

Let it shine in dark places,
in moments of pain,
in times of grief,
in the darkness of hatred,
violence,
oppression,
where there is discouragement and despair.

Wherever darkness is to be put to flight,
"Let there be light!"

Radical Acceptance Activity:

[adapted from <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/sermon/god-makes-no-mistakes-creating-beloved-community-all-our-children>]

Does everyone have an index card and something to write with? We will be using them for an activity based on one by Sally Patton that I found at uua.org. I plan to leave time at the end of the service to discuss this activity and my message.

Patton's activity is about radical hospitality, a way of love in which "the different, those who appear strange, and those who are marginalized are welcomed and accepted." "Acceptance is not about ... condoning behavior. ... We do not have to like a person's behavior in order to embrace and accept the person." I see radical hospitality as following from our 1st & 3rd UU principles (listed near the front of the gray hymnal): in the 1st we affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person; in the 3rd we commit to acceptance of one another. I think embracing every person with radical hospitality is a worthy goal for a UU.

Leave one side of the index card blank for now. On the other side write a label that describes things you do not like about yourself -- maybe the word Deficits, a frowny face, the word Failings -- however you think of them. Underneath, write 2 or 3 things that you do not like about yourself. (You will not have to share them.) The more open and honest you are with yourself, the more powerful this exercise can be. When you are done writing, look up, so I know we're ready for the next part.

Next, I invite you to close your eyes. Hold the card up to your chest, with your writing facing out. For the next minute, until I ring the chime, "imagine that everyone you meet only sees this side of you. They only talk to you from this perspective. What would the conversations be like, how would you feel? When you want to talk about something you feel good about, the person only responds to what they see on the front of your card. ... How do you think you would react and treat them?" This is also the only part of yourself that you see. How would you feel about yourself? How would this impact your friendships, your family life, your job, even your self-care?

"Now" take in a deep refreshing breath, and "release these thoughts to the Universe."
Open your eyes when you are ready.

Let's look at the positives now. "On the other side" of your card "write" a positive label such as Gifts, a smiley face, or Strengths -- however you think of it -- "and" under it "list 3 to 5 things you **like** about yourself."

When you are ready, close your eyes, hold this side of the card facing out, and imagine you and everyone else only sees these things.

People "only talk to you from this perspective. What would these conversations be like, how would you feel? They see all your strengths and gifts and think" of you as capable, worthy, talented, and you see yourself that way as well. "How do you think you would react and treat" others? How would you feel about yourself, and how does this impact your self-care, work, friendships, and family? I will ring the chime after 1 minute.

Finally, keep your eyes closed and imagine everyone sees both sides of everybody's cards, and what you thought were negatives are simply differences. They can be allowed for where necessary, or may even become positives when seen in a certain light or used in a certain way. To use a personal example, my nit-pickiness can be attention to detail. How does this change the way you feel, the way you act, the way others treat you, the way your life goes? Imagine this for a minute, until the sound of the chime.

"Now" take in a deep refreshing breath. Remember how this feels. If it feels empowering to do so, "release these thoughts to the Universe."
Open your eyes when you are ready.

I hope you have found some insight in this activity. I partially chose it because the first part, seeing only my failings, is how I often feel when I am depressed. I think it has far greater reach, though.

I invite each of us to practice radical hospitality, putting the 1st & 3rd UU principles into practice. Each moment, we have the choice to focus on someone's weaknesses or strengths, our own failings or our gifts. More than that, we can re-frame what we see as faults into neutral differences or even talents. If

we do this as individuals, we can improve our own lives. If we do this "as a congregation, we can embrace each child and adult who crosses our threshold", thereby changing our community with radical acceptance.

If you would like to, after the service you may add your card to the box at the Altar of Hope, to be burned at the Samhain ritual.

Message:

Janice's Silver Lining of Depression

Imagine for a moment that you have a patch of garden right near your big picture window. You plant seeds of beautiful calla lilies, just what you always wanted to have. You water the area, eagerly anticipating the flowers. One morning you look out and see some green shoots! You race outside -- and see that the green is dandelion leaves. Disappointed, you pull them out.

The next morning you see more green shoots -- but it's just more dandelions to pull. Morning after morning, the only plants coming up are dandelions. There get to be so many that you hire someone to help you pull them out -- and they keep coming. Where are your beautiful lilies that you've been dreaming of? They never grow.

You try replanting the calla lilies that you are sure you are supposed to have. This time they grow for a while, but never well, and they slowly die off. You give up and let the dandelions take over. Whenever you see them, you feel frustrated, or disappointed, or angry. It seems like everyone around you has the garden they want. Why can't you?

You may have some idea that this is a metaphor for my life, and you would be correct.

Growing up, I had a fairly clear idea of how I thought my life would go.

As a teen, I lived mostly in my head, judged others for things like poor spelling, and condescended to people who did not have a wealth of academic trivia at their command.

I was a straight A student in high school. Did all my homework. Never dreamed of cutting classes.

Mostly lived up to everyone's expectations.

I applied and was accepted to Reed College, an elite liberal arts school.

I planned to get a bachelor's degree in mathematics, and then probably a master's degree in something related. Because I had been programming computers since 1981, and my mom & I had a lot in common, I might well have followed in her footsteps and worked at a well-paying computer programming job.

In short, I was headed towards being another well-to-do intellectual, solidly entrenched in the upper middle class.

Depression derailed that.

In my 2nd year of college, I started skipping classes, sleeping extra, feeling overwhelmed. I finally felt so hopeless that I attempted suicide.

I started counseling and antidepressants, and managed to finish the semester. I then took a medical leave for the next semester. After that, I thought I was ready, so I went back to college, but wound up skipping class again, struggling to do classwork, dropping classes. I took some time off, worked a clerical job for over a year, then tried a different, easier college. Same pattern. What was wrong with me?

Over the decades, I have spent hundreds of hours in counseling, both individual and group. I have also spent untold hours in introspection.

After many, many attempts to get my life back on its original track, including a few years actually doing computer programming in an in-training position, I have realized that I do better when I **accept** things as they are.

I am not living the life I had planned, and I may never live that life -- and that's okay.

I have difficulty following through on commitments -- and that's okay too.

I do not contribute financially to my household -- and I can believe my husband when he says he's okay with it, and I can be okay with it.

As Katherine Hepburn said in the film, "On Golden Pond": "Sometimes you just have to look at someone and realize he is doing the best he can." That is now how I try to look at myself.

I have learned that it is destructive to compare myself to others. How well someone else can do something has nothing to do with how well I can or should be able to do it. I keep reminding myself to let that go.

This acceptance is hard-won. Luckily, I had a head start. I was raised with unconditional love from my parents and grandparents. And I was raised in UU churches, where we commit to affirming and accepting each individual. As Kenny Wiley states, Unitarian Universalism tells us over and over again "You are already good. You are already enough." [<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/uu-helped-my-depression/>]

Another thing I have learned is that depression may ambush me when I least expect it. I can have days or weeks or even months when I am handling things well, following through on commitments, enjoying life like someone without depression. Then the numbness or doubts or aloneness comes over me again, suddenly or gradually. It may last hours or weeks.

Eventually, sometimes after a crisis, it recedes again, and I try to pick up the pieces and have a life worth living.

What helps is to appreciate what I can do, when I can do it. My friend Julie thinks of me like a wild strawberry -- I'm not always around, but I'm worth waiting for.

Because I'm not reliable, I have had to build a life of flexibility.

I had to let go of expectations and question the way things were normally done, because I was no longer able to do them that way.

This has turned out to have many benefits.

When I have been able to work, I have mostly had a part-time, flexible schedule. This allowed me to volunteer in my friend's special ed classroom, gaining valuable experience and understanding of dealing with kids who have special needs.

When my grandmother fell and broke her hip while my parents were on vacation, I was able to stay in her room with her at the rehabilitation center just about 24/7 for 2 weeks. I'm glad she had someone with her, because there were several instances where she was not able to effectively advocate for herself but I was, significantly improving her stay.

I've also taken advantage of the extra time to explore and develop much more than I would have been

able to if I were working full-time.

Because of the different path my life has taken, I have interacted with a far greater variety of people and had a far different array of experiences than I probably would have as a self-sufficient full-time computer programmer.

In Spokane, I was a member of the Evergreen Club, a place for people with mental illness to gain structure, build job skills, and get help with getting employment. (By the way, we now have the Iris Clubhouse here in Casper, that functions on the same model) I also participated in group therapy through Frontier Behavioral Health, which mostly has low-income people as clients. Through both of those venues, I heard what it was like to be homeless -- carrying your belongings with you during the day, no place to get out of the weather for parts of the week, trying to navigate the various soup kitchens and shelters, having stuff stolen by other clients at the shelters.

When I was suicidal and spent 5 days in a hospital's Adult Psychiatric Unit, I got to know a woman who was struggling with addiction to methamphetamines. She had finally decided that when she got out of the hospital, she had to break up with her boyfriend and break off contact with all her current friends in order to avoid temptation. She would leave town to stay at her mother's place. Just when she needed support the most, all she would have was her judgmental mother. There are other people who would not even have that support.

While my husband went back to school for 6 years to become a pharmacist, we went on public assistance. I experienced first hand how daunting it can be to navigate the information and forms to get food assistance and medical coverage through the government. I had to resubmit paperwork twice a year, usually having to re-fill out every field, even if it was the same information as last time. Well, when I am depressed and struggling, having to fill out paperwork can take weeks, and more than once I finally had to ask my husband (who was busy with schoolwork) to walk me through doing it. What do people do if they are single and find the paperwork daunting? I have a friend who is leery of all forms of authority because of the abuses she has seen and experienced. When the one person who was helping her was no longer available, she did not tell anyone and just let the assistance lapse. She was so ashamed, she just told me about it a few days ago -- and she has been without assistance for over 6 months.

What I see now is that someone who is fully functioning, like I thought I would be, even if they believe themselves to be liberal and accepting, can have a difficult time understanding all the ways that simple-seeming things can be next-to-impossible for someone who has PTSD, mental illness, works 3 part-time jobs, or has been abused. It's easier if you get to know people with those issues, and it's much easier if you have a major issue yourself. I consider myself blessed to have had experiences that allow me greater empathy and understanding for others.

All of these experiences have given me a greater ability to help others.

When one of my best friends found herself stuck in depression for the first time, I was able to offer her a depth of acceptance and understanding that only comes from having lived it myself. She is better able to believe me when I say that things eventually get better (at least for a while), because she has seen me go through cycles of depression and feeling better. She is more likely to confide in me if she is feeling hopeless or suicidal, because she knows I have been there too. I have a huge binder full of coping skills that I can sort through to offer her suggestions that she might find helpful. And some of them have

been.

As I find greater acceptance and compassion for myself, I am able to offer greater acceptance and compassion to others. I am frequently amazed and touched when someone will share something with me that they have not been able to share with anyone else, allowing themselves to be vulnerable -- sometimes even when I am a perfect stranger. Such exchanges always leave me feeling honored to be so trusted, and uplifted to have been able to offer such vital support.

I believe in the words of Rev. Peter Boullata:

"I'm not saying that every dark cloud has a silver lining, or that hard times teach us something, Rather, I am saying a true "dark night of the soul" is a cauldron of change, painful to experience, but transformative." [www.uuworld.org/articles/dark-night-journey]

I already have to deal with the struggles of depression; I might as well notice the positives that have come from the journey: acceptance, appreciation in the moment, flexibility, broader range of acquaintances and life experiences, greater ability to help others.

Remember that garden I talked about at the beginning, full of dandelions, but no calla lilies? I'm getting used to having that garden. I'm even liking some of the benefits of that garden. Dandelions are easy to care for, and offer nourishment in lots of ways. Rather than conforming and being elegant, I can revel in exuberance, expansiveness, and cheerfulness. I provide healing I never could have provided if I had lived that safe, comfortable life. And I offer fun & silliness, like when a toddler or adult revels in foofing dandelion seeds.

When I look at it that way, my life is pretty amazing.

Discussion

Responsive Closing Words:

We close with a litany based on Brené Brown's work on wholeheartedness. The words are in your order of service. After I read each line of plain text, please respond with the bolded words.

A Litany Of Wholeheartedness

by Dawn Skjei Cooley

Because there have been times when shame has crushed our ability to be wholehearted

We let go of who we ought to be and embrace who we are.

Because we have not always had the courage to be imperfect

We let go of who we ought to be and embrace who we are.

Because we have struggled to have compassion for ourselves or others

We let go of who we ought to be and embrace who we are.

Because we have been afraid of our own vulnerability

We let go of who we ought to be and embrace who we are.

Because we are sometimes too scared to live authentically

We let go of who we ought to be and embrace who we are.

Because we want to be whole-hearted people, confident in our worthiness and our belonging

We let go of who we ought to be and embrace who we are.