

ANALYSIS OF ALL SOULS' WORSHIP

Understanding All Souls' Common Sunday Liturgy

The mission of All Souls is to liberate and cultivate the spirit

- ⇒ The mission of All Souls' worship is to be *an experience* of liberating and cultivating the spirit.
- ⇒ Not about *espousing* theological doctrine (Protestant Christian)
- ⇒ Not about the church and its representatives acting *to mediate* God to human being, and represent human being to God (Catholic Christian)
- ⇒ IS an aesthetic, artistic creation whereby individuals, through various mediums of expression, witness to their direct, unmediated relationship to God; to the highest values that judge human existence and invite it towards its fulfillment
- ⇒ IS an experience whose chief medium for expressing this liberation and cultivation of the spirit, is sound (to say it theologically, we are a tradition of the Word); secondarily sight, smell, taste, and touch; this is to compliment the chief means of the individual cultivating that liberation, which is through reason, the faculty of conscience
- ⇒ Sentiment is elicited or aroused in order to gain clarity for the use of reason; sentiment drives the service, primarily through music

The roles in liturgy:

The role of the minister in this experience is as the chief designer of the experience, setting the conditions for this event to the extent that human beings can. The minister is also an "actor" living within the experience, through giving "witness" to how the liberating Spirit has moved in his particular life, and how others and all of existence around him have cultivated that freedom.

The role of the musician in this experience is as the "liturgist," guiding the individual worshipper and the worshipping community through the various emotional stages that will yield an experience of living inside of this liberating Spirit. The musician directs and experiences with the worshipping congregation this liberating Spirit.

The role of the laity is to live inside this artistic event, the liberation and cultivation of the spirit, as a means to realize the joy, resolve, courage, and trust necessary to live out the mission of the church every other day of the week; and by their life bring the Good News of a freedom and unity of the Spirit expressed through a love for all souls.

Our liturgy is a three-part spiritual event most closely analogous in form and structure to the artistic even of a "symphony." However, while the worship experience may have an aesthetic nature, the aim of worship is more than just aesthetic. It is ethical and spiritual as well. It is to produce in the individual worshipper a conviction to live a life devoted to freedom as a spiritual quality; to work to bring about the unity of the human family through upholding the individuality of each of its members; and to witness to a larger Spirit enfolding existence, which is best in evidence through ever-widening one's breadth

of affection. Thus, in community, this event carries forward the spiritual identity of the congregation as a Unitarian Universalist church, best described in the congregation's Chalice Lighting words spoken every Sunday morning.

We light this Chalice to remember a truth, consecrated through the ages by the service and sacrifice of individuals and communities: There abides a unity and freedom of the Spirit expressed through a love for all souls.

The Movements of the liturgy:

FIRST MOVEMENT: *The purpose of this section is to call the worshipping community, this particular spiritual congregation together as a visible and historical embodiment of a timeless truth and message. The truth All Souls represents and seeks to enact is not an absolute, complete, exclusive, or never changing thing. But it is articulated in the Chalice Lighting words, to inspire worshippers by inviting them to place their lives alongside men and women and other spiritual communities through history who stood for spiritual freedom, the unity of humanity, and God's love for all souls.*

- 1) Enter into experience = Introit and playing through the Call to Worship; this experience is to be of the Ineffable and the Holy, and playing through the Call to Worship is meant to suggest this through its sound, the manner in which the keyboardist/musician plays. The sound of the Call to Worship is to emulate what is suggested by this Mary Oliver poem; that is, the sound of loon across a lake in the morning fog:

THE LOON ON OAK-HEAD POND

cries for three day, in the gray mist,
cries for the north it hopes it can find.

plunges, and comes up with a slapping pickerel.
blinks its red eye.

cries again.

you come every afternoon, and wait to hear it.
you sit a long time, quiet, under the thick pines,
in the silence that follows.

as though it were your own twilight.
as though it were your own vanishing song.

- 2) Establishing the sentiment appropriate for liberal religious worship = Gratitude, in the singing of the Call to Worship and in the Invocation
- 3) Transcending the particular congregation with the historic faith community of which it is a part = Chalice Lighting, which establishes that the individual is

transcended by historical community (transcends time) and a truth that is larger than culture (transcends place), just as the congregation is as a Unitarian Universalist church

- 4) Transcending the individual with the historic congregation = Reciting the covenant, which established All Souls as a Unitarian Universalist spiritual community in time, and as something larger than the individual and to which the individual belongs
- 5) Re-affirming gratitude as the sentiment appropriate for liberal religious worship, and the transcending nature of spirituality = Doxology

SECOND MOVEMENT: The purpose of this section is to introduce the particular aspect of existence that will be lifted up for the day, for the reasoned consideration and emotional engagement of all. This section has an emotional movement that seeks increasing depth for the individual into the self, to prepare one's self to hear and respond to the liberating Word, Sentiment, Thought, or Insight. Our Unitarian Universalist faith tradition upholds that 1) revelation is not sealed, and 2) that human being having been made in a likeness to the Divine, can realize the depth of that connection through a focusing of thought and emotion. This section is designed to prepare the individual and the worshipping community for the liberating movement of the Spirit.

- 1) Readings from historic resources that are the products of human beings encounter and experience with the divine = mark those readings off as sacred vis a vis our faith tradition
- 2) Prayer as the preparation of the individual to begin locating and discerning the workings of the Spirit, liberated from time and place, mortality and culture; that is, to connect most deeply with God through humanity's Divine likeness

THIRD MOVEMENT: The purpose of this section is to experience the product of the liberating movement of the Spirit, and to cultivate the fruits of that freedom through a resolve to live differently and/or more deeply. The means for realizing this purpose are twofold. First, through the witness of an individual, the minister who is called by the congregation to share his life experience passed through the fire of his thought. Through the sermon the minister shares a spiritual "walk" with the congregation, not in order that their lives take the shape and meaning of his. But, that in sharing deeply and emotionally, influenced by reason and critical thinking, the minister examines his life, "witnesses" to the liberating prospects and possibilities that examination has yielded, in order that each individual might do the same with his and her life. By sharing his spiritual life in such a manner the minister is inviting each worshipper to engage his or her own life in a deeper, more liberating way; in a way that will yield a broader affection for others and a wider gratitude for this gift of life. Then, in the final Hymn, Benediction, and Benediction Response, the individual worshipper and the spiritual community are

both “sent out” into to the world to live out that spiritual freedom and the unity of the human family can be realized through God’s all embracing love shaping our lives.

- 1) Sermon as the witnessing of one individual, so called out of the community to give that witness, of his experiencing the divine; that is, what transcends time and culture
- 2) Returning to the world, now having been upheld, supported, and sustained by the knowledge that individuals possess and can bear witness to, a direct relationship with God, a divinity to which all things of this world and to which all souls of this world bear a likeness

-Dr. Brent A. Smith – October 2006, revised January, June 2008