

**MEMORIAL SERVICES:**

**Memorial for Dorothy Berke**

June 28, 2008

Clear Lake, Michigan

The Reverend Doctor Brent A. Smith

All Souls Community Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan

PRELUDE: *"Morning Has Broken"*

INVOCATION

O most High, Almighty, our loving God, to thee belong praise, glory, honor, and all blessing!

Praised be our God with all thy creatures and especially our brother the sun, who brings us the day and who brings us the light. Faithful is he and shining with great splendor. O God, to us, he signifies thee!

Praised be our God for our sister the moon, and for the stars, which thou hast set clear and lovely in heaven.

Praised be our God for our brother the wind, and for air and cloud, calms and all weather, by which thou upholdest life in all creatures.

Praised be our God for our sister water, who is very serviceable unto us, and humble and precious and clean.

Praised be our God for our brother fire, through whom thou givest us light in the darkness; and he is bright and pleasant, and very mighty and strong!

Praised be our God for our mother the earth, which doth sustain us and keep us, and bringeth forth diverse fruits, and flowers of many colors, and grass.

Praised be our God for all those who pardon one another, and who endure weakness and tribulation. Blessed are they who peaceably shall endure, for thou, O Most High, shall give them a crown.

Praised be our God for our sister the death of the body, from whom no one escapeth.

Praise ye and bless ye our God, and giving thanks to God, serve God with great humility.

-Francis of Assisi

We bring to this place the tribute of our sorrow and the offerings of our sacred memory for Dorothy Berke. We are gathered here, her family and friends, to pay tribute to her spirit, and to give thanks for all the gifts of life which through her life we have received. We gather, also, in the hope that in the time of her death she might strengthen our hold on life.

Let us pray:

O God of Life's Venture, we are surrounded on every side by a multitude of wonders. No corner of this great earth, which is our home, is without its own special miracles of sight and sound. There is a divinity in the world in all its varied manifestations and disguises: it is visible in the daily witness of nature's unending order and providence; and in the mysterious depths of our own being - in the call of the heart's adventure, in those countless affirmations when our openness to life confirms the very meaning of life in happiness and joy. Yet, the essence of life's meanings remains a great and powerful mystery to us; the wherefores, the whys, the hows. It is as though sometimes our lives are wrenched apart with grand confusions and great unanswerable events. Yet, what we do not know, we are driven to find out; what we do not understand we are inspired to search for and comprehend. And so, we come to this place in thanksgiving and gratitude to sing our praise of life in all its complexities, in all its uncertainties; and to confirm those things which she whom we honor, honored with her mind, her heart, and her spirit.

Amen.

## READINGS

*If I can stop one heart from breaking, Emily Dickinson*

If I can stop one Heart from breaking  
I shall not live in vain  
If I can ease one Life the Aching  
Or cool one Pain

Or help one fainting Robin  
Unto his Nest again  
I shall not live in Vain.

*Gift from the Sea, Anne Morrow Lindbergh*

A good relationship has a pattern like a dance and is built on some of the same rules. The partners do not need to hold on tightly, because they

move confidently in the same pattern, intricate but gay and swift and free, like a country dance of Mozart's. There is no place here for the possessive clutch, the clinging arm, the heavy hand; only the barest touch in passing; because they know they are partners moving to the same rhythm, creating a pattern together, and being invisibly nourished by it. The joy of such a pattern is not only the joy of creation or the joy of participation. It is also the joy of living in the moment. Lightness of touch and living in the moment are intertwined.

*After Apple-Picking*, Robert Frost

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree  
Toward heaven still,  
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill  
Beside it, and there may be two or three  
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.  
But I am done with apple-picking now.  
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,  
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.  
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight  
I got from looking through a pane of glass  
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough  
And held against the world of hoary grass.  
It melted, and I let it fall and break.  
But I was well  
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,  
And I could tell  
What form my dreaming was about to take.  
Magnified apples appear and disappear,  
Stem end and blossom end,  
And every fleck of russet showing clear.  
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,  
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.  
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.  
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin  
The rumbling sound  
Of load on load of apples coming in.  
For I have had too much  
Of apple-picking: I am overtired  
Of the great harvest I myself desired.  
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,  
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.  
For all  
That struck the earth,  
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,  
Went surely to the cider-apple heap

As of no worth.  
One can see what will trouble  
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.  
Were he not gone,  
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his  
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,  
Or just some human sleep.

WITNESS: Eric Berke  
Gail Berke  
Chris Berke  
Others, as you are so moved to give witness

## HOMILY

*Spirit of Life, come unto me,  
Sing in my heart, all the stirrings of compassion.  
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea,  
Move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.  
Roots hold me close, wings set me free,  
Spirit of life, come to me, come to me.*

This is a favorite Unitarian Universalist hymn of Dorothy's. And since at her and Craig's wedding, the officiating minister sang, it seems only fitting that it be done on this day as well. Thus, was this homily opened with song!

We come to this place to celebrate the spirit, and the things of the spirit, as they were made known to us in the life of Dorothy Berke.

It is no small thing to think upon the life of any one individual; and more so, when it is someone who so loved life in herself and others; giving to it her hours and energies, that the essence of life's delight might be nurtured, and strengthened, and sustained.

You have heard the effect Dorothy had on the lives of others, and have been given the opportunity once again to visit in your mind and heart how she shaped your life in particular and unique ways. And this needs be recalled and honored again and again.

But more than that, Dorothy stood in a faith tradition and is now part of a mighty cloud of witnesses for a deep and longstanding view of the meaning of human nature and our existence. She is part of a history of lives that speak and deeds that beckon the human spirit to conceive and understand its grand and glorious ways.

She is now alongside of her comrades in faith: Benjamin Rush and Dorothea Dix, who in the 19<sup>th</sup> century created social work and the art of helping others as a specific social calling for the public's welfare; Susan B. Anthony and Clara Barton, who distinguished themselves as angels of human rights and mercies, one in the political arena of women's suffrage and the other on the Civil War battlefield and later as the founder of the Red Cross; Margaret Fuller, who conceived of something holy in the human intellect and the religion and philosophy that is its harvest; Ralph Waldo Emerson, who first saw in Nature's forms - the apple trees, the birds, and all of the plants and creatures - the imprint of the Divine; and William Ellery Channing, who took so seriously the prospect that we are made in the image of God that he declared it was the purpose of all human religious fellowship to invigorate those moral sentiments we are born with, instead of diminishing human nature by calling it depraved as so much religion is wont to do. Horace Mann, who dedicated himself to public education for all as a means to develop this Divine image in every unique way. This is Dorothy's Unitarian Universalist faith legacy, the view of human nature and existence she campaigned for, stood up for, and lived her life by. Dorothy and Woodbridge Ferris found the Eternal expressed through the incomparable and changing forms of Nature, and the curious intersection of Dorothy's life with all these others forms the real and spiritual air we breathe today.

She pieced together quilts in her life, a practical skill she was taught in her early teens and something she pursued with a passion after retirement. But, she spent a lifetime piecing together a Divine quilt through wedding her faith to the challenges of helping others to flourish. And this life-quilt is dazzling beyond compare! It is made of the fabric of the Spirit which endures all seasons to appear through human affection.

Yet, as Unitarians our faithfulness is not an ethnic matter as it is with the Jews. It is not a matter of submission to the will of Allah as it is for Muslims, nor a matter of right belief and correct doctrine as it is for creedal, orthodox Christians. To us faith is about trust, ultimately, in Creation's purposes and in human beings as the agents of love and mercy, and this faith is arrived at by individual's like Dorothy consenting to choose this difficult and discipline path. She freely chose to live her life and shape her character by the wisdom, insight, and revelations of our faith tradition:

Everybody is of worth. God loves all souls.

Freedom is the form God takes in this world. All souls are created in a likeness to the Divine, so everything we do to uphold and strengthen freedom is a holy thing.

Life is the religious challenge of trust, not the challenge believing rightly. And the enemy of this deep trust is the fear human beings harbor for the various

and glorious differences in creation, especially fearing the differences we are created with. Life is the challenge to live in trust rather than succumb to fear.

Revelation is not sealed, and thus education and the free mind are sacred things. Dorothy's accomplishments in education reflect how deep this value flowed within her. She was second in her high school class, largely put herself through college, scored the highest on the first Missouri state examination for welfare workers, and she influenced so many young people in their educational endeavors. She went back to graduate school in her fifties! She valued science and the world's religions because these taught us about the wonders of the natural world outside us and the wonders of the human heart and intellect inside us. She even kept the school slate she used as a little girl, a sacred and everyday symbol of the potential that abides inside of every child, of every race, creed, and culture.

Dorothy held fast to the interconnectedness of life. She was what her spiritual forbear, Ralph Waldo Emerson called, a "unitarian of the united world," glimpsing the unity that ties together all the various differences of creation. It is a unity that makes all souls part of the human family and worthy of respect, because all are as children unto God.

And so this mighty cloud of witnesses has one more standing beside it. Alongside of Susan B. Anthony, Clara Barton, Margaret Fuller, Dorothea Dix, we now see Dorothy Berke, whose is now a child for the ages and whose spirit remains to bless us:

For everything there is an appointed season,  
And a time for everything under heaven.  
A time for sharing, a time for caring;  
A time for loving, a time for giving;  
A time for remembering, a time for parting;  
You have made everything beautiful in its time.  
For everything You do remains forever.

## PRAYERS

O God, in whose eternal love do rest the spirits of all thy children, we praise and bless thy name for the great company of those who, having walked with us in this life, have gone before us into thy world of light.

Thou hast encompassed us about with a mighty cloud of witnesses: thy saints and prophets, aged men and gracious women, and little children, all those most dear, who, though they be invisible to our outward eye, yet speak within our hearts of truth and love and peace.

Especially do we give thanks for thy child Dorothy. Bless her name to thy continual keeping, and save her earthly life within the eternity of thine own.

O God, we do not presume to know thy children as thou knowest them. We give thee thanks for all those secret, mysterious completions of life beyond our understanding but known by thee: her service to others in private, her petitions for thy support and comfort, the cry of her soul in pain and in joy, the strong aspiration to thy blessed rest, and the benediction of thy peace which has come at last.

Now may she rest in peace. For, her eyes have seen a glory, and her heart has known love, and her life has been and will always remain a blessing.

AMEN.

#### PRONOUNCEMENT

Be not afraid, seeing this thing that comes to all men and women and all flesh. For things that are of flesh must perish after the way of flesh. But the Spirit is more wonderful than these. No one has yet plumbed its secrets, or set bounds or limits to its majesty. Pain cannot subdue it, nor sorrow destroy it. And we who mourn do but bear witness to its glory, which shall rise again.

#### SONG: "Song of the Soul"

*Love of my life I am crying  
I am not dying, I am dancing  
Dancing along in the madness  
There is no sadness  
Only the song of the soul*

Chorus: *And we'll sing this song  
Why don't you sing along  
Then we can sing for a long, long time  
Why don't you sing this song  
Then we can sing along  
Then we can sing for a long, long time*

*What do you do for a living  
Are you forgiving, giving shelter  
Follow your heart, love will find you  
Truth will unbind you  
Seek out a song of the soul CHORUS*

*Come to your life like a warrior*

*Nothing will bore yer, you can be happy  
Let in the light, it will heal you  
And you can feel you  
Sing out a song of the soul CHORUS*

*Love of my life I am crying  
I am not dying, I am dancing  
Dancing along in the madness  
There is no sadness  
Only the song of the soul CHORUS*

## BENEDICTION

Seeing that there is naught to fear and bearing witness to what can never die, let us go forth into the world in peace.

Be of good courage,  
Search all things  
And hold fast to that which is good  
Render unto no one evil for evil  
Strengthen the faint-hearted  
Support the weak  
Help the afflicted  
Love all men and women  
Serving the Most High  
Rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.

AMEN.

Rev. Dr. Brent A. Smith  
All Souls Community Church  
Grand Rapids, Michigan  
9/2/03

**Order of Service**  
**Memorial for Dorothy Berke**  
June 28, 2008  
All Souls Community Church  
The Reverend Doctor Brent A. Smith

PRELUDE: *"Morning Has Broken"*

INVOCATION

OPENING PRAYER

READINGS

*If I can stop one heart from breaking*, Emily Dickinson  
*Gift from the Sea*, Anne Morrow Lindbergh  
*After Apple-Picking*, Robert Frost

WITNESS: Eric Berke  
Gail Berke  
Chris Berke  
Others of you, as you are so moved

HOMILY

PRAYER

SONG: *"Song of the Soul"*

Chorus:      And we'll sing this song  
                  Why don't you sing along  
                  Then we can sing for a long, long time  
                  Why don't you sing this song  
                  Then we can sing along  
                  Then we can sing for a long, long time

BENEDICTION

Celebrant: The Rev. Dr. Brent A. Smith  
All Souls Community Church  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Memorial Service for Richard Batzer  
All Souls Community Church  
November 3, 2002  
The Reverend Doctor Brent A. Smith

PRELUDE [finishes with #156 *The Compass*]

INVOCATION

Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord!  
Lord hear my voice!  
O let Thine ears consider well my complaint.  
My soul fleeth unto Thee before the morning watch.

If thou, O Lord, shouldst record iniquities,  
Lord, who could stand?  
But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be  
revered.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and for his word I hope;  
my souls waits for the Lord  
more than the watchmen for the morning,  
more than the watchmen for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the Lord!  
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,  
there is grace,  
and with him is plenteous redemption.

Into this place of memory and hope we have come because, even though we sit in the presence of a great loss, and are saddened and angered and confused by what we face, yet we are nevertheless assured that there is a Spirit alive in the world over which death has no dominion, a light which no darkness can extinguish. We interrupt our daily routines and activities to join together as one; to listen; to reflect; to grieve; and to recall the life of Richard Batzer; to pay tribute to his spirit, and to give thanks for all the gifts of life which through his life we have received. We gather, also, in the hope that in the time of his death he might strengthen our hold on life.

Let us pray:

Eternal God of Life and Light, and Healing and Redemption, we come into this house of light that we might be reminded of Thy presence in this moment; and, to seek Thy consolation and Thy strength. We do not ask for wisdom for what we cannot know, but for fortitude in the face of what we do

know. We do not ask for understanding for what is beyond our ken, but for the solace of the spirit, which is within our reach. Breathe thy peace into our hearts, and remove from us all fear of tomorrow, that in thanksgiving and gratitude we might sing a praise of life in all of its complexities and in all of its uncertainties. And to confirm those things which he whom we honor, honored with his mind, his heart, and his spirit.

AMEN.

## READINGS

Who will teach me to write? a reader wanted to know.

The page, the page, that eternal blankness, the blankness of eternity which you cover slowly, affirming time's scrawl as a right and your daring as necessity; the page, which you cover woodenly, ruining it, but asserting your freedom and power to act, acknowledging that you ruin everything you touch but touching it nevertheless, because acting is better than being here in mere opacity; the page, which you cover slowly with the crabbed thread of your gut; the page in the purity of its possibilities; the page of your death, against which you pit such flawed excellences as you can muster with all your life's strength: that page will teach you to write.

There is another way of saying this. Aim for the chopping block. If you aim for the wood, you will have nothing. Aim past the wood, aim through the wood; aim for the chopping block.

*-The Writing Life, Annie Dillard*

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
Do not go gentle into that good night,

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight

Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light,

And you, my father, there on the sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

-Dylan Thomas

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

And the self same well from which your laughter rises was  
oftentimes filled with your tears.

How else can it be?

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy  
you can contain.

Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was  
burned in the potter's oven?

And is not the harp that soothes your spirit the very wood that was  
hollowed with knives?

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall  
find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is now giving you  
joy.

When you are sorrowful, look again into your heart and you  
shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which would bring you  
delight.

Some say, "Joy is greater than sorrow," and others say, "Nay,  
sorrow is greater."

But I say unto you, they are inseparable.

-Kahlil Gibran

When the spent sun throws up its rays on cloud  
And goes down burning into the gulf below,  
No voice in nature is heard to cry aloud  
At what has happened. Birds, at least, must know  
It is the change to darkness in the sky.  
Murmuring something quiet in her breast,  
One bird begins to close a faded eye;  
Or overtaken too far from his nest,  
Hurrying low above the ground, some waif  
Swoops just in time to his remembered tree.  
At most he thinks or twitters softly, "Safe!  
Now let the dark be dark for all of me.  
Let the night be too dark for me to see

Into the future. Let what will be, be.”

-Acceptance, Robert Frost

MUSIC: *Amazing Grace*

WITNESS TO THE LIFE OF RICHARD BATZER

*I stand, still as a wary doe, in a thick summer forest. Where once I was just a girl walking a trail with her father, I am now frozen, vigilant, lost in a maze of sharp shards of sunlight and bottomless shadows, the tree branches twisted and drawn toward my neck, like the limbs of marionettes, by the ancient gnarly vines that govern them.*

*A darkness closes around me. I do not recognize it for what it is – the eclipse of reason. It is so damn quiet, my endless rambling about goals and hopes and dreams stilled by the words of my father – “I’ve lost the trail”.*

*The whispers in the canopy above are malignant. I wait. No birds sing. No insects buzz. I startle, over and over again. Invisible seizures wrack me in this mockery of silence.*

*It has been too long. He is gone. I am alone.*

*He had been calling me, sounding our positions off my quavering responses. He had been seeking the trail marker in a widening trajectory while I held the place where he first realized the trail had disappeared. Now, it has been quiet for too long.*

*The eyes of future demons watch me from the bottomless shadows. They will obey the sun only a few hours longer, and then dusk will stir them, darkness will embolden them. I will scream my father’s name once in the throes of a wrenching panic, but they will devour his name, and me, in one blind scramble.*

*“Sherry!”*

*“Pa?”*

*“I’ve found it. Walk toward my voice.”*

*Stumbling over diminishing terror, driven forward by the things that are behind me, I find him. The orange marker tied to the tree beside him flaps lazily in the late afternoon breeze. The trampled path spreads out before us into brighter places.*

*I haven't left you there. I have just been seeking the path. The orange blaze scars the tree I stand beneath. It is time to call you. It is time for you to come forward, toward my voice, out of the bottomless shadows and into the setting sun. The time may not be long. But it will surely be that rare and sacred moment, unburdened by past, present, or future, when all fear is banished by an unexpected light.*

*I found an unopened fortune cookie on top of the refrigerator in your apartment. I cracked it open. It said, "You will be offered the deal of a lifetime."*

*And the deal is this. I don't understand love. I guess I don't really need to. All I need to acknowledge is that it is a form of arrogance to hold one's head stiffly above the vortex and proclaim to know, for a fact, what is good and what is bad.*

*"Papa!"*

*"Sherry"?*

*"I've found it. Walk toward the sound of my voice."*

Sherry Batzer is a writer. Her father, Richard Batzer, was a writer, too, a newspaperman, a newspaperman who loved jazz. For those who don't know, they are a natural combination. The newspaper writer records moments as they line themselves up to create the unique and unrepeatable melody of everyday life. The jazz musician records feelings as they line themselves up to create a unique and unrepeatable series of sounds. Both report human emotion; how sorrow and joy are inseparable, and how humanity often weeps from that which has been its delight, and how our laughter emanates from the wellspring of our tears.

Richard Batzer was a writer, a newspapermen, a hard life because of two contradictory things necessary to do it well. And he did it well. To report of the breadth of human life, from the mundane to the sublime, from the tedious to the tragic, and the hilarious to the horrific, one must possess a deep sensitiveness to the human condition. He must have pity on the lot of man. But that very same sensitiveness is a burden, too. He feels and reports on the folly of human being, the ignorance, pretentiousness, and neglect. He is suppose to report it objectively, dispassionately, unconnected, and how can anyone do that and retain a sensitiveness? A news journalist's life is a hard one because it is lived so close to life.

Dick Batzer was a writer, a newspaperman who “could be nasty when he was nasty, and loving when he was loving,” like the human beings who took hold of his curiosity and found their way into his stories. He had a hard childhood, the only child, of a Detroit family of German descent. He lived in a household that did not teach him how to love by teaching him all the various ways he was loved, and so he didn’t talk much about his growing up. For some reason, throughout his life, he wasn’t certain he deserved the love he was given.

Dick Batzer was a musician, played the trombone in a number of bands, and loved Stan Kenton and Mozart. He and Char met, in part, because of music, and their love of music and each other grew together. Dick Batzer wanted so much to compose an opera, traverse the world in a tramp steamer. But not all things we desire to do get fulfilled in just one lifetime. There were unforgettable moments for the family in the car, on trips, to Allegheny State Park, with the dog Mugsy in the backseat. He quoted the Dylan Thomas poem, and this piece from an unknown source: “My greatest glory consists not of never falling, but in rising every time I fall.” He did not go gentle into that good night. He often did not go gentle.

This writer’s favorite writers were Robert Frost, Barbara Tuchman, Larry McMurtry, S.J. Perlman, and J.D. Salinger. “Writing must be as immediate as life, or there are no juices, no chance to involve yourself or others in your vitality.” (Ray Bradbury) Dick Batzer had vitality, an unwieldy vitality at times. But the writer must face the eternity of the blank page and create something by destroying that blankness, and that creative process is not meek or mild, but sometimes is almost violent. It’s why newspapermen say they are pounding out a story on their typewriter. The two are inseparable, creation and destruction, like so much of life, like loss and gain. At the death of someone whom we loved, or someone who was such an important ingredient in our lives, we weave our way through the complex matrix of grief. We grieve the loss of what he was to us. We grieve the loss of what he couldn’t be for us. But, the tears flow the same.

Wrote the poet:

*What happens to the living when we die?  
Death is not understood by death; nor you, nor I.*  
-W.H. Auden

What remains from death? Does a hole remain in our lives? Yes, though even this is but evidence that through him there was experienced both joys fulfilled and sorrows unredeemed. A leave taking of any kind yields one overpowering remainder: the demand that we love life, discover its virtues,

uncover its blessings, revel in its salvations, and then extend that to every living, breathing creature. For like the man we mourn today, we have been created by God to grow and keep faith with life, and always feel its glory.

*I found an unopened fortune cookie on top of the refrigerator... I cracked it open. It said, "You will be offered the deal of a lifetime."*

*And the deal is this. I don't understand love. I guess I don't really need to...*

*"I've found it. Walk toward the sound of my voice."*

## PRAYER

O God, in whose eternal love do rest the spirits of all thy children, we praise and bless thy name for the great company of those who, having walked with us in this life, have gone before us into thy world of light.

Thou hast encompassed us about with a mighty cloud of witnesses: thy saints and prophets, aged men and gracious women, and little children, all those most dear, who, though they be invisible to our outward eye, yet speak within our hearts of truth and love and forgiveness and peace.

Especially do we give thanks for thy child, Richard. Bless his name to thy continual keeping, and save his earthly life within the eternity of thine own.

O God, we do not presume to know thy children as thou knowest them. We give thee thanks for all those secret, mysterious completions of life beyond our understanding but known by thee: his service to others in private, his petitions for thy support and comfort, the cry of his soul in pain and in joy, the strong aspiration to thy blessed rest, and the benediction of thy peace which has come at last.

Now may he rest in peace. For, his eyes have seen a glory, and his heart has known love, and his life has been and will always remain a blessing.

AMEN.

## PRONOUNCEMENT

O Lord, my heart is not yet lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; but I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted in its father's arms, like a child that is quieted is my soul.

I lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. The Lord will keep us from all evil; he will keep our lives. The Lord will keep our going out and our coming in from this time forth and forever more.

MUSIC: # 297 *Break Forth, O Beauteous, Heavenly Light*

#### BENEDICTION

Seeing that there is naught to fear and bearing witness to what can never die, let us go forth into the world in peace.

Be of good courage,  
Search all things  
And hold fast to that which is good  
Render unto no one evil for evil  
Strengthen the faint-hearted  
Support the weak  
Help the afflicted  
Love all men and women  
Serving the Most High  
Rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.

AMEN.

POSTLUDE: #11 *Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*

Rev. Dr. Brent A. Smith-Minister  
All Souls Community Church  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 11/3/02

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR ROB WOODRICK  
ALL SOULS COMMUNITY CHURCH (UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST)  
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN  
DR. BRENT A. SMITH

**HOMILY**

That song, *"You Can't Always Get What You Want,"* is both a pop song and theological statement. If you can for a moment dwell in freedom such that you can see the extraordinary and abiding in everyday things, you can understand the profound meaning hidden in that ordinary song; and you can understand something profound about Rob's life and something true and real right now. We do not always get what we want. But what we need is always at hand.

Today we gather amid the stories of family and friends because, even though we sit in the presence of a great loss, and are saddened and angered and confused by what we face, yet we are nevertheless assured that there is a Spirit alive in the world over which death has no dominion, a light which no darkness can extinguish. We gather in the face of death to remember life, and a particular life of one whom we so loved and who loved us. We interrupt our daily routines and activities to recall the life of Rob Woodrick, who died by an act of his own hand. Yet, too, we gather to pay tribute to his spirit, and to give thanks for all the gifts of life which through his life we have received. We gather, also, in the hope that in the time of his death he might strengthen our hold on life.

The first words out of Rob Woodrick's mouth when I first met him while I was eating lunch at the Bistro downtown, were, "I heard you preach and now come to your church. I am a very spiritual person, but I warn you. I am not religious." Later in the conversation, after he revealed he had worked in the meat business, I told him I had, too. "Before my call to ministry I worked for Oscar Mayer selling bologna!" He laughed loudly and said, "So you know the difference between religion and spirituality, too!" That cemented our companionship.

Rob was not a self-righteous believer, nor a disdainful and defiant non-believer. He wasn't interested in the church's appetites, which can imprison the spirit in policies, politics, personalities, and the past. Rob's taste was for deeper things. His spiritual pedigree was Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Muir, Thomas Edison, Ernest Hemmingway, and Henry David Thoreau, and Eastern and Western and Native American expressions of the spirit. He was an earnest and true seeker. He was a pilgrim of the spirit.

There is in some a deep sensitivity to the things of this world, an intelligence and generosity of the spirit, which makes their sojourn on this earth a rare mixture of exuberance and depletion. Sometime in their life they have made a vow to themselves to engage life in its bare essentials, to learn what it has to teach, and not to discover one day that they had not lived at all. Living is so dear to these souls that they feel so very deeply all the facets of life that others feel sporadically. All of our lives are a mixture of fullness and emptiness, which we vaguely apprehend. But these souls live intensely. Impulsive. Restless. Creative. Entrepreneurial. To the pilgrim of the spirit life is adventure and discovery. This good, good man was one such soul as this.

A pilgrim of the spirit possesses a romantic's exuberance for the world. He danced an innocent dance with the world, to tunes as diverse as Van Morrison and Frank Sinatra, with partners like SpongeBob, sometimes wearing a plastic bunny head as in a Horton Bay parade. At other times he adorned a Honey Bear costume so that the suffering children of this world – whose suffering he could feel - could make a wild wish that would actually come true!

A pilgrim of the spirit is learning constantly. Rob learned that true travel is spiritual travel. His loves were fierce and strong. Moderation is the chef's enemy because it makes everything taste bland. The pilgrim of the spirit subsists on spice and seasoning and quality and zing. He tastes the full and rich embellishments of life like a wine he calls for at a table of friends, and savors it as tasting much more expensive than it really is.

A pilgrim of the spirit seizes upon the love that is in the air, always about us, and offers that to his wife and his children in a measure no one can understand fully except them.

But one who confronts the bare essentials of life with the vitality and creativity of a pilgrim of the spirit cannot also be spared its pain, which he feels in equal measure. That is one of the great mysteries of this life: that all souls are filled with ambiguities and paradox. And never is this more in evidence than today. The life of the spirit requires a risk. To feel so deeply of love and life means, too, to feel the depths of a rare kind of solitude as well. Before the skier attacks the hill he is in the lodge preparing with his companions for the trials ahead. He starts up the hill amid the shouts of support and encouragement from his companions who will, after his descent, welcome him back with their sentiments, their admirations, and their embrace. But as the skier starts off the vertical slope there is a moment, plunging off a seemingly impossible cliff, when he is alone in the air, suspended above solid ground and the control one feels with the earth beneath one's skis. And no one of us knows what a man thinks at that time. Does he find himself in the challenge, the confrontation, and the connection with nature and with himself? What hopes does he possess? What fears possess him? Does he find himself, or does he lose himself?

But a pilgrim of the spirit knows this, and teaches it to all who have ears to hear: all of life involves risk. It's just that the pilgrim of the spirit feels this most deeply.

And he knows, too, what others struggle to understand. No one act ever encompasses an entire life. We are much more complex creatures than that. We feel the triumphs and trials of this life much deeper than we let on, and sometimes deeper than we know, because the manner of Rob's death tempts us into thinking it was a repudiation of existence. The pilgrim of the spirit does not renounce life, but sometimes there arises in his soul a cry for more life! He could feel life as deeply and as passionately as anyone I have known. All of life was his banquet. Yet, sometimes, inexplicably there is a driving hunger in the soul for more life, which is not satiated try as an individual might.

The spiritual life involves risk, and that is the reasons so many throughout time have found spirituality in spite of religion and church. Because the risk of the spiritual life takes one to the edge of the true nature of self: We live by faith. Not faith as success, as in were you faithful or not, did you succeed in keeping your faith secure? Not faith as certainty, which is an adversary of the spirit representing that the risks of life are somehow not real. Faith is not about the past, which we know, but about the future, which we do not know. Faith is a person's approach as he walks within the life of the spirit. Do you walk afraid, and too afraid to love? Do you live life shrinking from its risks, or engaging them and embracing them, and loving them, and loving all the souls you meet along the way?

A pilgrim of the spirit knows what we search for and struggle to comprehend: Love created never ends. If anything is God, love is, for it multiplies from moment to moment, life to life, generation to generation, and is eternal and will not end. The grief we hold now is as deep as is the affection, the esteem, the joy and the compassion that marked out our life with Rob. And those things, the things of the spirit, when all else fails or falls away, abide forever as love abides forever.

### **PRAYER FOR THE SOUL OF THE DECEASED**

O God, in whose eternal love do rest the spirits of all thy children, whose mercies are from everlasting to everlasting, and who does not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men; we thank Thee that Thy children can flee for refuge in their afflictions to the blessed certainty of Thy love. From every grief that burdens our spirits, from the sense of solitude and loss, from the doubt and failing of the soul in its trouble, we turn to Thee. Be Thou our strength and our deliverer; in our great need be Thou our helper; pour Thy consolations into our hearts, and let Thy truth minister comfort and peace to our souls.

O God, we do not presume to know Thy children as Thou knowest them. We knew much about Rob; but Thou, O God, knowest his deepest secrets. We give Thee thanks for all those mysterious completions of his life beyond our understanding but known by Thee: his service to others in private, his petitions for Thy support and comfort, the cry of his soul in pain and in joy, and the benediction of Thy peace which has come at last.

For as much as in the unsearchable and unknowable order of things the life of Rob Woodrick is ended, may he rest in peace; a peace the world can neither give nor take away. We commend the spirit of your child, Rob, to Thy eternal care. Bless his name and keep him, O God, and be gracious unto him, and give him peace.

AMEN

### **PETITION TO THE COMMUNITY OF THE LIVING**

Be not afraid, seeing what becomes of all flesh. For things that are of flesh must perish after the way of flesh. Be not afraid, for the Spirit is more wonderful than these. No one has yet plumbed its secrets, or set bounds or limits to its majesty. Be not afraid, for pain cannot subdue the spirit, nor sorrows destroy it. And we who mourn our brother do but bear witness to its glory, which shall rise again.

Be not afraid.

But, be of good courage.

Search all things, and hold fast to that which is good.

Render unto no one evil for evil.

Strengthen the faint-hearted.

Support the weak.

Help the afflicted.

Love all souls, serving the Most High.

And rejoicing in the power of the Spirit. Amen.

### **INTERMENT**

Gathering here, the good earth beneath our feet, the air freshened by the wind and filled with migrating birds, and the great arching sky above us, we bow our heads in thanksgiving for the one we held so dear. For here the body of Rob Woodrick is returning to the quiet ground and we come bearing the gifts of our hearts for a blessing upon this place.

We have come to commit to God and the preciousness of memory a life that mingled with our own, the vitality and loveliness of which remain to

bless us. Those whom we love do indeed leave us and when they do, no spoken words can lessen our grief. But what they were will never leave us either. The strength of his presence and his companionship, the gentleness of his sympathy, the warmth of his love, these are ours always, interfused with our thoughts and blended with our lives. And so, let us seek the courage to begin to know gratitude for the gifts given us through his life.

The great words that we speak: truth, justice, and goodness. What would they mean if no one lived them into life? Beauty, what would it mean if it were just a word? Compassion, what would it mean if we had never felt it? And God, the greatest word of all? The spirit of God, if we are to know it, must first be found in ourselves and in one another. And we find it best in those whose lives remind us that God's other name is Love.

### **PRAYER**

O God, in whose eternal love do rest the spirits of all Thy children, we praise and bless Thy name for the great company of those who, having walked with us in this life have now gone before us into Thy world of light.

For Thou hast encompassed us about with a mighty cloud of witnesses: Thy saints and prophets, caring men and gracious women, and little children, all those most dear who, though they be invisible to our outward eye, yet speak within our hearts of truth and love and peace.

And especially do we give Thee thanks for Thy child, Rob. Bless his name to Thy continual keeping! May he rest in peace. For his eyes have seen a glory, and his heart has known love, and his life has been and will always remain a blessing.

AMEN.

And now in the presence of three great mysteries, death and life and love, into the good earth from which he came we place the body of Rob Woodrick, whose spirit remains to bless us.

AMEN.

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