

Hymns:

#347 Gather the Spirit
#309 Earth is Our Homeland
#318 We Would be One

Readings:

#443 We Arrive Out of Many Singular Rooms - I'll read this
#444 This House - responsive reading

Summary: Individual relationships to God, UU ideas about God, and being interconnected while being individual in our relationship to the sacred

Who Do You Think you Are?

Hey there big stuff - Yeah you there
Hiding between rock and stone
Whispering on the night wind
Touching the dawn rays and dying leaves
Just who do YOU think you are?
You make us with joy
Fill my soul with song
Sung through moving
Turning, twisting reflection
Danced a thousand, no a million times
In communion, revelation
Sung with arms and feet torso and head
Leaping into the stars and crouching into the earth
And you took it.
Just who do you think you are?
To take that?
Maybe "I gave it to you, I can take it away"
Like some angry bitter mother-
Feeling unappreciated. Broken?
Is that you? What is it?
Was I not grateful enough, for the joys you gave me?
You had to take them away
So I could really understand?
Just who do you think you are?
Or did I do that?

I want to start with a story. A very old story.
There is this guy, tending a flock of sheep in the desert,
maybe down by Moab, you know,
where the rocky spires stretch to the sky
and the desert is colored like a pastel painting
And the wind smells like dry stone; anyway,
this guy was tending this flock of sheep
and he looked over this hill and saw a burning bush. At first, he thought "Fire"
Then, I bet he thought, maybe I need some folks with buckets.
But after watching for a moment,
he realized the bush was not burning up,
so he thought "Wow, I should go check out that bush that's
burning, but not burning up. That is just too weird!"
So he went over the hill, to see the strange
bush that burned, but did not burn up.
As he got close the bush called out to him in a whisper,
"Yo, hey, Moses, Moses" So yeah, I guess his name was Moses.
So Moses got close to the bush, but not too close,
because you know, its a bush, its on fire, its not burning and its
whispering his name, best to not get too close to that.
So, this guy Moses, called from a ways away, "Here I am."
The bush whispered, "Do not come any closer,
best take off your sandals, for the place
where you are standing is holy ground."
Moses didn't see any where to put his shoes so
If it were me, I would have left them on
No matter what the bush said, so yeah I am thinking
Moses probably left his shoes on.

The bush said, "I am the God of your father,
the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."
Intimidating. So Moses hid his face, because he was afraid
Or could be he was ashamed to be still wearing his shoes
With such a lofty introduction.
Maybe he didn't like rigid patriarchal power
He could have been a progressive.
Anyway, the bush said, "I have seen the misery of my people.
I have heard them crying out in their slavery,
and I am concerned about their suffering.
I have come to rescue them from the empire
and bring them to a good and spacious land,
Flowing with milk and honey.
YOU are going to go down into the land and free them."
Moses looked at the bush and talked back
"ONE second....just who do you think I am?
I am a shepherd. My sandals are the most expensive
Thing that I own" (which Moses probably said
to cover the whole "I am still wearing my sandals here")
"I cannot go and challenge an empire to bring
Your oppressed people out of slavery.
This is not for me, in fact, this whole shindig is crazy."

So the bush said, "I will be with you" and Moses stopped
He stared at the bush for a long moment, the kind
of stare that you give someone
When they say something that doesn't make any sense at all
But which is compelling somehow any way?
Moses said, "Look, suppose I do go to your people and say,

`Hey, look, the God of your fathers has sent me to you,'
they are probably going to say, `What God? Does this God have a name.'
After all, they've been in slavery for a while,
You haven't exactly been there for a while, what am I
going to tell them when they ask me,
`What God are you talking about you crazy shepherdder?'
Who are you anyway?"
So the bush said to Moses,
now this is interesting, this bush, it said, "I AM who I AM.
This is what you are to say to the Israelites:
'I AM has sent me to you. I AM, the God of your fathers –
the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This
is my name forever, it has always been my name, so you will tell them 'I AM has sent
you and I AM has watched over you. I AM has seen what has been done to you, so I
AM will bring you up and out of your misery and will take you to a new land flowing with
milk and honey.'"
Moses looked at the bush cross-eyed.
Wouldn't you? Really? If a bush said all that?
There's a bush saying "Hey, go tell these slaves that
I AM is coming and we're gonna fix all this slavery and oppression."
But the bush said, "The elders will listen to you.
You and the elders will go to the empire and you will say,
'I AM, the God of the oppressed, has met with us.
We all need a 3--day weekend to go into
the woods and burn some stuff in worship, or else..."
The bush also said, "Sure, the rulers of empire will not listen to you,
so I will perform wonders and make them listen, and every poor
household will take their wealth from the rich.
It is going to be so great, you will all be free. Go on

and get on with it.”

Moses thought, “why not?”

I am bored with these sheep anyway, so he went down into the land of empire and spoke to the rulers, the emperors, and set the people free.

There was some stuff about plagues on the oppressors, oceans opening up, the people wandered a long time, eating some kind- of bread that appeared in the bushes.

There was a serious incident with a golden calf, ignoring the amazing things that I AM had done, but that was kind- of a blip that everybody got over later

Mostly because Moses, being a bit mouthy like he was, stood up for the people to this God when God got angry. All in all, it went pretty well.

Maybe you heard this story before?

The last time I was here, talking about covenant,

I made a reference to this story

I summarized the covenant between Moses and God as

“If you challenge Pharaoh to free the people, I will be with you always”

I like the longer version.

Each of our relationship to creation is unique, special

Like Moses, maybe we each have our own still, small voice

Or maybe big, burning bush voice, calling to us

At least, that is what I think.

I love this faith. I grew up in it.

My mother was an ex-Catholic, my father, an Ex-Congregationalist

The Rev. Kenneth L. Patton was my childhood minister

He was a mystical humanist; he wrote both of the readings for today

He preached about the human experience, the beauty

The uniqueness and yet the similarity.

There was no mention of God.

Ken was a professed and devout atheist.

Is that a thing? A devout atheist?

It seems like it should be to me; the word

Certainly describes the minister of my church when

I was growing up; he was maybe even an evangelical atheist.

Spreading the good news that there was no God.

Yet for me, every day in my childhood, there was a presence with me

When I talked to people about it, folks sent me to psychiatrists

Gave me medicine, told me to yell at the presence

“Go way now” - Yet it stayed. It never left

This presence did not fit into the church of my childhood

After a few experiences, I learned to hide it from the adults

In my highly intellectual, critical community

Do not get me wrong, I have no issue with that community

Not any more. I mean I did. I was angry

When I realized that my childhood church

Had tried to take my God away from me.

But I worked through that. And I learned something

I learned how important it is for our faith to recognize

The individual and unique nature of each and every

Singular beings relationship to their God.

Because as a child, impressionable, do you have any idea

How loudly those voices with adult authority said to me

“there is no God?”

Unitarian Universalist Theologian Forrest Church

Has been profoundly important to my work as a chaplain

And to my identity as a Unitarian Universalist

Forrest Church wrote a theological metaphor called

The Cathedral of the World - Church writes:

“*The Cathedral of the World* begins with a like metaphor (“one light and many windows”) drawn from the introduction to Unitarian Universalism that I wrote with my colleague John Buehrens. Although tailor-made for my own denomination - Unitarian, “one light,” Universalist, “many windows” - my cathedral metaphor weaves an all-embracing theological garment, suitable for universalists of every religious persuasion.”¹

Church’s metaphor is simple, yet deep and rich

Imagine awakening from a deep sleep to find

That you are in the nave of a vast cathedral

Opening your eyes to an unseen world

Your awakening a calling that stirs deep inside you

The call of life itself, of creation, of God

Gazing around you, the cathedral stretches out

In many directions, as ancient as humanity,

Built upon our history, our belief, our faith

The cornerstone the first altar, stained with blood sacrifice,

Etched and hidden in the myriad shrines statements of reverence

Made by scientists glimpsing a moment of the eternal

It has been built stone by stone by countless builders

Working age upon age, their whole lives, destroying and creating

Tearing down and raising up arches, chapels, gargoyles, icons

Innumerable moments of hope, fear, joy and loss

Are carved into every stone surface, shape every wall

Stain the glass in every window, and countless memories

¹ Church, *The Cathedral of the World*, Kindle Location 101

Are hidden away in the chambers, halls and shrines
Not a moment passes without dreams of long-dead dreamers
Cracking or breaking underneath the pressure of new vision
Immortal, and yet ephemeral all at once.
Illumination shines through many windows, illuminates many corners
Shadows play across others, and the beauty is as breathtaking
As it is terrible. There is a still, vast, ponderous terrible beauty.
Welcome to the Cathedral of the World

The importance of this metaphor to my work in ministry
To the way I do chaplaincy cannot be over stressed
For me, that same God who said to Moses
“I will be with you” is embodied in that light
The illumination of the cathedral that touches everything, in different ways.

When I was young that presence was always there for me
It whispered in the babbling brooks of New Jersey
Laughed in the winds that touched the leaves of the trees
Grounded my heart when the smell of wet earth or stone
Touched my nose or when crisp night air chilled my lips.

As a child, I was alone in that spiritual world
I think I can appreciate the reception that Moses
Probably got when he walked into his community
And said “Hey, Listen. I gotta pack up and go talk
To these enslaved people because a burning bush
Said that I should go do that. But hey Mom, Dad,
Don’t worry about it, because I AM is coming with me
And I gotta really hurry because Pharaoh has no

Idea how much trouble he is in and I gotta give him
A chance to let all his slaves go and trash the economy
Of his whole civilization before things get really bad.”

Yeah. That is exactly the kind of speech I would want to
Say to my parents, my wife, my kids...

James Luther Adams another Unitarian Universalist theologian
Wrote that God is dynamic, not mandatory, God is
the “inescapable, commanding reality that sustains and transforms all meaningful
existence,” a reality that “works upon us and through us and in accord with which we
can achieve truth, beauty or goodness.”²

James Luther Adams captures the same sense of the eternal
Yet ephemeral, that mysterious presence
That I hear in the story about Moses

The hebrew for “I AM”
(please forgive my poor enunciation)
Is Eyeh Asher Eyeh,
The translation could be “I AM”
Some scholars believe another translation is “I am that I am”
Or “I will be what I will be” or maybe “I will be what I become”
I like to think of the phrase the burning bush said to Moses
As “I am becoming” or “Being”

The name of God used the most in Hebrew scripture

² James Luther Adams, *The Essential James Luther Adams: Selected Essays and Addresses*, ed. George K. Beach (Boston, Mass: Skinner House Books, 1998). Page 32-33

Is the Tetragrammaton, the Yod Heh Vav Heh
Which appears to be an archaic third person singular
Imperfect of the verb "To Be" meaning "He or She is"
Since Hebrew is poetic and meaning is artistic
It is impossible to translate the verb exactly
What does that mean?
To me that says that even in Hebrew scripture,
The oldest sections of the bible,
Those same sections that Jesus studied as a rabbi
The most commonly used name of God means mystery
The gender is unclear. The tense is unclear.
God is just not entirely unclear.
Has been for the past nearly four thousand years.
What is confusing to me, is all the people who seem to say
They know who God is...or is not...

Albert Einstein said:

"The finest emotion of which we are capable is the mystic emotion. Here in lies the germ of all art and all true science. Anyone to whom this feeling is alien, who is no longer capable of wonderment and lives in a state of fear is a dead man. To know that what is impenetrable for us really exists and manifests itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, whose gross forms alone are intelligible to our poor faculties - this knowledge, this feeling ... that is the core of the true religious sentiment. In this sense, and in this sense alone, I rank myself among profoundly religious men."

<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/703309-the-finest-emotion-of-which-we-are-capable-is-the>

I am not suggesting that Einstein believed in God
He did not. Other quotes make that clear.
At least, Einstein did not believe in a God
That could be defined and described
Instead Einstein felt a sense of amazement

Mystery

During his contemplation and studies
He sought to know the workings of the universe
His seeking filled him with a sense of reverence
And wonder.

To me, it sounds like perhaps James Luther Adams
And Einstein had similar ideas.
That there is some vast, mysterious, compelling force
A force that transforms and calls us to all great, creative endeavors
In my understanding, that illumination which Forrest Church wrote
Sheds light throughout the cathedral of human faith
Casting illumination upon all the beauty
Without covering, or dismissing what any one individual
Might see, or find.
Truly a Cathedral of the World.

We keep arguing and trying to define this mystery
Effectively grabbing each other by the arm and saying
Hey, come over here, look what I found
Here in this cathedral
As if our discovery
Were the only thing of beauty
In this giant cathedral.
We seek to categorize, define
Structure the infinite
But that is in our nature isn't it?

I have a story like the one I started with

It is the story that makes that presence that I feel
So important to me now
In 2008 I was at home alone. My wife was out of town
For several days. I had not eaten enough. I was tired.
I felt nauseous and got up to run to the bathroom
And I passed out in the hallway, falling on my face
When I woke up, I was paralyzed from the elbows down
I could not move my hands, legs, body, just my upper arms and shoulders
And I was going to be alone for the next 3-4 days
Realizing that I would die there all alone, I panicked
Not just panic, but that deep, mind-numbing
And primal fear that rises up from inside your cells
To take over every inch of your being.
My mind shut off as I lost the ability to think
Buried under waves of abject terror
Something came over me in that moment
I was a martial artist, I was well trained
And maybe in that moment, my training kicked in
Or maybe it was that presence that I had always felt
But whatever it was there was a peace that came over me
And my mind started to come back
As something in me started to control my breathing
A question came into my mind "What can I do right now?"
I explored my movement. With that presence
That peace calming my mind
I started to try and drag myself through the house
It took me six hours of dragging myself to be able to call 911
Things were strange, I was in shock, I did some strange things
Like make a 3 foot detour to change the channel

I was sure

That it was wrong to die with a vacuum cleaner infomercial
As my soundtrack. So I stopped to change the channel.

There was the 911 team, the backboard, the emergency room

Through all of it I kept wondering how this was going

To affect my wife. If she would be able to handle it.

I wondered if I would ever get up again

Or if my lovely wife, who married a successful

Businessman, Kung Fu practitioner and folk hero

Would be cleaning up after me

Every time I went to the bathroom

For the rest of my life.

When I arrived in rehabilitation

I asked the doctors if I would ever walk again

And they said to me. "We don't know

Your nerves seem to be good enough

But that is only a small predictor. We don't know."

Again, that peace came over me.

And I remember saying, "Then it is just between me and providence."

I still feel emotional when I say that phrase

Not because I remember the loss. The loss was huge

I never got all my functionality back. I lost my Kung Fu

Twenty years of training and it was all gone

In an instant when my muscle memory changed

And the reset button got hit

I have never had the emotional fortitude to return

Because my body cannot do what it could

And that loss was just too much.

No, I don't get emotional because of that
I get emotional because of that phrase
"I guess it is between me and providence"
When I said that phrase to the doctors
What I remember is that I felt it again
Embodied by: "I will be with you"
You notice that when the bush talks to Moses
It does not promise that Pharoah won't freak out
And kill him. Torture him. No.
It does not promise that the people will be free
Or that Moses will make it to the promised land
(Spoiler alert - he doesn't)
It promises "I will be with you"
That is the extent of the promise; whatever happens
"I AM" "I AM BECOMING" will be there
And that is exactly what I felt when I felt alone
Paralyzed and hopeless as I was
I felt that same presence that was there
The same presence that whispered in the rocks, the wind
A presence that was being, becoming, I AM'ing
A presence my therapist, parents, my faith community
Back in the day told me I should chase away
I am so very grateful that it never left me.
That even when the young man felt the authority
Spoken from pulpit about the wrong God
Still the presence never left, and it was waiting
For the moment when I needed it, to whisper
"I will be here" "I am with you" "I AM"
We will become.

And become we did.

I kept my hope. I had more energy

Than almost anyone who ever entered rehab

And because of that energy...

Because I was willing to be the only

Crazy patient...in a harness...hanging from the ceiling

Trying to do Kung Fu, flailing around like a pinata

No literally, picture a 200-lb man hanging from a ceiling

In a harness trying to do Kung Fu but having spasms

Does that not sound like a giant Pinata?

But because I AM was with me

I was reborn in a very real, physical way

I am so very glad that I AM never left

That the cathedral was large enough

The mystery never failed and the call was there

I cannot say that I know which God speaks to you

And one of the things that makes me a chaplain

Is that I am astonished to hear the myriad voices

Of the choir echoing through that cathedral

In the many ways people find meaning in creation

This family talks about the mountains

Another a favorite fishing hole

Some talk about church or singing

Many do not.

The Tao. I AM. Eyeh-Asher-Eyeh

Illumination. Dynamic force.

Hope. Mystery.

Does defining it diminish it?

Which God is yours?

Closing Blessing (From St. Clare)

Live without fear. Live without shame. Creation has made you holy, and loves you as a mother. Go in peace. Go in love. Go in kindness. Listen for Being in the world around you. May God's blessing be with you always. Amen. Ashay. Blessed Be.