

# Small Steps in a Broken World

In celebration of social justice

Created by Laurie Stuart, October 17, 2010

Upper Delaware Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

## **I. Welcome:**

This morning we come together to celebrate our commitment to social justice within the ranks of the Upper Delaware Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. Today, we walk our talk as many of us will step out with other socially conscious organizations in our 20th Annual Bud Rue Walk for Social Justice. This day, we are actively participating in our mission to build just and sustainable communities through good works as we begin our season of raising money for Victims Intervention Program, RISE and two chapters of Habitat for Humanity. Today, we will walk together. We will share our stories and share our day. We will learn first hand about how our money is helping one person at a time and making a difference in individual lives. And today, I want to talk about how, this year, our walk may not be as robust as in the past, that has been brilliantly created to mirror a philosophy and a theology called process theology that puts forth that there is nothing static in this world and that through our relational beings we touch the divine, each other and do good works.

## **II. Opening Hymn: We are climbing Jacob's Ladder #211**

We are helping in our communities. We are helping in our communities. We are helping in our communities, as we walk along.

Everyone has their own story. Everyone has their own story. Everyone has their own story, as we walk along.

Even though sometimes we're weary. Even though sometimes we're weary. Even though sometimes we're weary, still we walk along.

## **III. Opening Words:**

May our time together renew our hope.

May the stories we share refresh our courage.

May the songs we sing lift our spirits.

May the words we speak invigorate us.

May the touch of hands, the sound of laughter,

the sight of faces new and familiar,

restore us in faith.

And when we are done walking, let the food we share nourish our bodies and our souls.

Amen.

## **IV. Chalice Lighting**

Process philosophy holds that materialism is mistaken. What constitutes our universe is not an assortment of lifeless particles but an ensemble of interrelated happenings. May we always remember and celebrated the interrelated happenings.

## **V. Candles of Joy, Sorrow and Concern**

### **VI. Offering/Imagine**

### **VII. Children's story:**

A wise old man once owned a precious golden coin. One day, as he sat gazing at this precious coin and rejoicing in its beauty, a thought occurred to him: "It isn't right that I should be the only person to have the pleasure of possessing this golden coin. What use is it if no one shares it?" And he went out and gave the coin to a passing child.

The child couldn't believe her luck. She couldn't take her eyes off this shining coin. Then she had a sudden idea: "I'll give this coin to Mum. She needs so many things. This coin will make her very happy."

Of course, the child's mother was delighted with the coin. It was such an unexpected solution to so many of her problems. She pondered in her mind as to how to spend it and what to buy first.

As she was thinking about this there was a knock on the door, and there stood a street beggar. "Poor soul" she thought. "He has nothing, and we are just about getting by." And she gave the gold coin to the beggar.

The beggar was speechless. This coin could be turned into food for a month. He made his way back to the subway where he slept, and there he noticed a new resident, just arrived. The poor guy was blind and disabled. He had no chance of getting anywhere near to the folks who might have spared him a coin or two.

"I guess he needs it more than I do," he thought to himself. And he pressed the gold coin into the blind man's thin, cold fingers.

That evening, a wise old man walked through the dark subway. He noticed the blind, disabled beggar and stopped to speak to him.

The beggar couldn't remember the last time anyone had bothered to speak to him.

After a while, the wise old man put his arm round the beggar's shoulder. "I've nothing left to give you, except my friendship," he murmured.

A tear rolled across the cheek of the blind beggar. How could he repay this gift of human kindness that had changed a dark night into a new dawn? With his shaking, aching hands, he reached into his pocket, brought out the gold coin and gave it to his newfound friend.

"Thank you for loving me," he said.

## **Song: Spirit of Life #123**

### **Small steps in a broken world**

Stephen, from across the country, calls and tells me that we will have beautiful weather for this 20<sup>th</sup> annual Bud Rue Walk for Social Justice. We're connected, Stephen and I, and he pays attention to the weather. He used a tool that is all about connection to know that the weather here in the beautiful Upper Delaware Valley will be sunny, and in the high 50s. It's undoubtedly different from the weather in Guimes Island, where he has spent the week building two wind turbines. One of those turbines, will make its way to Dick Riseling and be installed at Apple Pond Farming Center.

Not only does Dick have the notion to continue to develop Apple Pond Farming Center in a sustainable energy demonstration farm, he has a radio show on WJFF. And before Stephen left, he made arrangements that the Bud Rue Walk for Social Justice would be featured last Monday night. He sent out emails to a couple of you, and no one was available to do the show. Rather than lose the opportunity, I went. I asked Pat to send out a notice to the groups that we help sponsor so that someone might call in.

I was a little uncomfortable about doing the show because with all of the competing realities going on in our individual lives, the organizational structure of the Fellowship and particularly the walk is not strong. Pat stepped in just three weeks ago and agreed to organize the walk. We have sent out press releases, we have signs and water, we will have a lovely potluck. The walk will be what it usually is, and we will support VIP, RISE, Wayne County Habitat, and Sullivan County Habitat, despite the late-hour organizing or the idea that it could be bigger than it undoubtedly will be.

Which is, even with extensive planning, life. There is a lyric in John Lennon's song Darling Boy, which said that "Life is what happens to you when you're busy making other plans. It is a small step in a broken world.

And the radio show, which undoubtedly was listened to by hundreds of people, went well. You can listen to it at [wjff.org](http://wjff.org). Our segment begins at 32 minutes. In it, we talked about the history of the walk. (talk about history here.)

We talked about the organizations that we are supporting and what they do. (talk about the organizations here)

And we talked about how this walk is a brilliant demonstration of process theology and how it is designed to build community and awareness of the interconnectedness of our community and social justice.

Process theology, or process philosophy, as it can also be called, is a belief system that puts forth that everything is relational and that specifically, when people act in a way that connects to the other, truly putting oneself in other's shoes, that magic happens. Henry Nelson Wieman, in his book *The Human Predicament* writes that it is process theology that formed the originating events of the Christian Faith.

Henry Nelson Wieman (1884–1975) was an American philosopher and theologian. He became the most famous proponent of theocentric naturalism and the empirical method in American theology and catalyzed the emergence of Religious Naturalism in the latter part of the 20th century. In 1963 he wrote, "It is impossible to gain knowledge of the total cosmos or to have any understanding of the infinity transcending the cosmos. Consequently, beliefs about these matters are illusions, cherished for their utility in producing desired states of mind. . . . Nothing can transform man unless it operates in human life. Therefore, in human life, in the actual processes of human existence, must be found the saving and transforming power which religious inquiry seeks and which faith must apprehend." [1]

Here's what he writes about Jesus:

Jesus engaged in intercommunication with a little group of disciples with such depth and potency that the organization of their several personalities was broken down and they were remade. They became new men, and the thought and feeling of each got across to the other. It was not merely the thought and feeling of Jesus that got across. That was not the most important thing. The important thing was that the thought and feeling of the least and lowliest got across to the other and the other to him. Not something handed down to them from Jesus but something rising up out of their midst in creative power was the important thing. It was not something Jesus did. It was something that happened when he was present like a catalytic agent. Something about this man Jesus broke the atomic exclusiveness of those individuals so that they were deeply and freely receptive and responsive each to the other. He split the atom of human egosim, not by psychological tricks, not by intelligent understanding, but simply by being the kind of person he was, combined with the social, psychological, and historical situation of the time and the heritage of Hebrew prophecy. Thus there arose in this group of disciples a miraculous mutual awareness and responsiveness toward the needs and interests of one another.

But this was not all; something else followed from it. The thought and feelings, let us say the meanings, thus derived by each from the other, were integrated with what each had previously acquired. Thus each was transformed, lifted to a higher level of human fulfillment. Each became more of a mind and a person, with more capacity to understand, to appreciate, to act with power and insight, for this is the way human personality is generated and magnified and life rendered more nobly human."

Consider the Bud Rue Walk for Social Justice. Is this not what bringing four groups together, each raising money not only for themselves but for the other? This is process of stepping into each other's shoes. This is a place where transformational community can be born.

Charles Hartshorn is another philosopher/theologian who helped bring process theology into the forefront. He was the son of an Episcopalian priest, who upon reading Emerson in his adolescence began a transformation from Christianity to a

more Natural religion. In his essay *Beyond Enlightened Self-Interest: the Illusions of Egoism* talks about how the very nature of beings is to understand that we are not a continuous being meaning we cannot see or be the same from beginning to end but rather we are continually being reborn in our relational framework every moment of our lives. Further, he says, we are destined to be in relationship with others.

“The future that matters is not our own future as such, but rather any future we can influence, sympathize with and in some degree understand as good or bad for someone. To serve the future can be our present aim, whether or not the good we do to the other will also be our own future good. It is our good, right now, to protect what we care about for the future, whether it be a child’s welfare, even a pet animal, or our country’s, or mankind’s. And one could go future still. Other things being equal, one prefers that persons, even animals should be happy, not only while one can share in this happiness but afterward as well. Anyone of whom this is not true is to that extent a subnormal or irrational human being and may be a sick one as well.

To prove his point he writes: “So, far from our valuing others only for their usefulness to ourselves, it is in no small part too our usefulness to others that we value ourselves. Convince yourself that are no good to anyone, and how much will you love, rather than hate and despise yourself?”

Process philosophy holds that materialism is mistaken. What constitutes our universe is not an assortment of lifeless particles but an ensemble of interrelated happenings. And each of these events – from energy that maintains a simple chemical bond to the complex flow of information through a termite mound or coral reef, is in constant change and interaction with all the others.

We started with a simple story about a gold coin being passed from one person to the next, only to end up with the first again. Through process theology we understand that this is the nature of the world, and some might say the experience of God. In our interrelatedness we are made new and we transcend our personal boundaries. Through our small steps we bring healing energy into our broken world. Whether we know it or not, whether you were aware that the Bud Rue Walk for Social Justice holds at its core its interrelatedness or whether you understood that we simply support four organizations, we are living in the magic of life-affirming energy and it is good.

## **Responsive Reading #670**

### **Benediction:**

You can drive from here to California at night, only seeing 50 feet in front of you. But rest assured, you will get there, one small step at a time.

## **Song: This Little Light of Mine: #118**