

# Everyone's talking about Raymond

A service of astonishment

August 19, 2012

Welcome to the Upper Delaware Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. It's always a pleasure to be here. Our services, whatever they might be, always seem to be special and to give each of us exactly what we need. When Crispen noted that last week, "Coming here fills a variety of my needs," I got the impression that "need" had a capital "N." And I concur, there is something that happens here that touches each of us in a unique way. My theory is that we all arrive here with the intention to be present. And when people are in the present, especially when two or more are gathered, there is magic and astonishment, and we seem to receive what we need. We seem to touch a place in the universe where there is bounty and there are answers to the questions we seek. There is astonishment.

Today we gather to celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of Raymond Rocklin, an amazing and prolific artist. One of the things that I am struck by, whenever I speak with Raymond, is that he seems himself as a channel of energy. He will tell you that his inspiration comes from outside of himself, as if it is falling from heaven. Heaven descends, and with it heaven is created on earth. This is truly astonishing, this circle of transforming energy. May we touch that energy in our time together, today.

And for as much as we will be specifically celebrating the creative spirit and astonishment of Raymond Rocklin, I am hopeful that we will also be able to celebrate our own creativity. Consider these words of Martha Graham, as we begin our service together. "There is a vitality, a life-force, an energy, a quickening, that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost."

We are all creative beings.

## **Chalice Lighting:**

Once you accept that it is natural to create, you can begin to accept a second idea: that the Creator will hand you whatever you need for the project. The minute you are willing to accept the help of this collaborator, you will see useful bits of help everywhere in your life. — Julia Cameron

## **Hymn: Spirit of Life, 123**

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

**Offering:** Very often, a risk is worth taking simply for the sake of taking it. There is something enlivening about expanding our self-definition, and a risk does exactly that. Selecting a challenge and meeting it creates a sense of self-empowerment that becomes the ground for further successful challenges.

## **Hymn: Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child; #97**

**Meditation:** Agnes de Mille said: "Living is a form of not being sure, not knowing what next or how. The moment you know how, you begin to die a little. The artist never entirely knows. We guess. We may be wrong, but we take leap after leap in the dark."

### **Thoughts and candles for Raymond**

#### **Homily:**

When Beverly first suggested that we use this Sunday, the day after Raymond's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday as a celebration I thought it was a delightful idea. And when I got off the phone with her yesterday, after making some last-minute plans, I realized that since this was a birthday celebration that I should make a cake. As soon as I thought of that, I knew that while a good idea, it was not so fitting to Raymond. For you see, as far as I know, Raymond does not like sweets. For as much as we all might like any number of variations of a cake, chocolate, Angel Food, sponge with fresh cream and fruit, to simply make my version of a birthday cake did not seem to honor Raymond. And so I decided I was going to make a savory cake. And that my major contribution to Raymond's service would be the experiential one: first, of me making a cake, and second of the anticipation of its joyful and astonishing presence as part of our service. I went out and dug potatoes. I had to find the plants between the over abundance of weeds. So deep in the weeds, I harvested the purple fingerlings that have grown in my garden for some time now. This year, they were more succulent than in the past, perhaps because I have been working the soil. Moving into a different row, I harvested some white ones.

And I have created a three-layer cake, with each layer being like a large potato pancake. I planned for two purple layers and one green. Purple and green are complementary, so to the white potatoes, I added parsley and green onion. Then for icing I choose a savory baked apple sauce that just days before I had mentioned to Stephen that we needed to find a good use for. Wanting my cake to look like a "normal" cake, I made a quick trip to Peck's for cream cheese. Over dinner, I questioned whether astonishment and surprise were almost the same. Do we have to be surprised to be astonished? Is astonishment a factor of expecting one thing and having it turn out to be different?

I assembled the layers this morning, being too tired last night. I mentioned to Stephen that I wished that I had put the cake together last night, so that the layers and frosting would meld together more fully. We hoped that the cake would cut. In the end, I accepted that I did what I did.

For me, allowing myself to be astonished is to allow myself to be and to somehow accept what is present. To allow the creative energy to manifest itself. The idea that I wanted to make a birthday cake and the idea that Raymond didn't like birthday cakes provided an opportunity. May Sarton wrote: "I always comes back to the same necessity: goo deep enough and there is a bedrock of truth, however hard."

Happy birthday Raymond. You are an inspiration. You gave me the opportunity to solve a disconnect in a creative way. You gave me the opportunity to think about my creation through the lens of an artist, utilizing color. You gave me the opportunity to allow pieces, like using the savory apple sauce, and how fitting it is that I came up with a potato pancake cake with an apple sauce frosting. You're right, I was not in charge, there was some sort of energy flowing through me. And that energy came from you and manifested itself through my unique talents. I know no one would have come up with precisely this recipe, and since I didn't write it down or measure, I'm not sure that

the cake could be quite replicated, just as Agnes DeMile reminded us that we are each unique. Being in the present moment, accepting our limitations as well as our talents, we have the opportunity to being alive in the moment, each moment that we have.

This is a legacy of your life, lived large, that touches us all.

Happy Birthday Raymond.

Closing song: This Little Light of Mine.

Benediction: The power of the word is real, whether or not you are conscious of it. Your own words are the bricks and mortar of the dreams you want to realize. Behind every word flows energy. -Sonia Choquette The Universe responds to my dreams and needs. There is a unity flowing through all things.