



Living Stones: Good News in the Garden

Rev. Naomi King

UUCF Communion Service Sermon at General Assembly, 2006

In the morning, one of the early matters of my day, after first prayer, is to pray the news. Sometimes I do this by listening to reports, sometimes by watching, sometimes by reading, sometimes gathering in the coffee shop near the church, sometimes cloistered with a colleague or a parishioner. Praying the news means absorbing the stories, for good or ill or indifference, watching my responses, praying the response of lamentation or praise or prophecy or reconciliation, and searching always for the good news. It is not that I turn away from bad news, but some time ago, I learned just how bad the bad news can be, how unrelenting grief and anger and injustice can challenge my capacity to see and feel and walk with my Beloved. Bad news has a capacity to possess me and torture me as wretchedly as any demon named in scripture; today's powers and principalities may be best named in the local and in the global, but they always show up through the medium of the news. The good news, the *evangelion*, is much, much harder for me to hear. And so I pray the news, daily, with lament, with prophetic anger, with humility, with forgiveness, and with praise, seeking out the good news in all of the tough news. Praying the news, like praying scripture, is one way of staying in touch with my Beloved and listening for God's word blowing through the world. Whenever I pray the news, the twin questions arise for me: what of justice? How do we keep keepin' on?

With these questions, I turn to the great scriptural stories where the questions, "what of justice?" and "how do we keep keepin' on?" are always treated, including the story of the dispossessed widow and the unjust judge. I find people there in the scriptures listening for and making the most of the good news whispering, singing, and shouting this good news through the less good news of their daily lives. Yet...just how was the widow – bereft of the comfort of the beloved – sustained to make her case, day after day, hour after hour, against the powers and principalities, the judges who care not about justice? How does the widow recreate the Beloved's garden in the world, filling the world with good news so persistently that even the judge relents? How are we to be the living stones building the spiritual house, a holy priesthood of all who love God through this teacher and child of God, Jesus? The Song of Songs sings: "Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden that its fragrance may be wafted abroad. Let my beloved come to the garden, and eat its choicest fruits." (4:16)

I recite this verse frequently in the mornings as I put on my clerical collar. I often wear a clerical collar, always when I travel, and frequently through the week. I do this persistently even though I serve an avowedly scared-in-the-



Artist: Diana Adams
Title: River Stones

Song of Songs
Luke 18:1-8
1 Peter 2:4-5

General Assembly 2006 in St. Louis was an especially rich experience for UUCF. We sponsored a prayer booth, a footwashing stand, two communion services, and the release of a new book "Christian Voices in Unitarian Universalism." Reverends Derek Parker and Naomi King provided the leadership for communion. Published here is Rev. King's homily. Reverend Thom Belote's speech at the UUCF Annual Meeting can be found at: http://revthom.blogspot.com/2006_07_01_revthom_arc_hive.html.

UUCF is indeed, alive and well, and flourishing in the 21st century.

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Good News

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"A Spirit is Rising"

the Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson, President

My brothers and sisters,

What a joy it was for those of us who could gather at General Assembly to experience the fellowship in the flesh that we share all year across the miles. For those of you who could not be there, know that we remembered you and held you in our hearts and prayers.

It certainly seems that a spirit is rising and new a day dawning for Unitarian Universalist Christianity. There is a spiritual hunger and a searching going on that is interested in, even intrigued by what Jesus and the Christian story have to offer.

It was visible in powerful ways at General Assembly.

- Our two wonderful services of Communion were well attended, as were the two workshops offered based on the book Christian Voices in Unitarian Universalism. That book grew out of UUCF workshops held last year, and was put together by our own Kathleen Rolenz. The testimonies and stories offered by the people who attended the workshops were spirit-filled and heartwarming.

♪ Our hymn sing, banquet and Annual Meeting were filled with enthusiasm and a singing from the heart that did not want to stop.

Why am I telling you all of this? Because I am lifted by the spirit that is moving through Unitarian Universalism, a spirit that is more open, interested and intrigued by Jesus than I have ever known before. We have something to offer- a grounding for the message of universal Love, God's unwillingness to give up on us no matter how hopeless the situation seems. We can lead the way for those who want to trust the everlasting arms, and draw their courage from that trusted ground of being. We offer a spiritual path that can love justice into being, and heal the sin-sick soul. We know what it means to hate the sin and love the sinner. We know the answer to the singer's plea "There is more love somewhere." And people are now looking for that answer.

So, I thank you friends for entrusting me with the honor of leading this fellowship in the year ahead. Blessedly, I do not do it alone. I thank all of those who have gone before to keep this Christian message alive in Unitarian Universalism, and I thank all of those who labor with me in the vineyard today and every day, that God's love might be made manifest, bringing joy and hope to the aching world.

Blessings,

Anita

Living Stones: Good News in the Garden

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name-of-Christ congregation, for I have discovered time and again, that I meet people praying for the good news when I wear this symbol of my faith in public. Keeping my hand on the gospel plow, I'm holding on to the experience of my Beloved and keeping my eyes lifted to see who else is walking on the arms of the Beloved. "*Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields, and lodge in the villages.*" (Song of Songs, 7:11)

One day, stopping for coffee at a town along the highway, I met a woman, flushed, weeping, and wringing her hands. She came up to me and implored me, "What kind of priest are you? You're the third priest I've seen today." Wondering whether there was new joke in the making – three priests come through a roadside stop, one Episcopalian, one Lutheran, and the third...I answered her, wondering what her response would be: "Unitarian Universalist." Her immediate reply: "*Edg adj ishten.*" -- "God is One", the cry of Hungarian Unitarians everywhere. We both smiled – she through her tears, me through my road weariness –

*As the Beloved's messenger said,
"Ask and you will be answered; knock and
the door will open; seek and the way will
be found." (Luke 11:9-10)
Come, you living stones, and be a spiritual
house. (1 Peter 2:4).*

and embraced. Persistent in her quest, praying for God to provide someone she could speak with, she ignored the judges all around her, and held forth her case. Her faithfulness strengthened my faith; her reliance on praying to hear the good news taught me another round of that lesson I seem to keep needing to hear. As the Song of the Songs sings, "*I slept, but my heart was awake. Listen! My Beloved is knocking.*" (5:2a)

As the Beloved's messenger said, "*Ask and you will be answered; knock and the door will open; seek and the way will be found.*" (Luke 11:9-10) .Come, you living stones, and be a spiritual house. (1 Peter 2:4).

"Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on the arm of my beloved?" (Song of Songs 8:5) "Come, my beloved, let us go out early to vineyards, and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms are in bloom...There I will give you my love." (Song of Songs 7:12)

I was riding the subway one day, reading psalms, when I was approached by a man. First, he stood across from me and watched me read. Then, he took a seat a few seats down from me. Finally, he moved to be in the seat right next to me. "Are you a Christian minister?" Yes, I'm a Unitarian Universalist Christian minister." "What's that?" "We believe in the unity of God, that God is so loving, all will be saved, and that we'd better to get to work on making that salvation real, now." "You're kidding." "That's often suggested, but no." "How can you believe God loves people?" "How is that you believe God doesn't?" "You can't answer a question with a question." "I can't?"

Silence.

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Revival 2006 in New York City!

From your editor, Kathleen C. Rolenz

From the editor: If you've been receiving the Good News on a regular basis, you've read a lot about this year's upcoming **Revival 2006 in New York City**. You might remember that its to be held from Nov. 2-5, 2006, at **Fourth Universalist Society**. You've probably read about the keynote speakers **Gary Dorrien and Jim Mulholland**, both published authors and well known theologians & speakers. You might have remembered that the **NEW YORK CITY MARATHON** is happening that weekend, so, you had better get your reservations in now!

Why else should you take the weekend off, plunk down some money, and attend Revival 2006?

HERE ARE MY TOP TEN REASONS WHY I HAVEN'T MISSED A REVIVAL YET . . .

1. **Fantastic worship**—creative, inspiring, meaningful worship.
2. **Fabulous speakers**—2005 Rev. Thomas Anastasi's preaching and playing rocked the house!
3. **An opportunity to dig deeper**—whether you are a Christian or not, being able to explore the Christian faith in a thoughtful, supportive setting is a true gift.
4. **Meet other people "like you."** Depending on the congregation you attend, you may feel theologically isolated. This is a chance to refresh your roots.
5. **Great singing.** No kidding. It's loud, it's proud and it's a lot of fun. (Of course, there are quiet, reverential hymns too.)
6. **Get better acquainted with the UUCF.** The UUCF has been around a long time—sustained by a rich tradition of liberal Christianity. It's a noteworthy organization.
7. **New ideas for spiritual practice.** Stuck in a rut with your spiritual practice? Participate in Taize singing, spiritual direction, guided prayer, lectio divina—new ideas will emerge!
8. **Strength in numbers.** There is no substitute for singing and worshipping alongside a hundred or more UU Christians—no (or little) translation required!
9. **Communion.** Need I say more?
10. **Seeing old friends and making new ones.** We're small in number, but truly mighty in spirit. Many wonderful friendships have been forged at "Revival."

See you in New York City!

Living Stones continued from page 3

"It's that stuff about sacrifice." And from his lips tumbled a story – a story many of us know full well – of being full of fear and trembling at the mention of the Beloved's name, of not knowing the wonder and love of the Holy One, of being estranged from God. We left the subway together to pray and talk in the park. Come, spirit of hope, and bring the living waters to wash over us! *Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on the arm of my beloved?*" (Song of Songs 8:5)

Most of my encounters with the Good News begin with a question – often a harshly spoken question, a persistent question. Few of us have the luxury of the persistent widow, bringing her case to only one judge. Most of us seek from pillar to post, through the trials and tempests, for the ports of safety, for the garden moments where the Beloved is so clearly present with us, we cannot help but overflow with joy, hope, and love. *"Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on the arm of my beloved?"* (Song of Songs 8:5)

"Pastor?"

It is very late at night or very early in the morning. The sky is shot with stars and a thinning grey blueness. The trip to the emergency room is brief, all right turns, no traffic. The light is bright and the smells of fear and pain bitterly present. There is a young person, nearly a child, waiting. Another story of betrayal, of deep hurt, of pleading and yearning. Though rejected by mortals, yet chosen and precious in God's sight. (1 Peter 2:4) O, where is the Beloved? *"I sought my Beloved, but she was not found. I called him, but the Beloved gave no answer."* (Song of Songs 3:1)

We sit together, and rock, and sing a song often parodied, but here, now, it holds us, and brings near something of that comforting presence of the Beloved. *"Someone praying, Lord. Kum by yah. Someone praying, Lord. Kum by yah. Someone praying, Lord. Kum by yah. Oh, Lord, Kum by yah."*

The garden opened in singing, in singing those favorite familiar songs.

"Someone crying, Lord. Kum by yah."

Continued on page 7

Living in the Kingdom: A Retreat with Carl Scovel October 13—15, 2006 at Gladstonbury Abbey, MA

Carl Scovel invites interested Christians of all sorts, but especially UU's, to a weekend of prayer, study, companionship and enjoyment of Benedictine hospitality and worship at Gladstonbury Abbey in Hingham, MA.

The retreat begins on **Friday, October 13th, at 7 p.m. and ends on Sunday the 15th after lunch.** The Abbey is the setting of a simple, restoring life with nature trails and a newly renovated chapel where the brothers chant the offices five times a day.

The work of the retreat will be studying the parables of Jesus which describe life in God's kingdom, and also his teachings about what it means to live in that kingdom. Carl will be assisted by Karl Haakensen, Linda Stoker and Nan Stone, all of whom were part of last fall's retreat.

The cost of the retreat will be about \$130 plus a contribution (of whatever one chooses to give) to the King's Chapel Minister's Discretionary Fund

for the benefit of a parishioner whom Carl has been helping to support over the past few years. We will try to help retreatants arriving at Logan Airport get to the retreat center in Hingham.

If you would like a registration form, please email Carl with your name, address, telephone number and email address, if you have one.

Email him at carlscovel@comcast.net Or, phone him at 617 - 522 - 3681. Or, write him at 36 Hampstead Road, Jamaica Plain MA 02130-3911.

Space is limited to twenty retreatants.

*"There are no believers and no unbelievers.
There are only times of belief, and times of disbelief,
and the grace that God loves everybody at all times."*

—from Derek Parker's Communion Service
General Assembly, St. Louis 2006

Introducing

The Unitarian Universalist Spiritual Directors' Network

<http://www.uusdn.org>

*For centuries and across religious traditions
spiritual directors have helped people along the way.*

*Spiritual Direction is a way of leading us
to see and follow the real Director -
the Holy Spirit hidden in the depths of our soul.*

-- Thomas Merton

The Unitarian Universalist Spiritual Directors' Network consists of over 40 practicing spiritual directors. We are ministers and lay people. We are Christian, Buddhist, Pagan, Theist, Humanist and more. Most have participated in formal spiritual direction training programs. Guided by the practices of spiritual direction from a variety of religious traditions, we work with others, companioning and witnessing to their sacred stories and grace-filled moments.

Spiritual Directors customarily meet with others one-on-one or in small groups on a regular basis. A fee or donation is commonly requested for services. For more information on individual or group spiritual direction, to locate a director, and to begin the process, please see our Directory of Members.

Contact us for more information about the Unitarian Universalist Spiritual Directors' Network at www.uusdn.org

How Tolerant Was Jesus?

A Protest Song Against the Four Square Gospel Church Workshop & Cross-Ministry Project

On Saturday, July 8th, a day long workshop sponsored by an organization known as "Cross Ministry" came to my town. Their intention was to help church leaders "walk people out of homosexuality." In response, the liberal clergy of the west side of Cleveland organized an afternoon prayer vigil. I was asked to speak on "How Tolerant was Jesus?" What follows are excerpts from that talk.—Rev. Kathleen C. Rolenz

We all know the stories,
we've all heard the words
of how Jesus walked allegedly with the
sinners, the tax-collectors, the prostitutes,
and probably, the homosexual too.
That's the good news that we want to hear—
the part we know is true

AND--we've heard the word mega-phoned down to
us from on high that Jesus somehow didn't approve
of gay and lesbian and bi-sexual and transgender and
other queer folk because they loved a love supreme
a hidden love, a forbidden love—
we've been told that Jesus
just didn't walk with that kind.
We've been told by some in a four-square gospel
way that to love another man or another woman is a
sin against nature
and that Jesus probably
would have stretched out his hands
and tried to heal that poor sinner of his or her love—
make him or her "right with God," or at least with
the Godless Right.

Well, I'm here to tell you—that's not my Jesus.
Listen to the Jesus I know—see the Jesus I see
Because Jesus walks with you and with me

My Jesus lives by his word and loves by his deeds
Stooped over in the corner of the temple
was a woman, crippled for eighteen years
Now maybe she had something wrong with her
spine—maybe she had broken her back
or maybe she was crippled over by something else—
by heaps of hate or prejudice or emotional exile—
and how many are there who suffer daily from the
slings and arrows
of this culture who would denounce your love,
deny your full humanity
and cripple you—cripple all of us—until you are
bent over and pulled down
so low all you can see is the ground.
Jesus put his hands on her and banished her ailment,
and told her she was whole and healthy just the way
she was.

Oh isn't this the Gospel? Isn't this the Good News?

Jesus favorite disciple rested his head on Jesus' breast
Jesus' hands touched and washed and caressed
other men's feet, drying them
"Do you love me?" he asked over and over again
and his disciples, not knowing what he meant, exactly,
said, bewilderingly "yes Lord"
but they had no idea what love really meant.
They had no idea that Jesus meant to die as a witness to the
truth that Love doesn't die
—not on a cross
—not in a workshop that is supposed to address the er-
rors of homosexuality
—not in hate-filled signs at Mathew Shepherds funeral
service,
—not here in Cleveland, Ohio
where simply holding hands with the one you love can get
you sneered at—or worse—
Not my Jesus—for there ain't no grave that can hold that
Love down . . .

. . . Yet, you love us all, don't you, Jesus?
There is no separation between Thee and Me—
between the gay and the non-gay
like star bellied Sneetches, we dash in and out of
the star off machine,
in some vain attempt to call attention to our uniqueness
to our own special reading of the Gospel
to our own precious claim on you, Jesus . . .

. . . Yet, tolerant, loving Jesus—
You want us to tolerate and love
even those who are intolerant of us—don't you?
I can barely bring myself to do it, Jesus,
so strongly I feel that I cannot tolerate intolerable people, or
ideas or bigots or ideologues.

What would you have us do—Jesus,
on this day that we—
as public protest to the Four Square Gospel Workshop
with the intent of "ministering the homosexual"
with the hope that she or he will become heterosexual,
so that all can fit into the very unnatural world of sameness?

You would want me to pray for them, wouldn't you?
You would want me to ask forgiveness of my own bigotry,

Living Stones: Good News in the Garden

By Rev. Naomi King, continued from page 4

The Lord is My Shepherd, I shall not want

Someone's crying Lord, Kum by Yah

The Holy makes me to lie down in green pastures

Someone's crying Lord, Kum By Yah

She leads me beside still waters

Someone's crying Lord, Kum By Yah

She Restores My Soul

Oh Lord, Kum By Yah

Come to the Holy One, be built into spiritual houses, into a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices through love. (1 Peter: 4-5) Do not lose heart, but sing out to the Beloved!

The way the notes change -- through their vibrations, through their lyrics, through their structures -- the way the notes change our being, opening our hearts, bring us once again into the presence of the Beloved. Remember the ways that singing shakes the prison walls and breaks chains, the ways that singing binds us together and hold us fast, the ways that singing bring us most fully into ourselves and out of ourselves. With the Beloved always near, the ways singing entwines my soul – each and all of our souls --entwined with the Beloved in the embrace of embraces. *Oh, Lord, Kum by yah.*”

“*Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on the arm of my beloved?*” (Song of Songs 8:5)

Why, it is you, and me, and all of us, many thousands come, and many thousands gone, and many thousands to come. *Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.*” (Song of Songs 8:7)

We, who rise up singing, into the sweetness of the garden of the Beloved, living stones, make here, there, and everywhere, evidence of the good news, of the love that cannot be taken away, of the love that suffuses everything, of the love that holds you, and you, and you, and even me. Amen.

How Tolerant Was Jesus? *Continued from page six*

my own prejudice, yes, even my own hatred of the other
who threatens to harm the lives of those I hold dear—

- my friends whose relationships I cherish and support
- the many couples I have married save for a certificate from the State
- the thousands of women and men living their lives in same-sex committed relationships

You would want me to pray for the day when Jesus message is not Paul's message,
when, on the issue of what Jesus said about homosexuality,
can be heard as clearly and as loudly as the sound of silence—
the profound reverberations of your Love, Jesus,
echoing as drops of water down a long, deep well.

I can't be you, Jesus—but I can try—we can try.

We can walk with you and gain strength for the journey.

We can remember your light touch, your loving hands
and the way you whisper the Gospel into our unhearing ears

"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you..."

“Oh Jesus—do I have to?”

“Yes, you do.”

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Mark Your Calendar!

Revival 2006 in New York City

Nov. 2-5, 2006, Fourth Universalist Society, 76th and Central Park West
Register Now! "God's Reviving Grace"

Revival November 2007 in Cleveland, Ohio

Hosted by the West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church, Rocky River, OH
"UU Christians Rock!"
Questions? Contact katrolenz@aol.com

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- NEW MEMBER!
- Renewing Member —*thank you!*