

Summer Dreams: What does your heart need?

Sermon for June 24, 2007

by the Reverend Lone Jensen

Now *Summer Dreams* may seem like a really strange title for a sermon given in late June in Southern Arizona. What was I thinking! This is after all the time of the year when most residents are in full survival mode as we hunker down and only stick our heads out of our air conditioned holes when absolutely necessary, much like human prairie dogs. We search sizzling parking lots for any tiny, spindly excuse for a tree with its promise of shade, and scurry quickly between car and home or work or other air conditioned habitats. I forgot my oven mitt and nearly burned my hand the other day on my car door. So yes, summer around here, where the saguaros are opening their red glowing fruits, rather like lips panting, and dust devils dance tirelessly, can resemble, more than we like, the place that we as Universalists do not believe in, a hot dusty, blazing hell.

Did I tell you I love Arizona? No, I really do, there is a beauty here that you do not find elsewhere, and despite all the changes a Western spirit still lingers with its promise of freedom, possibilities and a “live and let live” attitude. But I do understand the need to get away for a while, to connect with nature at other times than very early morning and very late evenings, and many years ago UU churches including this one would close for the summer. Back then the joke was:

Why don't the UUs have church during the summer? God trusts them.

However here at Valley UU we do not close and we have a wonderful slate of summer services lined up and I tell you if I was here, I wouldn't want to miss any one of them.

But I will be gone for two months myself, pursuing healing and wholeness and my own summer dreams. I plan to sit ever so quietly on a rock and look out over far away mountains and remember once again who I really am and what I am put here on this earth to do. So this seems like a good time to talk about what it is that our hearts and souls need this summer. How about you? As you listen to my stories and musings, I invite you to think about what it is that your heart longs for? And for those of you who are more, well literally scientifically or technically inclined, yes I know our heart doesn't actually long for anything. But we miss the point if we become that literal as in this prayer: "Dear God, if there is a God, if you can, save my soul, if I have a soul."

It is possible to find what you need even if you are not going anywhere at all. But first you have to ask yourself the question: What is it my soul needs? Vacations, breaks and other escapes all offer us a welcome respite, a change from our daily routine and that in itself is renewing and can be very wonderful. There is lot that is very right with

having glorious fun. But I am talking about something a bit deeper, something that will last beyond the first few weeks back.

Let us begin with our time, an ever more precious commodity and something that many of us and this nation in general seem to have real trouble with. We work harder than ever and take less and less time off. With all our obligations, to family, to work, to caretaking perhaps, for infirm family members, with all our daily worries and burdens, how often do you take the time to take your own spiritual pulse? That has to be the first step: to take the time to reflect on where you are in your life, how you really feel and what it is you need now. Not an easy quest really. I have made a solemn promise to myself again and again that I will write in my journal every night and for a while I do. Then too many late evening meetings or other emergencies come along and I look at my beautifully bound journal with a silver dragon on the front and fondle my blue embossed pen and, this is confession time, I sigh deeply, mutter that this seems like too much work tonight and turn on the television or read a mystery or do something else that is like more like candy for the brain.

The balance is the key. There is a time for escape, a time to savor chocolate for the soul and do just about anything that can temporarily soothe us enough so that we can fall sleep. But there is a danger too. What is it you are avoiding by not taking the time to reflect deeply? In

my case it is a veritable Pandora's box of uncomfortable feelings, painful events, sadness, things I can do nothing about, or one of my personal worst, misunderstandings, messy relationship or professional stuff, that is hard or seem impossible to fix. Time is both a gift and a luxury. This summer I will have the time I need to face my dragons squarely and tame them a bit, time to reflect and go in search of the places where my joys are hidden. How about you? Are you ready for a bit of labyrinth walking in your own souls corridors? I promise you only this, that you will know more about yourself at the end of such an expedition. You may however, to your surprise, find that any dragons you take the time to befriend can become new sources of both power and joy.

One thing I go in search of this summer is some healing. It has been a tough year in many ways and so I plan to return to perhaps the deepest of my sacred sources and find some solace and balm in nature. As Nancy Wood writes:

“My help is in the mountain,

Where I take myself to heal

The earthly wounds

That people give to me

I find a rock with sun on it

*And a stream where the water
Runs gentle
And the trees which one by one
give me company.*

*So I must stay for a long time
Until I have grown from the rock
And the stream is running
Through me
And I cannot tell myself from
One tall tree*

*Then I know that nothing touches
Me. Nor makes me run away.*

*My help is in the mountain
That I take away with me.”*

Within our tradition is woven a strong translucent strand of Nature's God as the Unitarians spoke of him and as our Transcendentalists ancestors experienced her. Susan Griffin, back in the seventies, wrote a book that changed my world view **The Roaring within Her, Women**

and Nature where she spoke of how we have devalued matter versus the spirit and made matter less, something to be overcome and conquered. But as she wrote:

We know ourselves to be made from this earth.

We know this earth is made from our bodies.

For we see ourselves.

And we are nature.

We are nature seeing nature.

We are nature with a concept of nature.

Nature weeping.

Nature speaking of nature to nature.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson also saw nature as healing. (In “Nature”)
“These enchantments are medicinal, they sober and heal us. These are plain pleasures, kindly and native to us. We come to our own, and make friends with matter, which the ambitious chatter of the schools would persuade us to despise. We never can part with it; the mind loves its old home: as water to our thirst, so is the rock, the ground, to our eyes, and hands, and feet. It is firm water: it is cold flame: what health, what affinity! Ever an old friend, ever like a dear friend and brother, when we

chat affectedly with strangers, comes in this honest face, and takes a grave liberty with us, and shames us out of our nonsense. “

Nature can bring us to our senses and put our lives in their proper perspective. At our UU Camp and Retreat Center in North Carolina called The Mountain, you will find a huge granite bolder near the edge of the mountain side. It is called Mediation Rock and you can sit on it and look out over the valley and the misty forest for miles and miles. In the beginning when I first came there, some fifteen years ago, there were very few lights in that valley at night and the stars were so bright and clear with the shimmering milky way ribbon snaking across the eternal darkness. It was a really good place to come for some perspective! Hello immense universe, here is this smaller than an ant human, with her big problems who has come to you for a consult! In the lights of those stars and eternity my problems seemed well, rather tiny, and thus easier to live with. If I came there wounded I found comfort in the beauty and the peace. If I came with deep sorrows just to touch the stone and smell the air and watch those stars brought me comfort. Today I imagine that this same valley has ever more lights in it and I hope you can still see the stars from that rock. I pray that our grandchildren will still be able to find such wild places where their souls can find solace and their hearts can sing.

Emerson wrote of an ideal summer: *The day, immeasurably long, sleeps over the broad hills and warm wide fields. To have lived through all its sunny hours, seems longevity enough. The solitary places do not seem quite lonely. At the gates of the forest, the surprised man of the world is forced to leave his city estimates of great and small, wise and foolish. The knapsack of custom falls off his back with the first step he makes into these precincts. Here is sanctity which shames our religions, and reality which discredits our heroes. Here we find nature to be the circumstance which dwarfs every other circumstance, and judges like a god all men that come to her.* (from [Essays: Second Series](#) (1844))

This is what I hope to find this summer, sanctity, clarity and a taste of sweetness. I go in search of nature's God and my own imperfect soul. Somewhere, I know, more joy can be found. Somewhere, I know, is balm and solace.

Then I hope to return with renewed purpose and energy to this ministry, this congregation and the good work we do together. I am grateful for this time to reflect and dream my summer dreams.

How about your summer? What are your dreams? Ask yourself what it is that your mind, body and heart need to be restored in these next few weeks. What would make your heart sing?

