



James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Child Dedication Sunday

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In the faith tradition of Unitarian Universalism we hold our children as born with innocence. They enter this world as inherent of worth and dignity, carriers of generations of information throughout the ages in a unique combination possessed by no other. They may be most similar in some ways with the parents, but the miracle of our DNA allows for infinite possibilities. For that reason, no one can predict the nature or personality of a child. Here, we choose to offer a safe and supportive place for the natural unfolding of a child into adulthood rather than impose some system onto our children.

Today we call out the names of our children as unique individuals though their names may have been held by countless people before them, we acknowledge each child as a unique addition to the universe. We use elements of water, flower, and oil which heralds back through the ages, reflecting various religious traditions, as a ritual way of celebrating the miracle of life.

The water we use is from the ingathering and water communion. It is sacred in that it represents our commitment to community. We see it not as an element for the washing away of some sinful nature, but as a source for all life as we know it. The water reflects our commitment to provide our children with the spiritual, emotional, and mental sustenance they need to become thriving individuals. Since it is the water from our water communion, we also wish for them to understand and grow as vital members of our community.

We use a rose to symbolize the beauty and miracle of creation. We strip the rose of thorns to symbolize our belief that every child is born innocent. We develop our thorns as we grow and mature. They are often needed to preserve our beauty. These are the coping mechanisms we develop which serve us in times of distress.

We use oil to signify value. We value our children and fragrant oils have been used by many cultures throughout history as a precious, vital element. In anointing our children we are saying that they are precious and valued members of our community.

To the parents and caregivers of these children:

In coming forth today, you are making a commitment to dedicate yourselves to the unfolding of this child. You are sharing this responsibility with the "Beloved Community" realizing that your child is part of a greater community.

Do you, the parents and caregivers of these children promise to protect and nurture them, to teach them through example in the ways of goodness, truth and love?

We Do!

To the “Beloved Community” gathered here today:

Do you promise to share in the growth and nurturing of these children by adding your love and support, and commitment by also living as an example for their growth and development?

We Do!

By what name do you want to be called?

By these names, we welcome you into the loving and supportive community of James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation. It is our hope that you will wear these names with honour, hope, peace and courage. And may the blessings of this moment encourage and sustain you in difficult times.

Water Blessing:

I touch your brow with water from life’s infinite spring. This is the water of community. It represents our coming together each season for the support and love this community provides. It represents both our tears of joy and tears of sadness. It is the water of our shared humanity, from the well of our hopes and dreams.

Anointing with Oil:

I anoint you with fragrant oil. Oils have been the balm of healing throughout time and across oceans. It represents our commitment to be there for you in difficult or painful times. May the fragrance remind you that like the rose you are beautiful by your very nature. And though at times we all do bad things, we never lose our potential for beauty, truth and goodness.

Dedication:

May this rose serve as the first of many gifts that you will receive from this community. May it be a tangible symbol for the gifts of love and support which we wish for you. So with these blessings of water, oil and flower we offer ourselves as your community,

Presentation of our children:

I now present to you the hope for our future, the newest members of our community---
Applause

Prayer:

We are thankful for the gift of childhood.

The gift that reminds us of our own potential for goodness.

May these new members of our community represent the best that we have to offer, and in return may we offer them our blessings of health, love, knowledge, and wisdom. Welcome to this our home, mother earth, may you join us as stewards of the planet. May you do a better job than we have done, may your works go beyond ours. You are the seedlings of tomorrow.

Blessed be.

Children’s Benediction:

Go now in peace, Go now in peace

May the spirit of love surround you, every where, everywhere. You may go.

I love child dedication Sunday. It is a ritual like no other that symbolizes our first principle where “we covenant, or promise, to affirm and promote, the inherent worth and dignity of every individual.” This one principle sets us apart from many other religious traditions those that view humanity as inherently sinful or flawed. We need not be saved from anything. We do however need to understand that our actions have

causes, some good and some bad. And we are connected to everyone and to all of creation and therefore are called to live in such a way that offers health to the universe.

When I look at the world's cultures and peoples I am convinced that we as UU's have it right.....that all are born precious and innocent, inherent of worth and dignity. It seems that no matter what any religious system posits as to the nature of humanity, our "feelings" about children speak a greater truth. The laws of our land are designed to protect the "innocent." I have trouble understanding some sects within Religions that on one hand believe that we are all born in sinful nature.

In the religious tradition that I was reared in, which heralds back to the Anabaptists, those who believed that baptism had to be a choice and therefore not for infants, I was taught that if a child dies before "the age of Accountability" (whatever it is) God would welcome them back as innocents. And yet, I was taught that I was born with a sinful nature? It was very confusing and didn't make sense.

I think that our actions, speak louder and clearer than any words. Almost all traditions welcome children as miracles of creation. I am convinced, time and time again, of the inherent worth and dignity of everyone when I see the response of the world's communities in welcoming the birth of a child.

I'd like to share a few examples with you from various traditions and peoples of the world:

The reading today was from *The Prophet*, by Kahlil Gibran. Gibran was born in Lebanon. He was a poet, philosopher, and artist. Since the first publication of *The Prophet* in 1923, the work has been translated into over twenty languages and the American edition alone has sold more than four million copies. In his words, I read of the miracle of human potential, not one of depraved nature. Gibran's words were put to song by Sweet Honey in the Rock, which we played for a prelude this morning.

From a First Nation perspective, here in the US, I offer you the words of Chief Seattle, both from the Suquamish and Duamish tribes. In 1855 he wrote:

"You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of our ancestors, so that they will respect the land. Tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin. And teach your children what we have taught our children, that whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth. This we know: The earth does not belong to humanity, but humans belong to the earth. This we know: All things are connected, like members of one family. This we know: Humankind did not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand within it; whatever we do to that web we do to ourselves."

By his words, we each, from our birth, have a sacred obligation to care for our earth and each other. We are sacred because the earth is sacred, because we come from the earth.

Some of the best loved paintings in the world are those by Mary Cassatt, who chose again and again to paint mother and child. She was born in Pennsylvania in 1844 and moved to France where she died in 1926. Her images speak to us of unconditional love and acceptance; of being held in the arms of the archetypal mother. These are images of beauty and value not the images of "fallen nature."

Then during the 1930's a man fled France after the fall to the Nazi invasion. He settled in the US. There he would serve his adopted country in an effort to defeat the inhumanity of the Nazi Regime. He would give his life for that cause in 1942 but not before offering the world his beautiful gift of writing including, *The Little Prince*. These are the words of Antoine de St. Exupery:

"And the little prince went back to meet the fox. "Goodbye," he said. "Goodbye," said the fox. "And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can hear rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." "What is essential is invisible to the eye," the little prince repeated, so that he would be sure to remember....As the little prince dropped to sleep, I took him in my arms and set out walking once

more. I felt deeply moved, and stirred. It seemed to me that I was carrying a very fragile treasure. It seemed to me, even, that there was nothing more fragile on all the Earth. In the moonlight I looked at his pale forehead, his closed eyes, his locks of hair that trembled in the wind, and I said to myself: What I see here is but a shell. What is most important is invisible.....

St. Exupery used the image of a child from another world as the means to impart the wisdom of the ages.

Debra Frasier lived in Florida then in Minnesota, between the 1950's until the 1980's. She gives us a ballad and a tribute to the miracle in every child. These are excerpts from, *On the Day You Were Born*:

“On the eve of your birth word of your coming passed from animal to animal....On the day you were born the round planet Earth turned toward your morning sky, whirling past darkness, spinning the night into light. On the day you were born gravity's strong pull held you to the Earth with a promise that you would never float away.....On the day you were born the quiet Moon glowed and offered to bring a full bright face, each month, to your windowsill.....On the day you were born the Moon pulled on the Ocean below, and, wave by wave, a rising tide washed the beaches clean for your footprints.....On the day you were born the Earth turned, the Moon pulled, the Sun flared, and then, with a push you slipped out of dark quiet, where suddenly you could hear.....a circle of people singing with voices familiar and clear. “Welcome to the spinning world,” the people sang as they washed your new, tiny hands. “Welcome to the green Earth,” the people sang, as they wrapped your wet slippery body. And as they hugged you close they whispered into your open curving ear, “We are so glad you've come.”

These examples and those of countless others, testify to the miracle of life, and the wonder of children. Within Unitarian Universalism we find the same strains that speak to the value of our children. Ellery Channing, the minister who claimed the derogatory term, “Unitarian,” as a badge of honour, had this to say:

“The great end of parental care is not to stamp your minds upon the young but to stir up their own. Not to make them see with your eyes but to look inquiringly and steadily with their own. Not to form an outward regularity but to touch inward springs. Not to burden memory but to quicken the power of thought, so that they may learn and approve for themselves what is everlastingly right and good.”

The essential meaning of these words is mirrored in the poetry of Kahlil Gibran almost one hundred years later.

And lastly from the one of the founders of our modern religious education program, Sophia Lyon Fahs:

“And so the children come. And so they have been coming. Always in the same way they come--born of the seed of man and woman. No angels herald their beginnings, no prophets predict their future courses, no wise men see a star to point their way to find the babe that may save humanity. Yet each night a child is born is a holy night. Fathers and mothers--sitting beside their children's cribs--feel glory in the wondrous sight of a life beginning. For each night a child is born is a holy night.”

Child dedication Sunday is a favorite time of mine because in celebrating our children we are reminded that we too are sacred. We never lose the fact that each of us is a miracle. We never lose our potential for continued unfolding. Look around you.....look deeply into the eyes of those near you. There you'll see the miracle that began as a fragile treasure. We never cease to be a treasure....we never outgrow being a rose. We grow thorns over time, and we go from bud to full flower, and then begin to wilt. But the beauty is always there, the fragrance is often strongest as the rose ages.

When we affirm our children we affirm ourselves. The ashes of the ancestors nourish the earth for those yet to come. And this is the miracle of the interdependent web of existence. We live in the land of tomorrow through our children, and not just those from our own seed. This is the miracle of secret of our children.....It takes a village to raise a child, and it takes children to make a village. We can't have one without the other.

I'd like to close with the words of Black Elk:

Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell. And I understood more than I saw. For I was seeing in the sacred manner the shape of all things of the spirit. And the shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that make one circle, wide as daylight and starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree, to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy.