

Theodore Parker Church
Carbonated Holiness (with thanks to Anne Lamott)
June 6, 2021

INTROIT This Joy <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1TbDPwA09Bc>
Use the video all the way to the end.

The Resistance Revival Chorus (RRC) is a collective of more than 60 women, and non-binary singers, who join together to breathe joy and song into the resistance, and to uplift and center women's voices recognizing how historically marginalized women have been in the music industry.

"This joy that I have, the world didn't give it to me. The world didn't give it, the world can't take it away."

OPENING WORDS

Let there be joy in our coming together this morning. by [Carl G Seaburg](#)

Let there be joy in our coming together this morning.
Let there be truth heard in the words we speak
and the songs we sing.
Let there be help and healing for our disharmony and despair.
Let there be silence for the voice within us and beyond us.
Let there be joy in our coming together.

Homily One: Rose Gallogly, Coordinator of Religious Exploration

Earlier this week when planning for this service and exploring the idea of play, Rev. Anne and I decided to give me a bit of an assignment. Play, after all, is something that must be experienced, not intellectually thought out, so in order to dive into this month's theme, I took on the assignment of creating an authentic moment of play in my week and then writing about it.

While sharing that task reminds me how lucky I am to have this job, I also have to admit that I didn't find the assignment that easy. In many ways I'm a pretty serious person, and I value bringing a lot of intention and care to my daily life — so moving into a spirit of play that's spontaneous and free-flowing doesn't always come naturally to me. I'm also actively grieving,

which means that I'm carrying heaviness and sadness in my daily life; neither of which prevents me from having moments of freedom and joy, but it does complicate how I move in and out of those feelings.

I thought through a lot of ways I might enter into a spirit of play this week and kept finding reasons (maybe excuses) why each wasn't the right fit. I couldn't just make some art, whatever the medium, because I'm an artist and visual creative practices are work for me in a way that I love, but that shift their playfulness. I couldn't quite count the time I spent babysitting this week as play, even if the three year old I was with invited me into many silly moments, because I was also caring for him, and caregiving shapes and directs playful energy in a particular way.

On Friday, a bit out of excuses and almost out of time, I decided would just put myself in an environment where I feel really free and open and just follow every whim, see what happened. I walked over to the Arboretum with vague thoughts of gathering flowers or skipping stones, and then it hit me: I should climb a tree.

It's not quite fair to say this was out of my comfort zone — I knew exactly where to go because I actually love climbing and have a favorite tree for sitting in on one side of Peter's Hill — but I realized that climbing this tree every once in a while is one of the most playful things I do, a little moment when the simple fun of doing something overrides my worry about what other people will think, and any sense of an activity needing a purpose or outcome. So I walked over to my favorite tree, slid off my shoes, said a little internal apology to my mom, and climbed up as high as the branches felt sturdy. (Show pictures)

Up high in this tree, I wasn't without my seriousness or my grief, but they faded a bit as the spark of joy and a little risk filled me up. I felt silly and free and altogether a person that my childhood self would have really loved. In remembering other times I had made this climb I felt proud that actually, I have found a way to work play into my life, even without an assignment. It started to drizzle while I was still up in the tree and I just let myself get rained on, not quite ready to leave — another decision that felt true to my childhood self.

I can't say that one moment has catapulted me to start living a new, fully playful life, or that I don't still have a lot to learn about putting down my internal seriousness, but swinging from a high-up branch was such a breath of fresh air, a lightness that can be hard to access these days. I know it means that I'll keep coming back to that tree, or maybe find some others to scale — whatever the specifics, I know my experience is made richer by my seeking of the joy and spark that is play, that is aliveness.

MUSIC 311 Let It Be a Dance We Do Rick Masten

Poet, dyslexic, the first “community minister” ordained into Unitarian Universalism, who always started off his addresses with humor . . .”Somehow he managed to be so hopeful, so open, so tender, and so wise that by the end of the evening I felt as if I had been to a remarkable worship service that had touched me both spiritually and emotionally. I felt blessed.”

Let it be a dance we do.
May I have this dance with you?
Through the good times and the bad times, too, let it be a dance.

Let a dancing song be heard.
Play the music, say the words,
And fill the sky with sailing birds. Let it be a dance.
Let it be a dance. Let it be a dance.
Learn to follow, learn to lead,
Feel the rhythm, fill the need
to reap the harvest, plant the seed.
Let it be a dance.

Morning star comes out at night,
Without the dark there is no light.
If nothing’s wrong, then nothing’s right. Let it be a dance.
Let it be a dance. Let it be a dance.
Let the sun shine, let it rain;
Share the laughter, bear the pain,
and round and round we go again.
Let it be a dance.

Let it be a dance we do.
May I have this dance with you?
Through the good times and the bad times, too, let it be a dance.

MEDITATION/PRAYER

All This Talk of Saving Souls By [Linda M. Underwood](#)

All this talk of saving souls.
Souls weren’t made to save,

like Sunday clothes that
give out at the seams.

They're made for wear; they
come with lifetime guarantees.
Don't save your soul.
Pour it out like rain on
cracked, parched earth.

Give your soul away, or
pass it like a candle flame.
Sing it out, or
laugh it up the wind.

Souls were made for hearing
breaking hearts, for puzzling dreams,
remembering August flowers,
forgetting hurts.

These (folks) who talk of saving souls!
They have the look of bullies
who blow out candles before
you sing happy birthday,
and want the world to be
in alphabetical order.

I will spend my soul,
playing it out like sticky string
into the world,
so I can catch every
last thing I touch.

Let's imagine our souls, swift of foot and joyful, as we share a time of quiet, and at the end
of our quiet, let us turn our screens to gallery mode and smile and wave at each other as
Michael shares some music. But first, the quiet . . .

HOMILY Two: the Rev. Anne Bancroft

Before I came to serve you all here at Theodore Parker Church, I served the Unitarian Universalist Church of Weymouth on the South Shore. Some of you may know that Weymouth is a pretty blue-collar town, sandwiched between Quincy and Hingham. It is an historically Universalist congregation while the Hingham congregation, next door, is historically Unitarian, so the Weymouth folks are fond of saying “they got the money, but we got the Love.” That is a pretty classic distinction between our two traditions, right? Unitarianism being a product of our bramen past, Harvard-educated, intellectual elites; and, Universalism a product of itinerant ministry and the insistence that love is there for every soul. The quip is also a pretty good defense for a tiny little church struggling to stay open across town from Old Ship, which is doing just fine.

At any rate, when I left, one of the congregants gave me a book called *Rolling in the Church Aisles*. The inscription on the inside of this quarky little book of church bloopers said, “Will miss you,” and was signed, Ivy Gay. Ivy was a long-time elder of the congregation, about 4’8” tall and shrinking, with a lovely appreciation for my sense of humor. She loved play in service to her spirit. The book has clips like, “The blessing of the pets will be followed by a hot dog lunch.”

Or this exchange between “a mortal” and “God.”

“What is a million years like to you?”

God answered, “Like one second.”

The mortal asked, “What is a million dollars like to you?”

“Like one penny,” God answered.

“Can I have a penny?” asked the mortal.

“Just a second,” God replied.

They’re silly and funny, and remind us - because, in fact, we DO need reminding, that the life of the spirit has room for playfulness; that, in fact, it is only well-rounded when play, by way of joy or humor, or laughter, are engaged. Remember Annie Lamott’s insistence that laughter is carbonated holiness?

We are so serious - most of us - caught in a web of encouragement to be grown-up, which means, of course, to be productive and mature, to leave our childhood inclinations behind. We discourage the Peter Pan effect, right?

And, it’s true. Life often feels like very serious business, and yet . . . what fullness we lose when we neglect our capacity to play, to find freedom and joie de vivre in the simplest ways.

Earlier this week, I tried to think of who to call to chat about play - who did I know who incorporated play into their lives, because honestly, I'm not always very good at it! Humor, yes - which is a kind of play, I guess - but play itself? . . . not so much - as a function of time as much as anything. You know, I have a serious job!

I bet you also know . . . (put on hat) I called Mary Harman! And of course she had any number of things to offer, one of which was a book called *Play: How it shapes the brain, opens the imagination and invigorates the soul*, by psychologist Stuart Brown, a pioneer in research on play. One of the questions that comes up right away is what we mean by play - Brown says "play is what lifts people out of the mundane, but that trying to define it is like explaining a joke: it takes all the fun out of it!

He also suggests that play is a state of mind, rather than an activity. "The things that most tie you down or constrain you," he writes, " - the need to be practical, to follow established rules, to please others, to make good use of time, all wrapped up in a self-conscious guilt - are eliminated (with play.) Play is its own reward, its own reason for being."

Apparently nothing lights up our brain like play, so imagine the impact of its absence!

The question lingers as to whether a truly spiritual grounding has any need for, or room for play. In an article on Ignatian spirituality, (<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/playful-spirituality/>) I found a parable shared by Father Anthony DeMello, who was an Indian Jesuit priest and psychotherapist - popular in the late 70's and 80's:

The Master once referred to the Hindu notion that all creation is "leela"— God's play—and the universe is his playground. The aim of spirituality, he claimed, is to make all life play.

This seemed too frivolous for a puritanical visitor. "Is there no room then for work?"

"Of course there is. But work becomes spiritual only when it is transformed into play."

How many times have you heard the claim that you're not supposed to like what you do to make a living: that's why they call it work! I wish you all could have been with us last night - John Lambert and I listened to three of our youth, now grown to young adults. One, in particular, spoke so enthusiastically about the work they are engaged with right now. They spend every waking minute working, working, working. "What is your favorite part," I asked? "It's fun!" he answered, "It's so totally fun!"

The Ignatian article continues: “For many of us play is something that comes *after* the “seriousness” of spirituality, religion, or prayer. It is outside of our work, our religious practice, and even our relationships! But (as Rose shared earlier) play involves the tapping into something deeper within ourselves. When we play we discover **joy** and allow ourselves to be vulnerable. Why must our religious practices or relationships or work be rigid and cold? The answer is that they don’t have to be!”

I’ve often shared poems by the mystics - Rumi, Tukaram, Hafiz, to name a few - their prayers, covering often the most difficult of life’s questions or dilemmas, are filled with humor and playfulness, remember? One of my favorites from Meister Eckhardt, on our capacity to make room for theological differences in our beliefs:

Having lunch in a field one day, I troubled an ant with a question.
I asked of him humbly, “Have you ever been to Paris?”
And he replied, “No, but I wouldn’t mind going.” And then he asked me
if I had ever been to a famous ant city. And I regretted that I hadn’t
and was quick to add, “I wouldn’t mind, too!”
This led to a conclusion: There is life that we do not know of.
How aware are we of all consciousness in this universe?
What percent of space is this earth in the infinite realm?
What percent of time is one second in eternity?
Less than that is our knowledge of the Holy.
How then can we ever argue It?

Let’s take a moment together: let’s stretch, and make funny faces. Let’s touch the edges of our screens and pretend we are really together and that we can feel each other’s fingers. Let’s breathe in, and laugh out loud . . . yes, it feels vulnerable, and that’s ok.

In our chat earlier this week, Mary reminded me of *The Book of Joy*, with the subtitle: *Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*. (from our mouths to God’s ears) It is a conversation between His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. In 2015, Tutu traveled to the Dalai Lama’s home in Dharamsala, India, to celebrate his 80th birthday and to talk about how and where they find joy. They had only met a few times before and never for any length of time, certainly not enough time to be playful with each other, though if you’ve ever seen the Dalai lama interviewed, he has a most engaging and unexpected humor.

In one passage, the editor asks Desmond Tutu, "What do you say to people who say they are not funny or that they do not have a good sense of humor?" (or - for our purposes, a capacity to play)

"I reckon there are many people who think they have to be somber because it gives them gravitas, and they feel they are more likely to be respected if they are serious. But I believe very fervently that one of the ways of getting into the hearts of people is the capacity of making them laugh . . . especially if you can laugh at yourself . . . it's really the easiest place to begin. It's about humility . . . If you start looking for the humor in life, you will find it. You will stop asking, Why me? And start recognizing that life happens to all of us. It makes everything easier, including your ability to accept others and accept all that life will bring." (221-222)

So, here's your assignment, should you choose to accept it, and since Play is the theme for the month! Go and find yourself some play: instead of working at it, play at it.

As composer, Roger Bourland, suggests, "Let us arrive as children to this huge playground - the universe."

Let's try on that state of mind this week, and see how it changes our perspectives!

One more from Ivy's book: "In the beginning there was nothing and God said 'Let there be light,' and there was still nothing but everybody could see it."

CLOSING HYMN 1057 Go Lifted Up (one verse with Robin on recorder?)

Go lifted up,
Love bless your way,
Moonlight, starlight guide your journey
Into peace and the brightness of day

BENEDICTION

And forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair. - Kahlil Gibran

Go forth and play, that peace and well-being might be yours and ours.

Amen.