**Reading ~ My Help is in the Mountain by Nancy Wood**

**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 the sun on it
And a stream where the water runs gentle
And the trees which one by one give me company.
So must I 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.**

**Sermon ~ Finding the Mystic Within**

**One of the things increasingly evident in the Christian world, is an understanding of the Bible as allegorical. As John Shelby Spong puts it “I’ve stopped asking myself if the miracle stories happened, and instead focus on why the stories were told in the way they were told. And, what meaning do they have for us today?”

As we move into an exploration of Creation Spirituality today, it’s useful to look at one of those miracle stories and see how some Christians are now understanding that story. For one of the things they do well, is find ways to keep their stories. Too often, we as Unitarian Universalists, are seen as the people who have no stories – because we left them all. I don’t think that’s true. The stories are all still there, and more arrived into our expansive, welcoming theological home. The challenge is that we lack any commitment to re-understanding them. It’s so much easier to dismiss them as stories told to manipulate a people or naïve stories held on to despite scientific proof that would lead a rational person away from belief.

This morning we begin with one such story.

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.  3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.  6 And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.”  9 And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so.

11 Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.”

14 And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” 0 And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” 21 So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. .

24 And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.”

26 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

27 So God created mankind in his own image,
    in the image of God he created them;
    male and female he created them.

31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

2 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 3

This, of course, an abbreviated Biblical accounting of The Beginning from Genesis.

In 1650 Anglican archbishop James Ussher, using both Christian and Hebrew Bibles calculated the date of The Beginning as 6pm on Saturday October 22, 4004 BC. Just over 6000 years ago. Given the scientific data reflecting Earth to be around 4.6 billion years old, a different way of understanding this important creation story had to be found.

 Emanuel Swedenborg, a dedicated Christian, and scientist living in Sweden in the 18th century, found such a way.

He wrote of the Bible "As long as the mind confines itself to the sense of the letter alone one cannot possibly see that its contents embody matters that are spiritual and celestial.”

And went on to offer that although the words speak of the creation of the world and of humankind, the internal message was about the New Creation of humans, their regeneration. That the week may be seen as a spiritual journey offered to each of us:

The first day: one of spiritual darkness, before our spiritual regeneration begins

The next day, when we recognize we are a part of something larger – and there is a difference between worldly, external things and spiritual, internal things.

The third day represents a stage of repentance operating from internal motivation but believing our actions to come from ourselves.

The fourth one where we move from a place of feeling we ‘ought’ to act in a certain manner to a place of wanting to act that way.

The fifth day, a stage of aliveness. It is one in which we recognize the goodness flowing from us are because of the faith we receive internally from God.

The sixth day reflects the moment we accept God as the source of all love and wisdom that motivate us and guide us to heaven.

The seventh day, is the day in which we rest in the peace and joy of allowing ourselves to be totally led by God with faith and knowledge God will guide us always and in all ways.

For followers of this Swedish theologian, and scientist, this allowed the acceptance of the scientific fact of Earth’s creation and the Biblical story of The Beginning. As an allegory for the spiritual journey we must take to achieve heaven for all eternity.

We, as Unitarian Universalists do not have the challenge of needing such bridges in order to keep our faith. I don’t imagine anyone arrived here today struggling with the question of how do I make sense of the miracle stories of the Bible. And it is for this reason, in no small part,that we also do not arrive here and move through our days as a people of faith struggling with the question “How do I move forward on my journey to become a more deeply spiritual person?”

And this is the question for all people.

And this story of Beginnings has meaning for us today. For the world did come to be. And so did we. And part of who we came to be included both a brain that holds our minds and something we call soul. And we are beasts seeking to use our mind to find and hone that piece of ourselves we call spirit. The piece that resides somehow, within. It is a place of feeling, of knowing right and wrong regardless of external experiences. It is a place of connection to the awe of creation, to one another and to a journey toward what we call spirituality.

While Swedenborg’s language may feel restricted by the necessity of belief in God and Heaven, the placement of the story has great power.  We might all do well to reread the Bible with different eyes. While most if not all here would look to it as a sacred text full of wonderful stories, what might it be like to reopen the text with this understanding of the first story.

But that is not the work of this morning. Today we root ourselves in the Creation story and find a pathway forward toward a deeper connection. The goal is to accept an invitation to mysticism. Swedenborg, a mystic himself, would perhaps be pleased.

Our guide is Matthew Fox. Fox is a contemporary Anglican theologian, invited to leave Catholicism in 1993, and a leading voice in a call to Creation Spirituality.

Like UUism, Creation Spirituality has principles:

1) The universe is fundamentally a blessing.
Our relationship with the Universe fills us with awe.

2) In Creation, God is both immanent and transcendent. This is panentheism which is not theism (God out there) and not atheism (no God anywhere).
We experience that the Divine is in all things & all things are in the Divine.

3) God is as much Mother as Father, as much Child as Parent, as much God in mystery as the God in history, as much beyond all words and images as in all forms and beings.
We are liberated from the need to cling to God in one form or one literal name.

4) In our lives, it is through the work of spiritual practice that we find our deep and true selves.
Through the arts of meditation and silence we cultivate a clarity of mind and move beyond fear into compassion and community.

5)  Our inner work can be understood as a four-fold journey involving:
– awe, delight, amazement (known as the Via Positiva)
– uncertainty, darkness, suffering, letting go (Via Negativa)
– birthing, creativity, passion (Via Creativa)
– justice, healing, celebration (Via Transformativa)
We weave through these paths like a spiral danced, not a ladder climbed.

6)  Every one of us is a mystic.
We can enter the mystical as much through beauty (Via Positiva) as through contemplation and suffering (Via Negativa). We are born full of wonder and can recover it at any age.

7) Every one of us is an artist.
Whatever the expression of our creativity, it is our prayer and praise (Via Creativa).

8) Every one of us is a prophet.
Our prophetic work is to interfere with all forms of injustice and that which interrupts authentic life (Via Transformativa).

9) Diversity is the nature of the Universe.
We rejoice in and courageously honor the rich diversity within the Cosmos and expressed among individuals and across multiple cultures, religions and ancestral traditions.

10) The basic work of God is compassion and we, who are all original blessings and sons and daughters of the Divine, are called to compassion.
We acknowledge our shared interdependence; we rejoice at one another’s joys and grieve at one another’s sorrows and labor to heal the causes of those sorrows.

11) There are many wells of faith and knowledge drawing from one underground river of Divine wisdom. The practice of honoring, learning and celebrating the wisdom collected from these wells is Deep Ecumenism.
We respect and embrace the wisdom and oneness that arises from the diverse wells of all the sacred traditions of the world.

12) Ecological justice is essential for the sustainability of life on Earth.
Ecology is the local expression of cosmology and so we commit to live in light of this value: to pass on the beauty and health of Creation to future generations.

Although Fox put words to Creation Spirituality in 1970, he is quick to note it is not an invented theology, rather one that needs rediscovering. He has become increasingly urgent in that invitation in correlation to the need for climate justice. He describes it as ‘a kind of watering hole for any person whose passion has been touched by the issues of our day – deep ecologists, ecumenists, artists, native peoples, justice activists, feminists, male liberationists, gay and lesbian peoples, animal liberationists, scientists seeking to reconnect science and wisdom, people of prophetic faith traditions – all these find in the Creation Spirituality movement a common language and a common ground on which to stand.’

Our kind of watering hole, but one that also requires we do the work of letting go of judgement of those who may hold differing beliefs. This one of the more challenging tasks of our people. To share this common ground is to let go of the need to convince anyone else of our perspectives and open our heads and hearts to hearing how others make meaning on their spiritual journey.

So, what does Creation Spirituality hold for us? It is an invitation. This tradition, as Fox says “rooted in the historical Jesus and the Cosmic Christ” offers us a place to stand or sit and evaluate an invitation to nurture a piece of us that arrived at the moment of our creation. It invites the mystic within to the forefront. It acknowledges that potential also arrived with our first breath.

The question is how do we accept it? How do we awaken the mystic within, that we might engage more with all of creation and become more spiritual?

One year, Matthew Fox was interviewed by a reporter for the New York Times. She arrived and began by saying “Look, I grew up in the inner city of Chicago and now I live in Manhattan. What does Creation Spirituality have to say to me? Is it just about visiting parks and zoos?”

He invited her to look out the window and tell him all she could see. There on the 18th floor of a NYC hotel room. You know that view. Buildings, all around, taxicabs and other vehicles and people below. He told her – the bricks were from clay raised up 18 stories by humans, the steel girders gifts from the earth, the taxis from steel as well running on tires made from rubber trees and fuel made from dead plants and animals from millions of years before ------ all of it earth. All of it creation.

Creation is everything because everything came to be, either arriving as we did or being created by us. Creation engages all space, all time, past, present and future. It isn’t only in parks, zoos, mountains and streams. It is in cubicles, crowded trains, bathrooms, grocery store checkout lines, and voting booths.

Spirituality is to be alive in all of that creation. We all have it, spirituality. If we are breathing we have spirit. To be spiritual is to live in a manner that is more driven by spirit than thought. Being spiritual is taking the scenic route even though it takes more time. Being spiritual is stopping to engage with a person rather than rushing off. It is engaging with all beings along the way and also caring for the ground we walk or roll upon, even if it’s concrete. Being spiritual is risking not knowing and letting go of needing to be right or in control. It is being on a path that intersects again and again and again with other spiritual beings. Being spiritual is being here today.

Creation spirituality then is the focus on connectedness with the mystery of creation, all beings and committing ourselves to the path of deepening spirituality knowing it requires we be fully present in all of creation. It offers these four commandments.

1.      Thou shalt call in love at least three times a Day – driven by awe and wonder in our universe

2.      Thou shalt know the dark

3.      Do not be reluctant to give birth

4.      Be You Compassionate As Your Creator in Heaven is Compassionate

And so, let us leave here today, committed to awakening our mystic. We need to head to the mountain, yes, but also train ourselves to see the mountain in all things, including ourselves. We need to open ourselves to the dark through silence and sit alone with none other than our own thoughts. We need to create something – anything. And bless the world with our best selves, dressed fully in compassion.**

**May it be so.**