



## The More I Wonder, The More I Love

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### **Reading:**

What is the greatest gift?  
Could it be the world itself — the oceans, the meadowlark,  
the patience of the trees in the wind?  
Could it be love, with its sweet clamor of passion?

Something else — something else entirely  
holds me in thrall.  
That you have a life that I wonder about  
more than I wonder about my own.  
That you have a life — courteous, intelligent —  
that I wonder about more than I wonder about my own.  
That you have a soul — your own, no one else's —  
that I wonder about more than I wonder about my own.  
So that I find my soul clapping its hands for yours  
more than my own.

Mary Oliver

### **Sermon**

What's beyond space?

Why was I born?

I wonder if Pickles the Cat will be real?

Are there any absolute truths or values?

Will I ever feel like I am good enough?

When, where, and why I will die?

Why do we have fish at this church?

These are some of the wonders printed on our wonder board on the RE kiosk outside the sanctuary. They caught my eye. I could tell you some things about Pickles the Cat, found both in storybook form, and as a 21 lb. cat from Washington State. I can also tell you a basic reason why there are fish at First Church, but I am more interested in wonder and why and what you wonder than in answers. So I choose to let the wonder remain.

As Unitarian Universalists our first source affirms the "Direct experience and transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life." Transcending mystery and wonder. I like this. "Transcending" as in to "go beyond the range or limits," "mystery" as in "something that is difficult or impossible to understand or explain," or "wonder, "to be filled with admiration, awe, and curiosity."

Transcending mystery and wonder is awe and curiosity for that which is beyond our knowing. This is terrain that UUs both love and hate. We love the openness, but we can also be oddly fond of and in need of specific answers. Have you ever felt that tension within Unitarian Universalism? It is common. But not just here, in the world [Comments on Muslims]. I wonder why Candidate Trump's comments hold so much apparent meaning for other people?

Sometimes, in our education and illusions of control we prefer what passes for factual knowledge, or at least things that don't counter factor factual knowledge.

As the Soul Matters materials challenge us this month "Figuring out what it means to be a people of wonder might require us not trying too hard to figure it out . . . to really understand wonder, you've got to let go of knowing, or at least hold it a bit more loosely. Openness, not understanding is the point."

I love this terrain. It is my happy place because I wonder all the time. In fact, the older I get, the less certain I am about anything fixed or permanent. I used to count on what seemed "fixed" to me, actually hold on to it for dear life. As a young person I saw everything as "black or white," "right or wrong," but that started to fall apart for me the more I encountered the world and people in it. Now, well, it's not shades of grey, it's shades of color. Are there any absolute truths or values? I wonder. What might you call them to be if this is a wonder for you?

My son has an amazing science teacher this year. He has encouraged them to do the egg drop challenge off a balcony at Walnut Hills High School. I wonder how to drop an egg off

a balcony and have it not crack? When they go in the lab they are not graded on a perfected experiments, they are graded on completed experiments. Grades are better if the experiments are correct, but even experimental failures get good grades. Remember it is by "failing" that we become curious, if we allow ourselves, and then truly learn. Most famous scientists left behind them the "wonder that got away," that curiosity that didn't make sense or couldn't be answered. Perhaps some later person has answered the wonder, perhaps not. I like the space in and around all this possibility.

This year I have been participating in the Center for Courage & Renewal Academy of Leaders. It is a six month process and lesson #1 is to learn how to ask open and honest questions. Open and honest questions are those that cannot be answered with "yes" or "no" nor for which you nor I, as the questioner, have the answer. Asking open and honest questions is much harder than you would imagine.

In learning how to ask open and honest questions I have been appalled to learn how often I ask questions for which I know, or think I know, or am trying to get a specific answer. My questions have not really been questions. They have been my personal agenda. Yuck. This is not a wondrous way to communicate.

As I practice open and honest questions I learn to have patience, to listen, not to rush or expect, to follow someone else, and to just be. I was recently talking to a colleague struggling with a difficult situation in his congregation. Instead of giving him advice, which I could have done, I asked open and honest questions. I was astonished about what I learned about and from him. It was like being in the flow, being truly present. Open and honest questions are a wondrous and liberating experience. To really understand wonder, you've got to let go of knowing, or at least hold it a bit more loosely.

As Frederick Buechner explains that there are mysteries that can be revealed by truth, and there are other mysteries that are lived to be known:

The mystery of yourself . . . The more you try to fathom it, the more fathomless it is revealed to be. No matter how much of yourself you are able to objectify and examine, the quintessential, living part of yourself will always elude you, i.e., the part that is conducting the examination. Thus you do not solve the mystery, you live the mystery. And you do that not by fully knowing yourself but by fully being yourself.

According to Buechner we live the mystery of ourselves, that is the most we will understand and it will not be all there is to understand and this is as "good" as it gets. I know he is right, but even as I preach this, some part of myself does not want him to be right. Couldn't I just do enough therapy or read enough self-help books and put it all together so that I don't have any more shocking surprises, revelations, humiliations and/or embarrassments. See, that's the control part. I want it signed and sealed so that I am perfected and protected.

Even as I say I want that, and yearn for that, I feel less - as if some magic has gone out of living - mystery, wonder. So to be a person of wonder is to welcome surprises, revelations, humiliations, and embarrassments, the all of it. I don't see a way around this, and maybe it is good, fine, a path towards being fully oneself and fully present in this ever evolving world.

At this past week's meditation group (meeting here Monday at 11:30 a.m. - you are always welcome), our fearless leader, Fran Turner, read to us from "Peace is Every Step" by Thich Nhat Hanh.

"When I see someone smile, I know immediately that he or she is dwelling in awareness. This half smile, how many artists have labored to bring it to the lips of countless statues and paintings? I am sure the same smile must have been on the faces of sculptors and painters as they worked. Can you imagine an angry painter giving birth to such a smile? Mona Lisa's smile is light, just a hint of a smile. Yet even a smile like that is enough to relax all the muscles in our face, to banish all worries and fatigue. A tiny bud of a smile on our lips nourishes awareness and calms us miraculously. It returns to us the peace we thought we had lost."

I love this idea that a smile in the day is a sign of awareness, an appreciation of the unexpected and surprising fullness of the moment.

What happens when we are aware of the moment, whatever moment, appreciating its time? To begin with, it is harder to hate and harder to fear. Some situation elicit hate and fear, but not many, and many less than we seem as humans to choose. Holding wonder keeps us open to compassion and revelation, less prone to hatred and fear.

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So that I find my soul clapping its hands for yours more than my own (Mary Oliver)

Rally - looking out I was filled with wonder, all this diversity, hope, goodwill, community, trust - here after everything that has been said. We are what is best, beyond Isis and fear and control and hate. And after my words, the Muslim women who came to hug me, woman after woman telling me she laughed and cried at my words. They held our banner, Standing on the Side of Love, happy to do so because that is where they find themselves in a world that does not understand. And then, they fed me, insisted I take a sandwich because food is the gift of life, her soul to my soul.

And that is everything. Everything in a world that features clown show conversations. And I was saved and had hope again, in the wonder of all these people like and unlike me who I know and do not know and might know or will never know. Souls clapping, my soul clapping its hands for yours more than my own.

Alice Walker got it right in her novel *The Color Purple*, "The more I wonder, the more I love."