

Quote for cover :

Title: "Forgiveness"

Theme: Perseverance

Gathering Music

Announcements -

Prelude

Call to Worship - A Litany of Atonement

Musical Introit

Opening Hymn

Unison Affirmation

Doxology

Lighting Our Chalice

We light our chalice in peace and friendship

A Universalist Story -

Story for All Ages - Brenda McKee

Offering of Gifts

Musical Offertory

Song of Thanksgiving

*From thee I receive, to Thee I give*

*Together we share, from this we live.*

Silence

Candles of Joy and Sorrow

**Meditation**

**Meta Meditation**

**May I be filled with loving kindness**

**May I be well**

**May I be peaceful and at ease.**

**May I be whole. May I/you/we/**

### **Morning Message - "Forgiveness" Reverend Frieda Gillespie**

One of my favorite authors is Loren Eiseley who was a biologist, naturalist, poet, and essayist. He wrote many great essays about his observations of nature. Here is one of the best:

The judgment of the birds

I have said that I saw a judgment upon life, and that it was not passed by men. Those who stare at birds in cages or who test minds by their closeness to our own may not care for it. It comes from far away out of my past, in a place of pouring waters and green leaves. I shall never see an episode like it again if I live to be a hundred, nor do I think that one man in a million has ever seen it, because man is an intruder into such silences. The light must be right, and the observer must remain unseen. No man sets up such an experiment. What he sees, he sees by chance.

You may put it that I had come over a mountain, that I had slogged through fern and pine needles for half a long day, and that on the edge of a little glade with one long, crooked branch extending across it, I had sat down to rest with my back against a stump. Through accident I was concealed from the glade, although I could see into it perfectly.

The sun was warm there, and the murmurs of forest life blurred softly away into my sleep. When I awoke, dimly aware of some commotion and outcry in the clearing, the light was slanting down through the pines in such a way that the glade was like some vast cathedral. I could see the dust motes of wood pollen in

the long shaft of light, and there on the extended branch sat an enormous raven with a red and squirming nestling in his beak.

The sound that awoke me was the outraged cries of the nestlings parents, who flew helplessly in circles about the clearing. The sleek black monster was indifferent to them. He gulped, whetted his beak on the dead branch a moment and sat still. Up to that point the little tragedy had followed the usual pattern. But suddenly, out of all that area of woodland, a soft sound of complaint began to rise. Into the glade fluttered small birds of half a dozen varieties drawn by the anguished outcries of the tiny parents.

No one dared to attack the raven. But they cried there in some instinctive common misery, the bereaved and the unbereaved. The glade filled with their soft rustling and their cries. They fluttered as though to point their wings at the murderer. There was a dim intangible ethic he had violated, that they knew. He was a bird of death.

And he, the murderer, the black bird at the heart of life, sat on there, glistening in the common light, formidable, unmoving, unperturbed, untouchable.

The sighing died. It was then I saw the judgment. It was the judgment of life against death. I will never see it again so forcefully presented. I will never hear it again in notes so tragically prolonged. For in the midst of protest, they forgot the violence. There, in that clearing, the crystal note of a song sparrow lifted hesitantly in the hush. And finally, after painful fluttering, another took the song, and then another, the song passing from one bird to another, doubtfully at first, as though some evil thing were being slowly forgotten. Till suddenly they took heart and sang, from many throats joyously together as birds are known to sing. They sang because life is sweet and sunlight beautiful. They sang under the brooding shadow of the raven. In simple truth they had forgotten the raven, for they were the singers of life, and not of death.

This story is meaningful to me because it mirrors something that happened to me. When I was growing up I accumulated a lot of pain and resentments toward my mother who seemed incapable of loving me. This is an old and not uncommon story. The way I dealt with this was to hold onto the pain and used it to as a reason or excuse not to thrive. I came to realize that this was a kind of revenge for how I was treated. "I'll show her how much she hurt me. I won't be happy and won't make a good life for myself. After all, how could I after being held in so much contempt and having been so neglected emotionally." This is what I thought not necessarily consciously but it is how I behaved. Even when I was aware of this, I couldn't let the resentment go. This went on for much of my early adult years and it was a drain on my energy and creativity. I tried many ways to let go of the resentment. Talk therapy, Affirmations, meditations, common sense, nothing made a real difference. Or perhaps all the efforts made a little bit of difference that added up over time. Perhaps it was because in my 40's I began to take responsibility for my emotional life, I stopped looking to my past to correct my present. Little by little I let go and was more and more able to free up my energy to create a good life. Once I focused on my work as a minister and the friends I made along the way, I found much happiness. I didn't realize that I had gotten rid of my resentment until one day I realized it was simply gone and my life was a lot freer.

When we are injured in a relationship, it can be very difficult to forgive and forget. I know from my own experience how hard it is to let go of pain and resentment. I think that one factor that actually helps is gaining some understanding of our abuser. It is harder to let go if we believe the person who hurt us had a choice - could have treated us properly. Being verbally and emotionally abused can leave us with the question of whether or not we were at fault for making the abuser so angry and frustrated. Did we do something to deserve the treatment they gave us? Were we somehow deficient? Was the assessment of the abuser right? Were we stupid, neglectful, undermining of their efforts? Ironically, what we imagine we did wrong is often what the abuser actually did. By learning about the patterns of abuse, we can let go of the belief that we were the cause. If only we were more loyal, more supportive, smarter, kinder, etc.... My mother didn't love

me because I was unlovable, but because she was incapable of loving herself or anyone else.

By learning about how verbally abusive people and relationships work, we can begin to take back our power--our real power: the power to discern the truth about ourselves and the other. This is personal power and distinct from power over others which is always the goal of the verbal and emotional abuser.

Patterns of toxic anger and manipulation can occur in relationships between parishioners and their ministers. It's really important to be able to discern the different ways people can try and dominate, whether they have an agreed upon position of power or not. Work that has been done around verbally abusive relationships can be very useful in this discernment. Patricia Evans has written in great detail about it in her book, *The Verbally Abusive Relationship*.

When ministers are abusive and domineering they make it impossible for congregants to thrive. They create division and conflict in a congregation and confusion about what is happening and why. When an abusive minister leaves a congregation, members feel relief. They feel freed from some very unhealthy cycles of conflict without resolution. But then comes the hard work of discernment the "What happened?". That is very important work and can yield a lot of insight, especially when others' add their stories to yours. Abusive people work in secret and uncovering the ways in which we are abused is a huge part of healing. We can also discern the untruths about ourselves. When abused by your minister, you are not the problem. The abusive person may never change, may never even see that they can change, that they are the problem in the relationship. You are not responsible to heal them. You are only responsible for yourself.

As far as forgiveness goes, we can forgive ourselves for allowing someone else to befuddle us into believing we are damaged. We can forgive the abuser for their need for superiority and fear of inferiority.

After doing this work and seeing ourselves more clearly, then we can turn our attention to what we really want, to creating a thriving, dynamic church. Once we've had enough time to grieve lost opportunities and misunderstandings, we, like the song birds can turn our attention to life itself and all that it promises to us. We can sing a song of life.

And, speaking of singers of life, I want you to know how much I appreciate your life-giving ideas and initiatives: the movies, the lectures, the gatherings, the discussion groups, the healing circles, the dinners, the welcoming of newcomers and new mainers. In so many ways you are giving of yourselves in a life-giving way. I really love being here in shared ministry with you.

May it be so.

Closing Hymn #Go Lifted Up

Closing Words The way out is the way through

Extinguishing the Chalice 456

Unison Benediction

Musical Benediction