

OCTOBER 2016

SOUNDINGS



Unitarian Universalist
Church of Charlotte

DISCOVER DEEPER SPIRITUAL MEANING

Depth through reflection

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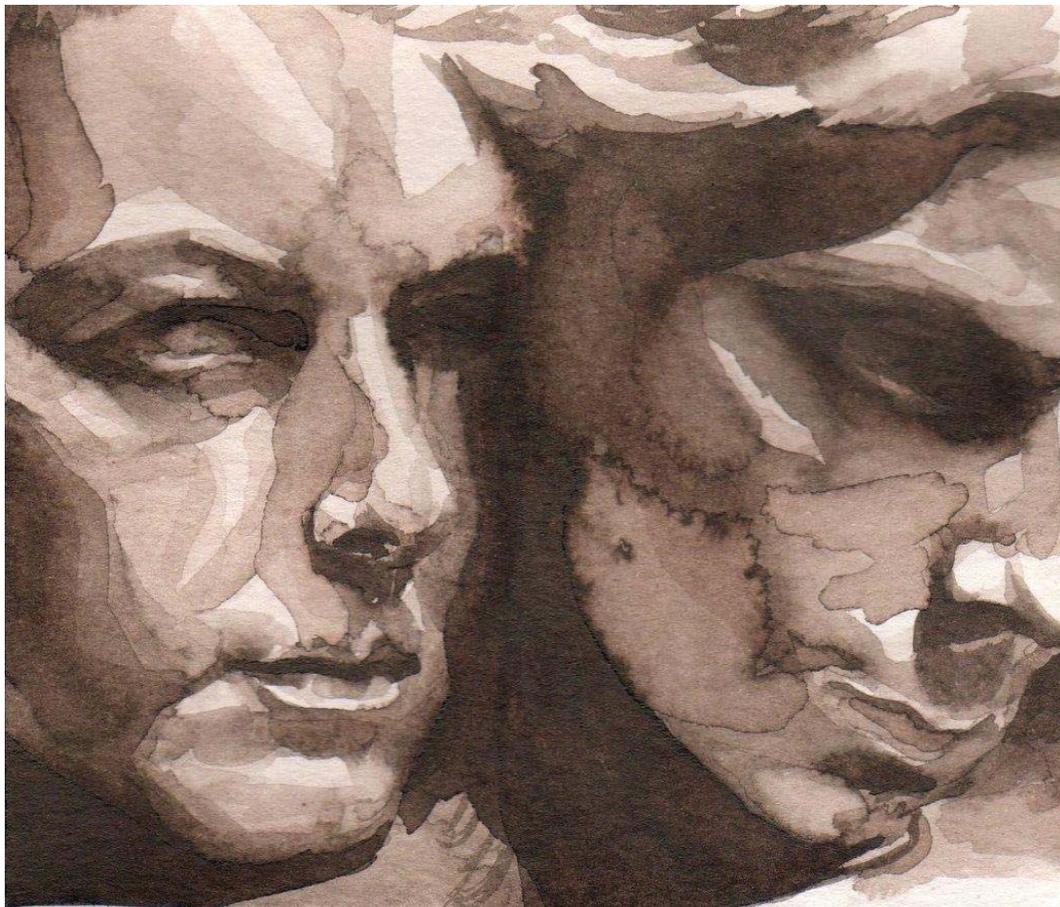
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The Abyss, ink drawing by Beth Mussay

*It's the yes and no
of things
How one holds
the other*

— MARILYN SINGER
IN "DIAMOND DARK"



The Mission of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Charlotte is to inspire children, youth and adults to discover and articulate deeper spiritual meaning evidenced in lives of integrity, compassion and stewardship of the earth.

La mision de la iglesia Unitaria Universalista de Charlotte es inspirar a los niños, jóvenes y adultos para que descubran y articulan un significado espiritual profundo, evidente en una vida de integridad, compasión y en el manejo de los recursos de la tierra

DOUBT MADE ME A SUPERHERO

by Heather Douglas



Heather Douglas

I have a personality that thrives on routine, longs for certainty and is desirous for regimen. So when I see Anne Lamott's quote, "The opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty," I panic, leading to implementation of calming strategies.

Up until 2010, certainty was always my ultimate goal, one which I spent endless energy trying to obtain. In May of that year, my divorce was final. An emotionally destructive chapter of my life was over. I had been involved in a relationship that was so chaotic that my usual urge for structure and certainty was exacerbated, leading me to frantically try to stabilize any aspect of that chaos that I could. The result created a version of myself that was filled with fear and doubt.

I was lost. The one truth I knew was that I wanted a family, but this felt unobtainable. I was 39-years old. My traditional upbringing and biology were not on my side for becoming a mother. My life course had not turned out as I had imagined, which created this loop in my head of self-doubt and denial of self-worth: "How dare I think that I could possibly have something to offer a child." "I am not capable of raising a child, especially without a partner." I had made so many poor choices, and I doubted my ability to make a positive one.

Throughout my life, there have been times when I doubted my faith in someone or something. This time

the doubt was in myself, my ability to even understand and decipher my own wants and my ability to obtain those wants. I had long since lost faith in prayer or looking to a higher power for any answers, but my faith persisted in the presence of this doubt. I had to make a commitment, to access faith, a faith that is sustained in the belief that I can trust and count on my community—that if I ask for help and let myself be vulnerable, help will manifest in ways I could not imagine. Using my doubt as a strength, I could acknowledge my limitations.

I was going to challenge what I had been taught and learned. I would challenge myself to view family in a non-traditional manner and believe in my ability to be a mother capable of creating a loving family. That is what I did.

*Exuberance*, photograph by Phyllis Bertke

My doubt was present but did not detract from my belief; rather, it motivated me to ask for help, fueling my faith to create my version of a family. I spoke with my parents, who are traditional and conservative, asking for their support of my desire to become

a mother, a single

mother by choice. My self-doubt diminished with their unbelievably supportive and loving response to my plan. My friends then expanded that support. My doubt led me to faith in human kindness, our need for each other, and our capacity to love and help one another.

Faith in myself and my community led me to bring into the world the rambunctious ball of light and beauty that is Oliver. I believe in doubt. It made me a superhero—I mean, a mother.

A SKEPTIC'S SEARCH FOR FAITH

by Doug Sea



Doug Sea

I confess to being a lifelong skeptic. My dad often told me, “Don’t expect much and you won’t be disappointed.” The more cruelty and pain I experienced growing up, the more I took his advice to heart. I became Doubting Douglas, the perennial pessimist. But in trying to protect myself from hurt, I was left with little faith—in life, in people, in the future,

in myself. If faith is what one has despite the evidence, it is no surprise I became a lawyer and passionate fan of reason and the scientific method, clinging to them like a lifeboat.

Ironically, however, the more I learned about science, the more my need for faith grew. The history of science is one of unquestioned tenets ultimately proven wrong or incomplete, the impossible becoming reality. Science has taught me how much of the world is hidden and counterintuitive, from invisible dark matter to “spooky” quantum mechanics. With so much of the world unknowable and vastly beyond my control, I am finally acknowledging that every choice or movement is an act of faith. My need for answers and power has to yield somehow to acceptance.

This inherent uncertainty doesn’t mean I have stopped doubting. I think skepticism is critical in a world where so many false prophets prey on the human desire to believe. But doubt, fear, and cynicism have too often left me unwilling to explore, risk, think imaginatively, live fully. I sometimes hide from the world, untrusting and numb. One reason I love this congregation is the many ways it keeps calling me out of the darkness, renewing my faith in life.

But it has been very difficult for me to remain hopeful and engaged over the last twelve years as I’ve experienced severe emotional pain caused by the disease of addiction in a close family member. Each sign of hope, especially over the past two years, has been followed by another setback. My faith has been

sorely tested by this crisis, the hurt and shame so private and deep that part of me is buried alive. Admitting my despair to myself, let alone others, is so hard that as I write these words, splinters are being ripped from a long festering wound.

Yet once again faith patiently waits for me, reminding me of my hubris in trying to manage the actions of another. My grandiosity having failed me utterly, my only choice is to surrender control, to turn it over to God. So let me repeat now as a mantra words I wrote for a sermon a few years ago:

William James believed that surrender is at the heart of all religion. Perhaps surrender of control to the universe is made easier for a Unitarian Universalist like me if I remember that I and the universe are one. If we surrender our separateness, we are no longer alone. We can live in harmony with the greater whole. In this way surrender can be a joyful act of trust and faith in which we can let go and find peace.

I know this much for sure: I am not alone in my pain. Life is full of great suffering. No one escapes. But widening my perspective, I see in human history a story of enormous progress by humans to make life better, growing enlightenment and understanding, and a dysfunctional family slowly learning to love one another. This gives me great hope for the future, deep faith in humanity, and profound trust in the bending arc of justice. Just don’t let me forget it.



A Path, photograph by Laura Hamilton



Jay Leach

Several years ago, our family had the opportunity to spend extended time in Italy. While there, we started noting how often we saw the iconic "Capitoline Wolf." This ancient image depicts the infant twins Romulus and Remus being suckled by a wolf, usually atop a tall pillar. Though it reflects the mythological founding of Rome by these two brothers, we discovered it often in places well outside of Rome.

This famous story of these particular twins is but one chapter in a prodigious anthology of twin stories in mythology and folklore. By one count, there are twenty-one sets of twins in Greek and Roman mythology alone.

Egyptians tell of Tefnut (water) who mated with Shu (air) to produce the sky goddess Nut and her twin earth brother Geb. Central American, Haitian, Native American, Norse, Syrian and West African myths all tell stories of twins.

Hinduism includes several stories of twins. Zoroastrianism is based on a twin story. And, the Hebrew Bible offer a twin tale—the tragic Cain and Abel narrative—to account for the first human offspring and a long-running twin tale—that of Esau and Jacob—as one of its central stories.

Examining this wide range of stories, we find that twin tales often present one of two contradictory perspectives. Sometimes twins appear as fierce rivals engaged in a defining struggle. The struggle may be ongoing or one twin may prevail. These tales depict our inclination to see life as either/or: good or evil, positive or negative as competing forces.

However, twin tales may also point to the opposite experience, depicting the twins as two essential parts of one unified whole. Such myths depend on collaboration, on cooperation. In these, the twins, recognizing their mutual dependence, work closely to sustain one another.

Mindful of our theme for the coming weeks, here's one way to think about it: if Doubt and Faith were twins, what kind of story might we tell?

We certainly recognize that, at times, faith and doubt compete and conflict. We've all come to crossroads in our lives in which we've wondered: should I trust myself? should I believe someone else? can I commit to some new course with confidence? Or: should I be dubious? doubtful? should I dismiss this possibility as undeserving of my trust? Faith might mislead. Doubt might impede. We're caught in a struggle aware that a decision will require opting for one over the other.

But, that's not the whole story of our experience with these twins, Faith and Doubt. At times our doubts can give rise to new faith just as our faith can prompt new doubts. They work in complementary ways, each setting appropriate limits on the other, each yielding to the other at appropriate times. This story is not either/or but rather both/and: both doubt and faith.

In the coming weeks, we might learn to tell a deeper, more honest tale about the twins Doubt and Faith. It could include both motifs: vignettes of sibling rivalry and accounts of intimate cooperation.

Where faith and doubt are concerned, what kind of story might you tell?



Romulus and Remus, photograph by Jay Leach

Our spiritual journey begins at birth and continues throughout our lives. We invite parents to use the material presented in LET'S DIVE IN! to engage their children in this journey.

DOUBTING THOMAS

by Belinda Parry

Twelve-year-old Thomas was worried. He thought it might help to talk to his mother.

“Mom?” Thomas said. “I’m not sure I should be a Unitarian Universalist anymore.”

His mother took a big breath and let it out slowly. “Hmm,” she said. “Why do you say that?”

“Well, I was thinking about the UU principles, like the first one—that all people have worth and dignity. And I just don’t know if I believe that. What about people who tie up their dogs all day and don’t take care of them? Or people who are hateful to other people just because they’re different from them? Or people who start wars? Or serial killers? I mean, I want to believe in the goodness of people; I really do. But I just don’t think all people are good.”

“I hear what you’re saying, kiddo. That’s a tricky thing,” his mom said. “Sometimes people do bad things, but maybe the first principle isn’t so much about people’s actions and more about who they could be.”

“So, like, everyone could be good?” Thomas asked.

“Well, I would say more like everyone matters.”

“Huh. Okay, but then there’s the second principle—the one that says to treat everyone with respect and kindness. Sometimes I have a really hard time doing that. Like this morning, when Louisa bumped into me in the kitchen for no reason and spilled juice on my sweatshirt, I just wanted to shove her back. And yesterday in my social studies class, someone brought up that law that says transgender people have to use the bathroom of the gender on their birth certificate, and she was in favor of it! I’m not sure I can be kind and respectful to someone like that.”

“This is more about you, though. If you think about the first principle . . .”

“Everyone matters . . .”

“ . . . when you react or interact with other people, you are living the second principle. You didn’t shove Louisa, because even though your sister makes you really mad sometimes you know in your heart that she deserves respect. And you might disagree with the girl in your class . . .”

“But I can still be respectful!” Thomas said. He thought for a second. “Well, what about the fourth principle—that all people should have the right to vote. What about the people who vote just because they think it will make them rich or powerful? What about the people who vote based on what they see on TV but who don’t know anything else about the candidates or issues? I feel like those people are voting for the wrong reasons and maybe shouldn’t be allowed to.”

Thomas’s mom said, “You know how crucial it is for people to be informed when they vote, which will make you a better voter when you’re older. Maybe you’ll even want to help other people learn about the issues . . . You know, it’s okay to have doubts and questions about the way things are in the world. I’m glad to see that you are thinking deeply about those concerns and acting on them in positive ways. I’d say you’re definitely a UU.”

“Maybe . . .” said Thomas. “You’ve given me a lot to think about. Thanks, Mom.”



Wanderer, digital art by Liza Park

Wondering Questions:

- I wonder if you feel free to question things you are told . . .
- I wonder if you have ever questioned something you were told in church or school . . .
- I wonder what your parent might say if you said you aren’t sure you should be a Unitarian Universalist . . .

Testify

*Well, I have seen a lot of true believers
Hallelujah all the time
They've seen the light, they've seen the glory
But have they seen so much they're blind?*

*And I have seen the broken hearted
They praise you as they grieve
In spite of all your slings and arrows
They find some reason to believe
But not me*

*If you grant me some immunity
Then I might testify
I'll deliver my confession, lord
If you'll just let me get by*

*I've seen saints and I've seen heroes
Devoting all their time
They turn their cheek, you turn your back
You punish faith like crime*

*If you grant me some immunity
Then I might testify
I'll deliver my confession, lord
If you'll just let me get by*

*(Bridge:)
And where were you in 1939?
1492?
Tell me, was that you?
And how about 2001?
1755?
Did you choose who would survive?
Are we equal in your eyes?*

*Are all your storms and fallen soldiers
Are all your floods and famines fine?
A grander plan, beyond our knowing
The best of what you have in mind?*

*Well I'm not pleading guilty
Just to the sin of being alive
But if you grant me some immunity
Then I might testify*

*Yes, if you grant me some immunity
Then I might testify
I'll deliver my confession, lord
If you'll just let me get by
If you could somehow let me slide
Then I might testify.*

– lyrics by Pete Moore



photograph by Elsa Lafferty

UNSPOKEN HARMONY

Both look down as if in contemplation,
the Buddha and the Earthmother share
a small space on my desk and a large space
in my life.

The Earthmother, appropriately clayful,
color a dark reddish-brown, her hands
clapsed, her arms curved
into a heart.

More narrowly formed of sandalwood,
the Buddha is present from the neck up
into a carved headdress, pagoda-like,
appropriately phallic.

Turned toward each other,
eyes closed, lids downcast,
holding each other, different
myths in unspoken harmony.

Nearby a Lalique Venus, translucent,
and prismatic in the morning sunlight,
looks on and wonders if she and they
are missing something.

– Henry Berne

FOR FURTHER ENGAGEMENT

Below you will find a list of books, reflections, movies, lectures and much more for further engagement on the subject of Faith/Doubt

BOOKS:

Adult

The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors, by Reeve Robert Brenner, 1997

In a Dark Wood: Journeys to Faith and Doubt, edited by Linda Jones and Sophie Stanes, 2004

Faith and Doubt: An Anthology of Poems, edited by Patrice Vecchione, 2007

The Life of Meaning: Reflections on Faith, Doubt, and Repairing the World, edited by Bob Abernethy, 2007

Fresh Air: Faith, Reason and Doubt, by Terry Gross, 2008

Leaving Alexandria: A Memoir of Faith and Doubt, by Richard Holloway, 2012

Against Dogmatism: Dwelling in Faith and Doubt, by Madhuri M. Yadlapati, 2013

The Faith to Doubt: Glimpses of Buddhist Uncertainty, Stephen Batchelor, 2015

Wrestling With God: Stories of Doubt and Faith, by Barbara Falconer Newhall, 2015

Preschool/ Early Elementary

The Lion and the Mouse- Aesop's Fable

Older Elementary

Polar Express, by Chris Van Allsburg, 1985

Grandpa, Is Everything Black Bad?, by Sandy Lynne Holman, 1998

Mr. Lincoln's Way, by Patricia Polacco, 2001

The Three Hard Questions (Based on a story by Leo Tolstoy), by Jon J. Muth, 2002

Busing Brewster, by Richard Michelson, 2010

Teens

Philosophy for Teens: Questioning Life's Big Ideas, by Sharon Kaye and Paul Thomson, 2006

Lord of the Rings, Fellowship of the Rings, J.R.R. Tolkien

MOVIES:

Agnes of God, 1985 (PG-13)

Contact, 1997 (PG)

Oh Brother, Where Are Thou?, 2000 (PG-13)

A Beautiful Mind, 2001 (PG-13)

Signs, 2002 (PG-13)

As It Is in Heaven, 2004 (Swedish)

Doubt, 2008 (PG-13)

The Blind Side, 2009 (PG-13)

Of Gods and Men, 2010 (PG-13)

Soul Surfer, 2011 (PG)

Salmon Fishing in the Yemen, 2011 (PG-13)

Life of Pi, 2012 (PG)

The Letters, 2015 (PG)

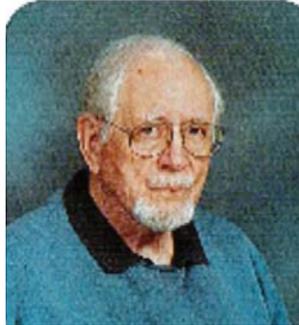
VIDEOS:

Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero, 2002, PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/video/2120639608>

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS OF ART, POETRY, AND READINGS:

Henry Berne

John Henry Berne was a journalist, writer, academic, therapist, WWII veteran and civil rights activist. He served our congregation on the Board of Trustees and was also involved with the Charlotte Friends of Jung. At age 70, he began writing poetry and leading poetry groups, including one at the UUC. As he liked to put it, poetry became his teacher. He died at the age of 83 in 2009.



Henry Berne

Elsa Lafferty

"As far back as I can remember I have felt a longing to capture the beauty around us. Colored pencils, paints, were a constant part of my school years. So were regular trips to the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam to study the Dutch Masters. Photography has opened up endless possibilities. Traveling, stopping whenever something interesting appears. How fortunate to be in a place of my life where I have the luxury of truly being in the moment, waiting for the light or an expression, for a flower to open, a wild animal to stop and look at you. A sunset, a moonrise . . . To capture that moment makes my heart sing. To be able to share it with others will only enhance the sweet experience."



Elsa Lafferty



Phyllis Bertke

Phyllis Bertke

Phyllis has been a passionate amateur photographer since she discovered that experiences are richer if she has a camera nearby, even if she's not taking

pictures. Her camera helps keep her present in the smallest of moments.

Laura Hamilton

"It started with my first point-and-shoot: a Kodak Baby Brownie. In the many decades since, I have enjoyed capturing pictures that are both interesting and pleasing. Transforming a 3-D vision into a 2-dimensional image is challenging and satisfying. I look for curious perspectives, different angles, unusual designs, or fun situations. For me, photos provide great memories and wonderful entertainment."



Laura Hamilton

Pete Moore

Longtime UUC member Pete Moore is a writer and self-taught musician. His song "Testify," originally written more than 25 years ago and recently updated, was inspired by a combination of Voltaire's *Candide* and the televised Iran-Contra hearings. A self-described positive agnostic, or "posnostic," Pete believes it is neither possible nor important for him to know for sure whether God exists, and if so, in what specific form. Instead, he tries to find meaning and inspiration across various faith traditions— including opportunities to express doubt as a fundamental aspect of faith (as in "Testify").



Pete Moore

Beth Mussay

Beth Mussay is a painter and illustrator originally from Indianapolis. She feels proud and lucky to come from a family of compassionate, politically conscious musicians. Beth is inspired by the beauty and complexity of people and the natural world. She aspires to contribute to the global political and artistic conversation.



Beth Mussay

CREATIVE SUBMISSIONS FOR SOUNDINGS

The editors of Soundings invite members of the congregation to submit creative written and visual material for publication. Submissions should reflect one of the congregation's upcoming Second Sunday themes: November–Faith/Doubt; December–Peace; January–The Common/Greater Good; February–Commitment. Written pieces (poems or prose) should be no more than 150 words. Visual works can include photographs or high-quality photographs of paintings, sketches, fiber art, sculpture, etc. All submissions must be original. The editors – the UUCC professional staff – will review all submissions and contact the authors regarding suitability for publication.

Please send submissions to uucc@uuccharlotte.org



Liza Park

"I use art as an outlet for self-expression and a way to convey emotions that can't be voiced. Typically I try and create work that illustrates a subliminal message; whether it be personal, concerning the world around me, or simply just a way to get my ideas out onto a canvas. Though I have a strong foundation with

Liza Park

traditional art, I've been experimenting with digital art (using programs such as Photoshop, SAI, or GIMP.) Art is both a calling and a passion of mine."

UUCC

ENDS Statements

AS A CONGREGATION, WE COURAGEOUSLY NAME THESE ENDS TO WHICH WE ASPIRE:

- We are a joyful, dynamic community of people who care about and are connected to each other. Here people are welcomed, heard, included and respected.
- We are a sanctuary for those on a liberal religious path and a beacon of progressive thought and action in the larger Charlotte community.
- We cultivate lives of generosity and responsibility, sharing our personal abundance.
- We are intentionally growing in our diversity as a congregation, each of us working with others to overcome the barriers that divide the human family.
- We strive for peace, justice and equity in our hearts, our interpersonal relationships, our community and our world.

SOUNDINGS

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