

In the Name of Love
Rev. Linda Simmons
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In the book, *The Zoo Keeper's Wife* about the Nazi invasion of Poland in the late 1930s and the zoo that provided refuge for so many, Diane Ackerman writes that etymologically the word paradise includes the concepts of gardens, animals and a motherly bread-maker. Of course, we have all heard of the garden and the animals in paradise, but the motherly bread-maker was new to me. You too?

And then I started to reflect on bread making and thought it made sense, that bread making in many ways is an apt definition of love.

First, one must dissolve yeast in warm water. Yeast can be considered the oldest microorganism. It's likely that yeast was used before the development of a written language. Hieroglyphics suggest that that ancient Egyptians were using yeast and the process of fermentation to produce alcoholic beverages and to leaven bread over 5,000 years ago.

By fermentation, the yeast species converts carbohydrates to carbon dioxide and alcohols – for thousands of years the carbon dioxide has been used in baking and making of alcohol. Other species of yeasts are opportunistic pathogens and can cause infections in humans.

In other words, yeast is complicated. It has within it the capacity to produce the staff of life and the ingredient that makes such a potent substance that over 17 million people in our country suffer an addiction to it. Yeast can offer us life, and destroy it too. It is savior and shadow; hope and darkness.

I think love is all of those things too. The first component of love that comes to me as necessary and real is the need to accept our own shadows, how the good in us also carried within it its darkness, not by accident but by design. That both are needed. We all carry within us the other, those whom we fear, hate, lash out at, name as unworthy of love, name as someone not us, and not therefore deserving of what we imagine we are deserving of: citizenship, marriage, support, compassion, advancement, fair hearing, medical care to name a few.

It's not just that it's time to see each of us as part of us- the immigrant, the homeless, the uninsured, those who cannot afford education or fancy things as parts of who we all are; we need too to the voter one who did not vote our way, the patriarch, the elitist and the racist within us too.

It all lives here, in us. And when we push it away, when we refuse the lessons of bread, then we are further and further from paradise. Because paradise cannot be here if we are

transferring our shadows onto everyone else. Until we can see ourselves in everyone and everyone in ourselves, we will repeat destructive patterns of history again and again.

“The truth,” M. Scott Peck writes, “is that our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable, unhappy, or unfulfilled. For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers.”

There’s something happening right now at the Unitarian Universalist Association or UUA that is causing so many white people or Anglos discomfort. There was a recent hire of a position in the upper levels of leadership at the UUA, spots that have been historically filled by Anglos and most of those Anglo men. The recent hire put another Anglo man into this position but this time, the whole dam broke lose and our President, Peter Morales resigned in the storm that came afterwards. There’s lots of discussion going on about Morale’s resignation but I think the more interesting conversation is happening around the hiring situation and led by Black Lives Unitarian Universalist and other UU people of color.

Many people of color in the UU world are telling us that it is our work to look at the words *White Supremacy*. Many folks have reacted and to that term and said: Wait, that’s for the KKK and Aryan Nation. And when we’ve settled down, we’ve begun to realize that it’s time to hang out in the discomfort, reaction, fear, and anger this term causes until we can move beyond reactivity and into another understanding and moral inventory.

White supremacy has typically been used to define the KKK and Aryan Nation but people of color in our denomination are asking us to look at the ways in which white people are supreme in our world and in our religion: that our ways of seeing, making sense, making truth, rationality, setting standards, defining the terrain...are the norms by which we all live and are expected to live.

The term white supremacy gets our attention in new ways. We are listening with heightened awareness.

Somewhere in this country, a child was born on July 1, 2015 that made the number of children who are children of color in the US greater than the number of children who are Anglo. This is a statistic but one that reminds us that the world is changing and that we all need to change with it.

The time has come to turn the world around and the way we respond as a faith denomination will matter. The world is watching. It always has been. The way we as white people handle being labeled as operating within the terrain of white supremacy will matter.

May we respond with a love that understands love and bread, knowing that to grow, to rise, we have to give voice to that within us that gives birth to light and dark, life and death, self-inventory and compassion, hope and shadow. In response, may we renew or commitments

to devote our lives and our intentions to that which supports who and what we wish to become on this earth together.

There will be more to come on this and we will have a talk about after service on the 23rd as well. I will be offering you all materials to read and think through between now and then too. If this has brought up any discomfort or agitation for you, let it be grist for the mill. We will love each other through it all.

As you know, requires more than just yeast. Other ingredients are needed too: sugar, salt, oil and flour, the rest of who we are, the rest of what we do, and this must be mixed to form a soft dough and then turned onto a floured surface and kneaded until smooth and elastic, about 8-10 minutes.

It is hard work to knead dough. Have you tried it? It is so elastic and strong. My arms start to ache. I have to take breaks.

Here is part of love too. Because seeing the shadows of all of life in us can't be the end can it? When my friends of color use the word white supremacy and ask me to consider how being white is supreme in this country and world and to look at how this has offered me advantages and continues to do so: love asks more of me than just owning this shadow in me? It asks me to grow, to open my life up in ways, to reach deep enough into it all so that I can feel the ache of it for others and myself. Kneading well always carries some aching. And without kneading that is intentional and long enough, then the bread will never rise, will never grow into what it can become and the food, the nourishment that is possible from love, will fail to bring and sustain life.

Paradise has to be full of shadows for the light to be clear, shadows we are willing to see, that we have kneaded, that we have worked and pulled and pounded and turned and rolled over and refloured and walked away from and then wrestled with again until they contribute to the rising of what makes us holy, what makes us good enough to be part of paradise: the fruits of our labor, our very capacity to nourish one another- our honest love.

And the next step to building paradise, is to take the kneaded dough and place in a greased bowl, turning it round and round until the whole surface is covered in grease. And then it put in a warm place to rise until doubled.

So what does love want from us anyway? More peace, more self care, more engagement with the world, more acceptance of self and other? More wrestling with the ways we walk away from each other when we are most needed?

I think love is about all of those things and that is has to be about more than that. I think love is political too, or that the way we employ our love in the world changes it, all the time. When we chose to love one and not another, when we chose to offer some and not others our friendship, shelter, protection, compassion, hope, jobs, opportunities- we are making political statements that get played out in the way resources are distributed, schools are built, financial aid is allocated, rentals are let out or sold or built with care or disregard.

The way we love changes the earth, our water, our food, our health, our weather patterns.

The way we love matters and not just in our vows or our covenants or in our homes, though that all matters and effects so many others in so many ways.

Our love has to be greased, covered with what it is not, turned over so that grease, so that it is insulated and will not get too cold or dried out. Love needs a witness, a community, a whole cadre of those we allow to see us, that we act out in front of so that we can be seen and challenged and loved back too. Love needs others, the grease, the outside agent that seems arbitrary, that seems unnecessary but without which, the whole thing will get too cold, too dry, too empty of its promise to go on. Love needs others, the grease, the outside agent that seems arbitrary but without which the whole thing will get too cold, too dry, too empty of its promise. Love needs a community to say: I've got you as you walk this handrail. Take my hand. Rise more, grow wider, reach further.

And then bread needs a warm space, one without a draft. Compassion. When we see ourselves in others, how much more difficult it is to name them with words that are harsh and broken. When we know that we too could do such a thing, might cross that border with our children if the only thing left was gangs and war, that we too could take that drug and become lost in it if our lives led us down that path too far, that we too might cast a vote in one way or another given our needs and sensitivities and ways of being and seeing that we too, that we too...

And when we know this, really know this, before we speak we try remember or surround ourselves with people who will remind us to remember that those words that come to us full of winds that tear down will keep us all from eating the bread tonight, and we chose more carefully, and the bread rises.

As Reverend A. Powell Davies puts it, "What are we, any of us, but strangers and sojourners forlornly wandering through the nighttime until we draw together and find the meaning of our lives in one another, dissolving our fears in each other's courage, making music together and lighting torches to guide us through the dark? We belong together."

And then we bake the dough at 375° for 30-35 minutes or until golden brown.

And then we set it down and let it be and let it become outside of us and see what happens because as every bread baker knows, there's always the chance that it doesn't work, that it falls flat, that it won't be worth eating, that it won't sustain. But still, we have to let it go now. We have done our best and we trust that the next step, sending the love into the environment for which it was built: the meetings, the relationships, the schools and committees and non-profits and families and government and churches...that it will grow there, that it will thrive there, that it will be added to by the love that is already there and made into something that is ready to become, something that can feed others, something that provides nourishment and sustenance and in all of that, courage.

And lastly the recipe instructs: Remove from pans to wire racks to cool. Yield: 2 loaves (16 slices each).

And alas, we too are nourished, we too are fed, we are able to see what our hands and hearts participated in creating and we take a slice and sit down with a cup of tea and we call our friends and family and we listen and talk and we share and we begin again, and we go on and we go on and gain the strength to gather up the ingredients once more and let the yeast rise because paradise is worth it.

Because nothing else is worthy of us.

Amen.