

Theme for March – Salvation:
The Practice of Healing

The world is God's salvation. — Dejan Stojanovic

Introduction

I once saw this most Unitarian Universalist of bumper stickers: “God bless everyone—no exceptions.” It is UU because one of our tenants is universal salvation, the idea that all will be saved, no matter what. Universal salvation did not originate with Universalists, however. It goes back, at least to the third century in the works of Origen, a scholar in the early church, who held that not a single rational being will be lost to the darkness of ignorance and sin. There is evidence that it goes back even further than that.

In some traditions, they speak about salvation as though it were something bestowed upon us – that it can be given and revoked - something specific and limited. In others, salvation, once found, can never be lost. We find another question to unpack: is salvation something that is outside us, something worn—like a shirt—that we can put on and take off? Or is salvation more like something we find within ourselves, something that once found can never be lost, or if lost, needs to be rediscovered within? Salvation is remarkably personal; it is not something that can be shared, lent, or transferred in any way.

Salvation has a deep and rich etymology; one of the earliest roots is the Sanskrit word “sarva” meaning “entire” or “whole”. “Sar” became “sal” and in Latin the word took on two different meanings: “salvus”, meaning safe and “salus” meaning health. “Salvus” obviously became “salvation”, whereas “salus” became “salute” (as in “I salute you” or wish you good health), “salutary” and “salubrious,” promoting health. That “salvation” and “health” are cousins should come as no surprise, given that salvation is the practice of healing, and healing is the act of making something whole.

This month, in addition to the normal quotes and readings, we have included real moments of salvation from fellow members of this church. As you read them and work through the questions for discussion and discernment, think about your own moments of salvation.

Questions for Discussion and Discernment on your own, around the table, or with each other:

- Do you come to Church for salvation? For healing?
- Are you saved? What does that mean?
- What makes you feel whole?
- What does feeling whole feel like?
- Do you want or need Salvation?
- Who or what comes to mind when you think of great healers?
- How do you heal? How do you heal yourself? How do you heal others?
- Is there a difference between healing and curing?

Personal Moments of Salvation from the Congregation:

*I was walking home to Union Square in Somerville, MA one night when it occurred to me: I was happy in my own life and in my own skin for the first time as an adult. This was the fall of 1999, and I was 27 or 28. I had my church--First Parish in Cambridge--friends, and a job. I realized I no longer behaved like the character in Shel Silverstein's *The Missing Piece*, searching for another person to fill in an empty space in me and make me complete. I could leave the safety and comfort of my life to take risks, such as dating a new person; but my life would be there to return to no matter how it turned out.*

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I live my life in constant quest of healing, wholeness, salvation; I think this world breaks us. Learning the secret that we have everything we need to be well inside ourselves and learning that the life force within me is powerful and can be channeled has been a big step towards healing and salvation for me. Looking inward to understand why and where I hurt, and looking at how I react to things I cannot control are key steps toward healing in my life. Living a holistic lifestyle and reaching out and connecting to healers in the true holistic sense of the word has been my salvation. To help maintain homeostasis I receive regular acupuncture treatments to channel the life force within me, the Chi, which in my belief, is our innate ability to heal ourselves. These treatments ensure adequate rest, strengthen my immunity, and reduce pain, all of which are foundations of good health. Peace starts from within, Amen to that!

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Dancing has always been a salvation for me. We dance at home with our kids at night to let off steam, and we have been known to plug in the dance playlist after dinner dates with friends, turn on the strobe light app on our iphones- hey Everyone can dance with a strobe light!! :-)

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I was in a mind-set that was holding me back from pursuing a career change that would require a substantial amount of time, schooling and money. My plans were on hold because as the single mother of a toddler with few financial resources I just didn't see how I could do it. I was talking about this to the friend of a friend and she said, " You will take out loans, everybody does, and you can study at night after your son has gone to sleep." It was like a switch had been flipped in my head.

A few simple words from someone I barely knew and everything seemed possible. If that isn't salvation I don't know what is. And I followed her advice.

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I was going through a period of debilitating anger at a troubled family member. She brought out the worst in me: pettiness, vindictiveness, contempt. I could not appreciate her pain and loneliness. I was drifting away from the person I thought I was.

When I came to church there was only a persistent message of love and empathy that slowly began to change my view of, and attitude towards, my sister. Through church I came to understand that her choices have caused her a great deal of pain and that my anger hurt us both. Church helped me experience compassion for her and this change has allowed me to be able to help her in ways I never thought possible. The message of the church has been my salvation.

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Salvation: A list in progress...

Feeling the thrum of organic beauty and love translated through the velvety tips of my dog's ears...

Hearing my delicious daughter's voice over the phone.. I love you, mama....I could create a whole list dedicated to how my daughter saves me.

The memory of my beloved's comforting words... Your vulnerable edges are your strength, my love....

Dancing...I soften puny hard thoughts as I immerse my body in sentient music, allowing it to awaken my cells in community with its call... I fly away inside myself....

There's much more...will you join me in saving community with your own list? :)

Quotes and Short Readings

Human ignorance is seen in the low ideas attached to the word "salvation." People think that salvation is something which another may achieve for them. The word Hell, which all persons acquainted with Jewish geography know to be a metaphor...this word has done unspeakable injury. It has possessed the diseased human imagination with thoughts of torture, and turned their thoughts to Jesus as someone outside them who will deliver them. But the salvation which humanity needs is not from outside things, but is from the evil within the mind, which hardens itself against love, which makes gain its god, which shuts itself up in a dungeon of self-interest, which consents to be a slave, and which allows itself to be formed by custom, opinion and changing events. To save, in the highest sense of that word, is to heal the diseased mind, and restore it to freedom of thought, conscience and love.

- William Ellery Channing

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Salvation

By what are you saved? And how?
Saved like a bit of string,
tucked away in a drawer?
Saved like a child rushed from
a burning building, already
singed and coughing smoke?
Or are you salvaged
like a car part—the one good door
when the rest is wrecked?

Do you believe me when I say
you are neither salvaged nor saved,
but salved, anointed by gentle hands
where you are most tender?
Haven't you seen
the way snow curls down
like a fresh sheet, how it
covers everything, makes everything
beautiful, without exception?

by Lynn Ungar



At Blackwater Pond

Look, the trees
are turning
their own bodies
into pillars

of light,
are giving off the rich
fragrance of cinnamon
and fulfillment,

the long tapers
of cattails
are bursting and floating away over
the blue shoulders
of the ponds,
and every pond,
no matter what its
name is, is

nameless now.
Every year
everything
I have ever learned

in my lifetime
leads back to this: the fires
and the black river of loss
whose other side

is salvation,
whose meaning
none of us will ever know.

To live in this world
you must be able
to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it
against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and, when the time comes to let it go,
to let it go."

— Mary Oliver

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My potential salvation...must remain an unswerving commitment to treat generality only as it emerges from little things that arrest us and open our eyes with "aha" -- while direct, abstract, learned assaults upon generalities usually glaze them over."

— Stephen Jay Gould *The Flamingo's Smile: Reflections in Natural History*

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Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of human is through love and in love. –Victor Frankel *Man's Search for Meaning*

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"Truth is stranger than fiction," as the old saying goes. When I watch a documentary, I can't help crying and then I think to myself, "Fiction can't compete with this."

But when I mentioned this to a veteran manga artist friend of mine he said that "fiction brings salvation to characters in stories that would otherwise have no salvation at all."

His words strengthened the conviction of my manga spirit."

— Hiromu Arakawa *Full Metal Alchemist*

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What can you do how much can you give to bring grace and salvation unto even one soul?

— Bree Despain *The Dark Divine*

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The salvation of mankind lies only in making everything the concern of all.

— Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

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"You know what you are, don't you?" she asks. "You're my salvation. My way to atone. To pay for everything I've done."

— Kendare Blake *Anna Dressed in Blood*