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## **Children's Story**

*The War Between the Whales and the Sandpipers* – from the Marshall Islands, found in “Peace Tales”

## **Prayer**

*REST IN PEACE*, by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat - (based on the poem "Call Me by My True Names" by Thigh Nat Hahn), <http://archive.uua.org/news/91101/reliturgical.html#close>

## **Sermon**

This past summer, I met with a small group of about 10 people to talk about today's service. I asked them, “It's going to be the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11 at our Homecoming Water Communion Service. What do you think you will need to hear that Sunday to respond to what may be happening inside of you?” Your answers were heart felt and sometimes painful to hear.

Some of you spoke of how the tragedy of 9/11 was a test for us and you so hoped we would pass that test. Would we respond to intentional violence with more violence, or would this nation be able to learn what we were called to learn? In one remarkable comment, one of you shared that when you first heard of the attack, your gut response was to sign up for active duty and get the guys who did this to us. But you knew inside this was a very normal human response to such an extreme act of violence, and you knew this was something to be felt, acknowledged, and not acted upon. There needed to be a different way. Would that our political leaders had stepped back from their initial hunger for revenge, and acted with pragmatism and intentionality.

And then, it became unpatriotic to question them! One of the reasons we held up the Dixie Chicks today is because they dared to question. When the Towers fell, their song, “I Believe in Love” was included in a 9/11 Memorial Compilation to support the survivors of the attack and their families. But when the War in Iraq began, they criticized the President while on an international tour. The condemnation was fierce and overnight, they were banned from most American Country and Western stations. Heroes turned to villains overnight.

The challenge before us is that we so want and need to honor and remember tenderly those who lost their lives that terrible day. Many of us also want to honor that an event of such magnitude is not unique to us. Such violence against civilians is a given in so many places that we should be careful not to raise up our suffering as something unique and special lest we be tempted into the beast of American exceptionalism. It would be far better to grieve the loss of that sense of security that we took for granted, a sense of security that itself is a luxury.

The challenge in remembering this day and holding it close to our hearts, is that we also face the very difficult reality that the attack was misused for political purposes, used to make us more afraid, to heighten the divisions between us, to demonize those of a particular race or faith, to make encroachments upon individual freedom seem like an act of civic duty, and to make a military response the only loyal option. It is hard to bring

ourselves into a place of pure remembrance and tenderness when it has become so politically charged. Our grief was abused. Our sadness and vulnerability was misused. We are grieving that abuse and misuse.

As we sat together on that hot July evening, it became clear that what we wanted was an acknowledgement of these many layers of grief. We wanted an acknowledgement not only of the deep violation of this nation and its citizens, but also an acknowledgement of the ways we as a nation violated others and ourselves in how we responded to the attack. At any time, we could have made the wise and courageous decision to stop a war that, to use our children's story, is eating the land and the sea. Our war against our enemies has hurt us as much as it has hurt them. We are starving ourselves and each other.

What we wanted most of all was hope, hope that the many errors that have shaped the last ten years do not have to define us. We want hope that our missteps will not be the only legacy we leave to the generations that will follow us. We want hope that we don't have to be stuck in the divisions that are tearing this nation apart, that we can find our way out of the financial hole we dug when we put two wars on a credit card. We want hope that peace still has a chance, that there is a healing river that washes the blood from the sand and waters the parched earth below our feet.

One of the images that I often draw on when I'm faced with my own disillusionment with humanity is the Daoist image of a rock in a river. You can spend all of your energy trying to move the rock, and it will not likely budge at all, and you will become exhausted. Rocks don't like to be moved. But if you are like the river, if you release yourself to the Dao, then you can part and pass the stone by and move on. Shortly after our meeting I received an email from someone who couldn't attend, but wanted to share her thoughts, and this is what she said. "The rocks determine the water's course in the short term, but eventually the water will win. Water is fluid and has flexibility and is more powerful than rocks. Rocks tumble and fall, erode, then build up somewhere else. What is consistent is the power of the water's movement over time and one's ability to recognize that strength." (Linda Giddy)

There is so much dysfunction and denial around the legacy arising from our choices following the 9/11 attacks, and we give that dysfunction and denial more power when it is our primary focus. We're trying to move the rock in the river and it's never going to move, because dysfunction and denial is a part of life. bell hooks, American author, feminist and cultural critic, has often said that at the core of the human experience is the choice we are asked to make every day between fear and love. When we focus on the dysfunction, if that is the target of our life's energy, we are living out of fear. Sometimes our society twists fear into a virtue and makes acting on it a moral strength. We do most of our harm when fear is our motivator. Then, we become the oppressor. bell hooks asks us to have the courage to choose love. Can we dare to pass by the stone, can we dare to join the flow of the river? Can we wade into that sacred troubled water and surrender to the strength of its healing flow?

This is the core question for us and it is the core question for this religious community. We are committed to the principle that when you choose love over fear, transformation is not far behind. Our mission is simple - transforming ourselves, our community and our world. Living that mission is anything but simple. Transformation isn't magical. It's not overnight and it's certainly not a ride into the sunset. Transformation is a minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day way of living. Sometimes the transformation is gentle, and sometimes it is not. But, it is what happens when you dedicate your life to moment to moment hope. Hope isn't about what good things we want to happen in some perfect future when bad is turned into good and injustice is wiped off the face of the earth. Hope is about a way of living now. Hope is living so deeply that we affirm with every breath that we are covenanted to live in harmony with everything that is. Nothing, no war, no hatred, no distrust, can separate us from the interconnected web of life. The strands of that web can be broken, but the spider never stops weaving its web. It just can't. It is hardwired to get up and spin again. That's moment to moment hope.

Unitarian Universalist theologians John Buehrens and Rebecca Parker say that our devotion to hope is “a devotion to the flourishing of life. [People of progressive faith] care for the sacredness of this world. We cherish our bodies, this earth, this time and place that is within our grasp. We reverence the intimate, intricate and unshakeable reality that all life is connected. We honor and respect the bonds that tie each to all, that weave us into an inescapable net of mutuality.” (A House of Hope).

This is what we are called to do and be for this hurting world. This is how we move through the many things we grieve. Can we do it alone? It is the separations between us that increase the likelihood that we will choose fear and join in the oppressions of this world. That’s why we need fellow journeyers, so that when we find ourselves up to our knees in troubled waters, tempted by the rocks in the river to hate, distrust, and bury ourselves in platitudes of self-righteousness, that we will choose the moment to moment hope that assures us that the rocks will crumble and erode, and the river, unstoppable, will flow on.

Amen and blessed be.