

Families

(adapted from the Unitarian Universalist Church in Eugene, Oregon)

Opening words and Chalice lighting:

“Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.”

~ *From Robert Frost’s poem “Death of the Hired Man.”*

“Home is not where you live, but where they understand you.”

~ *Christian Morgenstern*

Welcome and check-in (A time to share what is on your mind in order to clear it and be in the present.)

Reading for discussion

“The family. We were a strange little band of characters trudging through life sharing diseases and toothpaste, coveting one another’s desserts, hiding shampoo, borrowing money, locking each other out of our rooms, inflicting pain and kissing to heal it in the same instant, loving, laughing, defending, and trying to figure out the common thread that bound us all together.”

~ *Erma Bombeck*

Marsha Norman, in her 1983 play “Night, Mother,” wrote, “Family is just accident... They don’t mean to get on your nerves. They don’t even mean to be your family, they just are.” On the one hand we have the image of “family” in which blood is “thicker than water.” On the other we have the idea that “family is just accident” and that one’s “true family” is the people with whom our lives most intimately touch, whether they are related to us by birth or not.

~ *Adapted from Rev. Glenn H. Turner*

Questions for discussion

- a. What do you appreciate about your family of origin and what do you wish had been different? Why? How do these experiences affect you now?
- b. Do you think your gender or position in the family made a difference in your personality or in the way you relate to others now?
- c. Were there defining moments in your life related to family changes during your childhood?
- d. What would you like to share about your current family?
- e. Which needs are met with your biological family and which with your “chosen extended family”?
- f. What family traditions are particularly meaningful to you? Why?

- g. What has been your experience attempting to balance relationships and responsibilities within the family and those outside the family? What has worked well and not so well?
- h. Were you born into a UU family, and if not, what do other family members think about your chosen faith?

Check-out (A time to share likes and wishes, such as “I like how we...” “I wish we would...”, or express how you felt about the group.)

Closing words and extinguishing the Chalice:

Closing poem by Henry Taylor titled “At the Swings.” (attached)

Thanks to everyone for their participation and commitment to our group!

AT THE SWINGS

By Henry Taylor

Midafternoon in Norfolk,
late July. I am taking our two sons for a walk
away from their grandparents' house; we have
directions to a miniature playground,
and I have plans to wear them down
toward a nap at five.

when my wife and I
will leave them awhile with her father. A few blocks
south of here, my wife's mother drifts from us
beneath hospital sheets, her small strength bent
to the poisons and the rays they use
against a spreading cancer.

In their house now, deep love
is studying to live with deepening impatience
as each day gives our hopes a different form
and household tasks rise like a powdery mist
of restless fatigue. Still, at five
my wife and I will dress

and take the boulevard
across the river to a church where two dear friends
will marry; rings will be blessed, promises kept
and made, and while our sons lie down to sleep,
the groom's niece, as the flower girl,
will almost steal the show.

But here the boys have made
an endless procession on the sides, shrieking down
slick steel almost too hot to touch; and now
they charge the swings. I push them from the front,
one with each hand, until at last
the rhythm, and the sunlight

that splashes through live oak
and crape myrtle, dappling dead leaves on the ground,
lull me away from this world toward a state
still and remote as an old photograph
in which I am standing somewhere
I may have been before:

there was this air, this light,
a day of thorough and forgetful happiness;
where was it, or how long ago? I try
to place it, but it has gone for good,
to leave me gazing at these swings,
thinking of something else

I may have recognized—
an irrecoverable certainty that now,
and now, this perfect afternoon, while friends
are struggling to put on their cutaways
or bridal gowns, and my wife's mother,
dearer still, is dozing

after her medicine,
or turning a small thing in her mind, like someone
worrying a ring of keys to make small sounds
against great silence, and while these two boys
swing back and forth against my hand,
time's crosshairs quarter me

no matter where I turn.
Now it is time to go. The boys are tired enough,
and my wife and I must dress and go to church.
Because I love our friends, and ceremony,
the usual words will make me weep:
hearing the human prayers

for holy permanence
will remind me that a life is much to ask
of anyone, yet not too much to give
to love. And once or twice, as I stand there,
that dappled moment at the swings
will rise between the lines,

when I beheld our sons
as, in the ways of things, they will not be again,
though even years from now their hair may lift
a little in the breeze, as if they stood
somewhere along their way from us,
poised for a steep return.