

## **Service on Embracing your imperfections**

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Beginning music - "Perfect" by Hauser

Opening Words by Richard Gilbert

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In the holy quiet of this hour -

This is the sacred time that cannot be taken from us-

These few minutes of calm in an often hectic week,

This island of humanity in the midst of a warring world.

We sit here to receive the blessings of life-

The memories that drift across our minds,

The hopes harboured in these few moments,

The dreams we dare to conjure in the magic of this time.

First hymn green book no.247 - A world of Wonder

An interfaith prayer

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May we seek to know the truth of your Word and find common ground among the many faith traditions and recognise that we share a common humanity. Help us to be people of compassion and understanding, creating a path to a peaceful co-existence among all people.

Amen

Prayer by Brené Brown

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May we find the courage to let go of who we think we're supposed to be so we can fully embrace our authentic selves - the imperfect, the creative, the vulnerable, the powerful, the broken, the beautiful.

May we show ourselves and others the compassion that comes from knowing that we are all made from the same strength and struggle.

May we create a just and equitable world where privilege isn't a prerequisite for self-expression and authenticity, where everyone feels invited and safe to express their power and vulnerability.

And last, May we experience the strength of connection, the love of belonging and the grace of full joy.

May it be so.

Amen

2nd hymn green book no. 184 The Best Things.

Story - The Cracked Pot - a wisdom story

(source by Amy Friedman and Meredith Johnson)

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Once upon a time a woman named Chang Chang worked for a merchant in Sichuan province. The merchant's home was high atop a hill, and Chang Chang worked as the merchant's laundress. Every day she had to walk down the hill to collect water from the stream.

When she was young, Chang Chang made two pots to carry her water, and these she hung upon a pole she could carry over her shoulders. She painted one pot blue and the other red, and on each pot she painted flowers. Chang Chang loved flowers and she loved her pots.

For some years she carried her pole down the hillside and collected water. Afterward she climbed the hill. She was strong and able, though she was growing older. And as time passed, the pots, too grew old.

One day, as Chang Chang prepared to place the pole over her shoulders, she noticed the blue pot had a slender crack along its side. She ran a finger over the crack and sighed , “ my poor little pot.”

For a few moments Chang Chang studied the crack. “Will you hold my water?” she whispered. But she decided she could still use the pot. As always she carried both pots down the hill and filled them with water to the very brim. By the time she reached the hilltop, the pot with a crack was half empty, but this still left her plenty of water for doing the laundry.

For the next two years, Chang Chang carried these pots down the hillside every morning. When she reached the stream, she filled them to the brim, and afterwards she walked back up the hill, balancing the pole across her shoulders. By the time she reached the house, the cracked blue pot was only half full - just enough for the laundry.

Each day Chang Chang examined the crack, and though it was growing a little longer, she decided all was well. What she didn't notice was that the poor blue pot was miserable. Each time it drank from the stream, it secretly hoped that this day all the water would stay inside its belly, but each day when they reached the top of the hill, the pot knew it had failed. The blue pot glanced at the red pot and saw water filled to the top, and the blue top began to feel desolate.

In it's resting place on the far side of Chang Chang's little hut, the blue pot worried and wept. “ I'm no good, I'm no good, I'm no good!” the pot wailed.

“Stop your whining,” the red pot answered. “ No one wants to hear from a pot.”

One day the blue pot awoke and felt it's crack beginning to expand. It was certain Chang Chang would soon decide to throw it away. Soon it would be no use to anyone for anything.

That morning , as Chang Chang climbed the hill, she was startled to hear a voice she had never heard. “ Chang Chang,” the voice said, “ throw me away, I'm no good for anyone or anything.”

Chang Chang stopped and looked around, wondering who could be speaking to her. "Hello" she called down the hill.

But the voice that answered was very near. "I'm right here," said the blue pot, swinging this way and that way to get Chang Chang's attention. "I'm your pot. The pot you made with your own two hands. The pot that has served you so well all these years. But I see now my time is finished. The crack in my side has made me useless. When you carry me up the hill, I spill all my water. I'm no good!"

For a long moment Chang Chang stood very still, amazed that her pot had spoken. "Is that you?" She whispered, looking close. "Are you speaking dear pot?"

"It is I!" said the pot. "I am so sorry I have failed you, but I have."

Chang Chang was overjoyed to know her pots were as full of life as she had always imagined, but she was sad to hear such sorrowful words. "But pot, you don't understand," she said, "you haven't been paying attention. Look around."

Chang Chang pointed to the path beside them, the path up the hill, and for the first time the pot stopped looking inward and instead looked out. On the right side of the hill the pot noticed beautiful flowers growing in abundance - poppies and peonies and chrysanthemum and narcissus and citron. A ribbon of colour edged the path.

"And look at the other side of the hill," Chang Chang said.

The pot glanced to the other side and saw it was bare.

"I've always known about your flaw," Chang Chang said. "And so I planted seeds on your side of the path, and every day you water them and add more beauty to the world."

The blue pot was overjoyed. All its sadness was gone. It understood, just as Chang Chang always had, that every being has its unique flaws. And it's our little quirks and faults that make us and the world so interesting.

Reading by Omar Itami

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No palm tree is perfectly shaped, yet we marvel at the beauty with which it stands. No sea shell is perfectly drawn, yet we marvel at the beauty with which it curves. Accept and appreciate yourself as you are today, in your natural state, just like you would a tree in a forest, a flower in the garden or a seashell by the shore. You are the entirety of you. You are whole. You are beautiful.

Meditation by Thich Nhat Khan (repeat)

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I breathe in and dwell peacefully in the present moment  
I breathe out and know this is a wonderful moment  
Breathing in, I feel happy to be alive  
Breathing out, I smile to life.

Followed by 2 min violin music

Address on Embracing your imperfection

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Today is Stir up Sunday. Stir up Sunday started in Victorian times when families would come together to stir their homemade Xmas puddings. This happens today as it is 5 weeks before Xmas, the last Sunday before advent. It used to have 13 different ingredients to symbolise Jesus and his disciples. I think we're a bit like Xmas puddings, a mix of this and that, with all our flaws and imperfections.

We are all imperfect in an imperfect world but isn't that what is actually so wonderful . Each of us is beautifully imperfect and unique.

Brené Brown, in her book " The Gifts of Imperfection" says that in the process of embracing our imperfections that we find our truest gifts: courage, compassion and connection.

I realised what she was meaning during three occasions. As is usual for me, one was on a plane , two were on separate occasions at a bus station.

One of my flaws or imperfections is sometimes wanting to be left in peace. Not often, but occasionally.

The first instance , I was on a plane to Spain to meet up with family. I had a window seat. Literally just before take off, two rowdy women in their track suits got on the plane and sat in the two seats next to me. Oh no, I thought. I'll keep my head down burying it in my book so I wouldn't have to talk. But things changed. They insisted on talking to me and sharing their sweets. They insisted on buying me a coffee. I suddenly realised that to them , I may have looked like their grandmother. Funny really, considering how independent I try to be. So they were being kind and caring and looking after an elderly lady. On getting off the plane, I said I was going to the toilet and I'd be alright but they insisted on waiting and seeing me through passport control. I'd made assumptions about these kind young women . They told me they came from a very poor part of Wales and they had worked and saved for 2 years to have a long weekend away. Their mothers were looking after their children. They broke through and I felt that connection and empathy that Brené Brown talks about.

The two other times were at a bus station. The first time I was sitting waiting for a bus . It was pouring, I was very wet and miserable. A lady came and sat next to me . Oh no, I thought, please don't talk to me, I just want to wallow in my wetness and the bus not turning up. But she started to talk and I've been brought up not to be rude. It was a simple story that she told me - she had previously got on a bus, started talking to the driver . She asked him if he had a nice wife. He jokingly said " sometimes she is, sometimes she's not". She said she had spoken to no one else that day and just him taking time to joke with her cheered her up.

The next day she bought some chocolates and hoped she would see the same driver. Happily she did and told the driver she had bought chocolates for his wife. The driver said " you can give them to her yourself, she's sitting over there." As I said - a simple story but it meant a lot to this lady and she wanted the joy of retelling it. Once again someone broke through my flaw of miserableness and compassion and connection showed through.

The second occasion at the bus station was horrendous.

Again I was sitting waiting for a bus that didn't turn up as were many other people. We were wet and moaning ( I still had those flaws but I am learning), we were moaning about all the loud school kids. We knew they would get on our bus when it did turn up and the bus would not be peaceful.

Suddenly it was like slow motion. As two women were getting on a bus with their dog, the dog missed the step and slipped under the bus. We were all in shock and there was a deathly quiet. But a wonderful thing happened , the schoolchildren looked at each other and decided the thinnest boy among them would crawl under the bus and try to get the dog out. Without a thought to himself, he did this and managed to get the terrified elderly dog out. We all clapped and the two ladies burst into tears of joy. Probably I hadn't been the only one thinking how annoying these boys were. Through this awful happening young and old became connected and the courage of that boy was incredible.

Through the above three occasions, I felt so strongly that the presence of God was there in the little things.

Some of you have heard about Japanese Wabi Sabi. We often think of it as a method of sticking a broken pot back together but making sure the cracks still show. Sometimes even painting over the cracks with gold so they show up more, but that isn't really what it's about. Wabi Sabi is a Japanese philosophy, it denotes a more connected way of living - to ourselves and to others, it's about imperfection, simplicity and impermanence. It is also about seeing the beauty in all things, hence the example above about the pot.

Aren't we all like the pot. We are often broken and put back together through our life experiences and often we are frightened to show our vulnerability, but when we do, we find others have vulnerabilities and we can help each other.

We try very hard to do things perfectly, to act perfectly, to even think perfect thought but Ernest Kurt and Katherine Ketcham describe the spirituality of imperfection as a spirituality of not having all the answers. I think our Unitarian faith lets us ask questions and doesn't have all the answers. Some would say that Unitarism is imperfect and how wonderful is that. A religion that lets us question just as Jesus

wanted us to. We are as the late philosopher Krishnamurti said “ our souls come from the same paper, but what makes us unique are the folds that form inside the paper.”

I'd like to end with a quote by writer Ashleigh Bright

“ I might not be perfect, but some parts of me are excellent.

Final hymn green book no. 33 “ Do you hear”

Benediction

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May the warm rays of sun fall upon your home

And May the hand of a friend always be near.

May green be the grass you walk on,

May blue be the skies above you.

May pure be the joys that surround you,

May true be the hearts that love you.

May it be so.

Closing music - Saving Jane “Imperfection”