



Branches Themes 2011-2012

FAITH

Opening Reading/ Chalice Lighting

Faith has no other language than symbols... Faith is the courage to say yes to one's life. -Paul Tillich

Getting to know One Another: Please take time at this point to introduce yourselves and to go around the room and say how long you have been attending and how you found All Souls. Suggest that everyone try to remember to wear a nametag so that you can learn everyone's names

Business

Create a Covenant (Please go over the culture of a Branches group highlighting: space in between speakers, popcorn style/Quaker style sharing, taking care of your own needs, speaking from I, no crosstalk, etc.) Explain *empty chair*.

Culture of Group Are there things that need to be addressed? Starting and ending time, social opportunities before / after meeting or on another date? Service project inside / outside church, etc.

Tikkun Service projects are limited to the availability and interest and of the entire group. Please bring ideas for a service project next week.

Social Meeting Date? Time? Location? In order to assure the most availability, groups meet two weeks after their Church meeting at the same time at a chosen location.

Check-In How goes thy spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? 2-3 sentences

Claim time for Deeper Listening Deeper listening is a time at the end of our meeting where you can be listened to uninterrupted for what is essentially an extended check in if something is going on in your life that you would like to share. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes at this time. ***Is there anyone who would like to claim time for deeper listening?*** Ask for head nods to be sure.

Centering Take a moment to breathe, feel your feet on the floor and your body in the chair. After a few minutes, find your heartbeat (either by listening to your ear or placing your fingers on your pulse). See if you can hold the attention of your heartbeat and listen to the sounds in the room. (Leave space for 8-10 breaths) The goal is to bring this sense of calm and way of listening to the readings, and to one another, keeping our attention toggling between self and what you are listening to.

Readings (***Read through readings and questions twice, one time per facilitator, with reflection space in between*** followed by Quaker Style sharing. Try to stay in I statements and personal stories and not shift into third person and facts. Try to leave space between speakers.)

Meditation teacher Sharon Salzberg melds incidents from her life and Buddhist teachings to re-imagine this important human faculty. Here she makes distinctions between beliefs and faith.

**An excerpt from
Faith: Trusting Your Own Deepest Experience
by Sharon Salzberg**

"When we hold a belief too tightly, it is often because we are afraid. We become rigid, and chastise others for believing the wrong things without really listening to what they are saying. We become defensive and resist opening our minds to new ideas or perspectives. This doesn't mean that all beliefs are accurate reflections of the truth, but it does mean that we have to look at what's motivating our defensiveness. . .

"With their assumptions of correctness, beliefs try to make a known out of the unknown. They make presumptions about what is yet to come, how it will be, what it will mean, and how it will affect us. Faith, on the other hand, doesn't carve out reality according to our preconceptions and desires. It doesn't decide how we are going to perceive something but rather is the ability to move forward even without knowing. Faith, in contrast to belief, is not a definition of reality, not a received answer, but an active, open state that makes us willing to explore. While beliefs come to us from outside – from another person or tradition or heritage – faith comes from within, from our active participation in the process of discovery. Writer Alan Watts summed up the difference simply and pointedly as, 'Belief clings, faith lets go.'"

James Luther Adams

was a Unitarian parish minister, social activist, journal editor, prolific author,
and for more than 40 years a divinity school professor.

As creatures fated to be free, as creatures who must make responsible decisions, what may we place our confidence in? What can we have faith in? What should we serve?

Our ultimate faith is not in ourselves. We find ourselves historical beings, beings living in nature and history, beings having freedom in nature and in history....

A faith that is not the sister of justice is bound to bring people to grief. It thwarts creation, a divinely given possibility; it robs them of their birthright of freedom in an open universe; it robs the community of the spiritual richness latent in its members...

...The achievement of freedom in community requires the power of organization and the organization of power. The free person will be unfree, will be a victim of tyranny from within or from without, if his or her faith does not assume form, in both word and deed.

The commanding, transforming power is a shaping power; it shapes one's beliefs about that reality and when it works through persons it shapes the community of love and justice. The free church is that community which is committed to determining what is rightly of ultimate concern to persons of free faith.

...It is the community in which the life-spirit of faith tries to create and mold life-giving, life-transforming beliefs, the community in which persons open themselves to God and each other and to commanding, sustaining, transforming experiences from the past, appropriating, criticizing, and transforming tradition and giving that tradition as well as newborn faith the occasion to become relevant to the needs of a time.

Questions

1. What does faith mean to you? How has the meaning changed for you over time?
2. How does your faith show up in your life? In your thoughts? In your actions?
3. Think of a time when you lost your faith? What did that look like? Share your story. If you regained your faith how?
4. What is the difference between faith and optimism? Faith and hope? Faith and belief? Faith and trust?
5. Why is faith often described as blind? Can you have faith and reason? If so, how do you navigate their co-existence?
6. How do you know when someone has a strong faith? When they are faithful?

Deeper Listening

If time is claimed by an individual, group listens to speaker uninterrupted for that designated time. It is best to have a timer of sorts so that facilitator can listen fully as well.

Check Out

One sentence about where you are, now that we have been together for the past hour and a half. (How did you show up? Would you share more or less? Would you do anything differently? Focus your likes and dislikes on your own behavior) Please state your name again for the group so that we might have yet another opportunity to put faces to names.

Closing Reading/Chalice Extinguishing

Faith is not merely a way of knowing; it is a way of participating. ~Robert Ellwood

Faith Evaluation

Sit down with your co-facilitator immediately following the session and reflect on the following questions. Please take a few notes so that you can discuss this session at the next facilitator connection circle.

1. How was the covenanting process? Troubles? Concerns?
2. Did you feel as though the components were well explained and that the model was followed?
3. Were there distractions in the group that may have prevented whole listening?
4. How do you feel the group connected? Who are your potential facilitators if your group births another group?
5. Did the group connect with the topic?
6. Anything else that you feel you need to bring up to the Facilitator Circle?
7. What was your experience in the circle this time? How were you ministering? Being ministered to?
8. Total attendance _____
9. Missing and need to be called?