

**Painting God By Numbers
Order of Service
April 19, 2015**

Gathering music: Wayne Smith

Announcements: Board Member

{**Bell:** Jim }

Prelude:

Call to Worship – Jim Fisher

**Come, come, whoever you are.
Wanderer, idolator, worshipper of fire, come even though
you have broken your vows a thousand times,
Come, and come yet again. Ours is not a caravan of despair.**

~ Jalal ad-Dīn Muhammad Rumi

Chalice lighting - Jim Fisher

Congregation: *We light this chalice*

*We light this chalice,
for the light of truth,*

*We light this chalice,
for the warmth of love,*

*We light this chalice,
for the fire of commitment.*

*We light this chalice,
As a symbol of our faith, as we gather together.*

Opening hymn: #188 Come, Come Whoever You Are

Welcoming visitors:

Each week we welcome visitors and those who have been on a long sojourn. Please raise your hand (if you feel comfortable) and our ushers will bring you a microphone so that you can let us know who you are and whence you come.

Children's Story / Time for All Ages
ROY G BIV

Readings

Rumi or Hafiz "One Song"

<http://rumidays.blogspot.com/2010/07/one-song.html>

Every war and every conflict
between human beings has happened
because of some disagreement about names.

It is such an unnecessary foolishness,
because just beyond the arguing
there is a long table of companionship
set and waiting for us to sit down.

What is praised is one, so the praise is one too,
many jugs being poured into a huge basin.
All religions, all this singing, one song.

The differences are just illusion and vanity.
Sunlight looks a little different
on this wall than it does on that wall
and a lot different on this other one,
but it is still one light.

We have borrowed these clothes,
these time-and-space personalities,
from a light, and when we praise,
we are pouring them back in.

John Prine's song "Pretty Good."

I heard Allah and Buddha were singing at the Savior's feast
And up the sky an Arabian rabbi
Fed Quaker oats to a priest.
Pretty good, not bad, they can't complain
Cause actually all them gods is just about the same

Hymn:

23 Bring Many Names

Spoken meditation

Inner Light by Margaret Fisher

There is an inner light that guides our lives
That gives us purpose, hope, and strength
To do that which we must to find —
Fulfillment as we move through life.

Its voice is music, art, and prayer,
Is dancing, song, and poetry.
It seeks out justice in our courts of law
And healing by the doctor's hands.

Wherever kindness, love, and sympathy
And comforting are found, a silent glow
Of inner light is felt. Its gentle pulse
Extends into the universe.

Silent Meditation and Musical Response

Offering

IN TROUBLED TIMES

In Troubled Times

Responsive Reading

By [Stephen M Shick](#)

From the loneliness of troubled times, we come
To discover that we are not alone.
Into the dwelling place of togetherness, we come
To collect remnants of hope.
From fear that all is lost, we come
To discover what will save us.
Into the comfort of each other's arms, we come
To feel the strength that has not yet vanished.
From darkness, we come
To wait until our eyes begin to see.
Into the refuge of fading dreams, we come
To remove illusions and focus new visions.
From despair that walks alone, we come

To travel together.

Into the dwelling place of generations, we come

*To pledge allegiance to being peace
and doing justice.*

The Ushers will now accept our offering. For those who are visiting us for the first time, please let the plate pass you by. Your presence is your gift this day.

After: For the gifts which we have received—and the gifts which we, ourselves, are—may we be truly grateful.

Amen.

Joys and Sorrows

Each week we invite members and visitors to briefly share a personal joy or sorrow such as a birth, death, move or significant family event. If you raise your hand the ushers will bring you a microphone.

Tess Baumberger

Spirit of life and spirit of grace,
Rest with us this day, in this place.
We lift up every joy, every gladness,
We hold up every hurt, every sadness
Spoken in this good company
As well as every secret feeling
Held quiet in the hollows of our hearts.

Congregational Response:

Thus do we weave our lives together.
We mourn. We rejoice. We will remember.

Musical interlude:

Sermon: Painting God by Numbers

Abstract: The debate between spirituality and religion, the former often making light of the latter, misses the prescriptive nature of both. Should we social creatures hope to escape our paint-by-number world to achieve a deeper sense of unity with spirit, or should we team up to create this world in our likeness?

Text

You can't believe what happened in school today. Our teacher walked in and announced, "I have an assignment for you, and I think you're going to have fun with this one. I want you to paint God." She sat down opened her book and started reading. She didn't read to us, she just sat there reading. I looked around for a clue about what to do, but everyone was just as confused as me. No one ever talked about God in school, we were pretty sure that the teachers weren't supposed to even use the word. Anyway, what God or whose God, if there is a God, and what would God look like, I mean what is God?

The Hindus in our class went right to work. They have so many Gods, young blue-tinted Krishna or opulent red, elephant headed Ganesh, or the dark-skinned Durga. They each seemed to pick a different God and set to work. A few pagans in our class landed on earth-centered themes, painting trees and bushes and wild animals. Some of the Buddhist students painted pictures of Buddha, while others seemed content to simply meditate about painting God. Some of the Christians painted Jesus, though each Jesus looked quite different. Other Christians, some of the Muslims and Jewish students decided to paint religious symbols. These didn't seem quite like painting God, but they represented faith or religion, and that worked for them. Oddly enough, the humanists and many of the more orthodox Christians and Muslims just sat staring at our blank sheets of paper. We either couldn't or wouldn't paint God.

Not wanting to fail an assignment, and standing up for the secular humanists in the class, I approached the teacher and asked what I should do if I have no image of God and actually wondered if there was a God. She suggested I Google God and see what I could learn in a few minutes so that I could still paint something before class ended.



So I Googled God. I got 1,600,000,000 hits. The first hit was ... Wikipedia. There were several pictures of God on Wikipedia. They were famous paintings, such as Michelangelo's painting of God at the Sistene Chapel. All of them were older, white men sitting on clouds. That seemed improbable.



I checked on Allah – 144,000,000 hits, no images of God but there were many calligraphy letterings of the word Allah in Arabic.

Buddha – 117,000,000 hits – lots of images of Buddha himself, though I am pretty sure he didn't want to be the image of God. If you must be the messenger, then may your message be a good one.



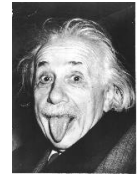
YHWH – 6,990,000 hits – Like Allah most of the imagery is the word written in Hebrew.

Odin – 44,200,000 – imagery dominated by comic book depictions of the Norse God with helmet and spear



Humanist God – 7,230 hits – posters claiming “Good without God”, pictures of famous people like Albert Einstein, and a smattering of attacks on atheism.

That simplifies matters, thanks Google. The orthodox Jews and Muslims were now happily working on their calligraphy. Some of the Christians were still struggling, though some were content to draw puffy white clouds without the old white guy, who they figured was some carry-over from Greek or Norse mythology anyway.



I returned to my teacher, protesting, there seemed to be no good options for us secular humanists. Her advice was to look to our past, to what mattered to us then and now.

From a young age I loved science, and perhaps even more than science I loved technology. Always ready to take apart appliances, repurpose old record players, soldering together resistors, tubes and capacitors to make tuners and amplifiers. My parents fed me subscriptions to monthly kits, like “Things of Science”, subscriptions to Science News and Popular Science and sent me off to Science Camp at the Smithsonian Museum.

I was less delighted that they required our Sunday morning trips to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington Virginia, a church they helped to create and grow. By some stroke of luck I had two very good years with the same Sunday School teachers, the Harmons, a married couple, who were scientists and challenged us to interpret stories from the bible through a critical, scientific perspective.

We considered the following: And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh *is* one: God hath shewed Pharaoh what he *is* about to do. [26](#)The seven good kine (cattle) *are* seven years; and the seven good ears *are* seven years: the dream *is* one. [27](#)And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them *are* seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine.

We considered various possibilities and concluded that the slow movement of groundwater emanating from rainfall in the mountains might account for long cycles of drought. It seemed plausible, and far more satisfying than the notion that famine was the consequence of divine intent. What was more important, though, was that Joseph turned the problem around, having interpreted Pharaoh’s dream he set about adapting to climate change, laying in stores to prepare for the seven years of drought. It seems less like a miracle and more like an honest assessment of coming challenges good planning. We were mildly aware that we were challenging religious orthodoxy, testing hypotheses rather than accepting biblical stories at face value.

The Harmons picked my little cohort of UU kids and stuck with us. I last visited the longer-lived teacher well into his 90s, and shortly before he passed away. His final

writings included a self-published book titled “Coyote Talks about Humanism” Lindsey Harmon’s Coyote appears to be an extension of the writings of Webster Kitchell. Lindsey Harmon’s poses a series of dialogs between a well-meaning humanist and a very sarcastic Coyote. Why are humans special? Why not Coyotism after all? Coyote sings,

We gather together to sing about reason.
 Our joy and our passion in science and fact.
 We celebrate thinking we find in our living;
 We sing with emotion of the brains that we bear.

I could go on all morning sharing the lessons and love this couple brought to our classes. I’ll share just one more class that is one of a number of small bridges to today’s topic. Being good UU’s we did Easter Eggs in Sunday school, but in the Harmon’s class we did so by melting crayons over a Bunsen burner and dipping the eggs at just the right temperature. The thick, waxy crayola dip made some of the best Easter Eggs I ever made. All the colors melted onto eggs to be delivered by rabbits in a bed of shredded green plastic. It was subversive and tremendous fun. Maybe my God picture should be a pastiche of Christian appropriation of pagan symbols and practices, filled with eggs, pumpkins and pine trees. Is this rational or merely a rationalization?

We gather together to join in the journey,
 To reason’s fair flowering, numbers and counting.
 Hypotheses proving, rationality worshipping
 Free thought overflowing, left brain is our God.

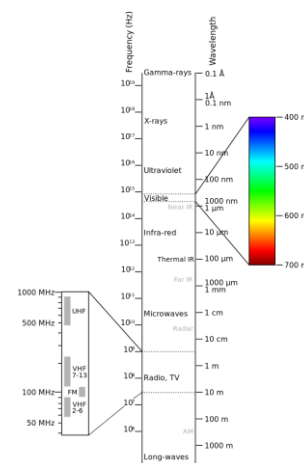
Back to the teacher one last time, I pleaded for a way out of this assignment. Her final advice was to work with the fundamentals.

[Optional]

Our world is awash in electro-magnetic waves, or particles, or both. Long waves are very long, a kilometer, or 1,000 meters or more and we cannot see them. Gamma-rays are very short, less than a nanometer, that is there are more than a billion nanometers in one meter, fast moving and we cannot see them. In fact the spectrum only becomes visible to humans in a narrow range, passing from ultra-violet to the deep violet we may see at sunrise with waves just 400 nm in length to a burning red at 700 nanometers, just shorter than infra-red.

Going from long to short, we find our friend ROYGBIV. All around the visible spectrum are other wavelengths including X Rays, Microwaves and Radio Waves. Some passing through us, some bouncing off of us, all of the part of creation or the interdependent web, if you like, but none of them visible to our eyes.

When we set out to paint God, or really paint anything, we do so with a palette of paints, rich as they are, that represents a tiny range in bandwidth between 400 and 700 nanometers on a known scale that is many billions of nanometers. Most of us cannot visualize the invisible spectra. I



think I'd be terrified to see all the radio waves, cell phone waves, wifi waves, all emanating around and through me.

[Optional]

Much like the narrow bandwidth of visible light, it should not be surprising that we are drawn to imagery that we understand from experience. These symbols, the abstract shapes, colors and textures, have been taught to us by our parents, teachers and a myriad of agents there to help use be a part of our society. The imagery of Gods in animist or pagan beliefs are drawn from that environment. Krishna wears south Asian vestments. If you accept the divinity of Jesus, you have license to convert him from his likely middle-eastern racial profile to a light skinned, long nosed, brown haired Arian.

Let us consider what color is your religion? You probably never thought to ask.

To my surprise I found a helpful guide to the colors of religion on the website of Sherwinn Williams, that's right I mean the company that sells house paint. To be precise, they host an article by Kim Palmer titled Hue Believers.

It turns out Rev. Patricia Kim Palmer has preached around a bit, mostly with Unitarian-Universalist Churches. She holds a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering and a Masters in Divinity from Emory University. Chemical engineering and divinity seems like a great combination for a world faced with a carbon imbalance, ocean acidification and climate change. If one strategy doesn't work, well perhaps the other will, but I digress.

Reverend Palmer illustrates her religions as follows, and here I will be excerpting or plagiarizing as the case may be,

Hinduism: Vital red and sacred saffron – Yeah, I got one right!

“Red, a sign of both sensuality and purity. Brides wear red saris and put red powder on their hair parting, and at death, a woman's body is wrapped in red cloth for cremation. During prayer, red powder is tossed upon sacred statues, and deities who are brave are often shown wearing red.”

“Saffron, the burnt-orange hue of the precious spice, is also a sacred color in Hinduism. It represents fire and the burning away of impurities, and is the color worn by holy men.”

Islam: A green tradition

She writes “The hue has a special place in Islam, and is often used to represent Islam to other world religions. Some say green was Muhammad's favorite color and that he wore a green cloak and turban. Others believe the color symbolizes vegetation and life. In the Qur'an, it is written that the inhabitants of paradise will wear green garments of fine silk.”

Judaism: True blue

She writes “Blue represents the sky and spirituality. The Israelites used an indigo-colored dye called tekhelet for coloring clothing, sheets and curtains. In the Torah, the Israelites are commanded to dye one of the threads of their prayer shawl with tekhelet so that when they see it, they will think of the blue sky and God above them in Heaven.”

Buddhism: The rainbow of Nirvana

She writes “Color...symbolizes a state of mind. Buddhists believe that meditating on the individual colors and their essences is a way to achieve spiritual transformation.”

For example

“Blue symbolizes coolness and infinity. Oxymoronically, the emotion associated with blue is anger, but meditating on the color is believed to transform anger into wisdom.”

So Buddhist, and so difficult for us to grasp.

“The highest state of all is to attain “**rainbow body**,” when mere matter is transformed into pure light. Just as the visible light spectrum contains all color, the rainbow body signifies the awakening of the inner self to all possible earthly knowledge before stepping over the threshold to the state of Nirvana.”

I’ll leave the rest of the article, particularly the section on Christianity for those that would like to read the article.

I think many Unitarian – Universalists fall in two camps. Some of us, and I count myself a reluctant member of this group, may be inclined to paint our God in black and white. Our God is an intellectual matter, one that might best be kept at a safe distance on the cool leaves of philosophical analysis. We have been lampooned by the best of them, facing the tough decision between going to God and going to a panel discussion about God. Coyote suggested that our God is the left brain.

Another camp, I think, applies the full rainbow treatment. We want a God of diversity, not a homogenous melting pot of scriptural conformity, but a come one-come all, bring it on, all embracing, love is the answer, peace marching, smiling, flower power, bright green, all natural, no such thing as sinning, Hare Krishna, Buddha Deva, earth Goddess kind of God. Hallelujah.

I’m not sure which of us presents a greater challenge to religious orthodoxy, but I’m guessing the rainbows in our midst are having more fun as we exhibit our total lack of commitment to dogma.

As I circle back to my origins, playing in the basement with my wires, batteries, tubes and motors, I also loved and memorized the words of Ludwig von Drake in the Spectrum Song.

Red, yellow, green, red, blue, blue, blue
Red, purple, green, yellow, orange, red, red
Blend them up and what do ya get?
Cerise, chartreuse and aqua
Mauve, beige and ultra-marine
And every color in between
Hazo ka li ka no cha lum bum
Color has it's harmony and just like I have said
Red, yellow, green, red, blue, blue, blue
Red, purple, green, blue, purple, red, red

May it be so.

Hymn: 305 De Colores

Benediction

Remnants of winter snow abating
Songs of birds now mating
Colors we are awaiting
Push aside the autumn leaves
And bring joy to our world.

Go in Peace, Go in Love

Postlude: Wayne Smith