

**SUNDAY SERVICE**  
**Mt Vernon Unitarian Church**  
**February 25, 2007**

**Reading**

From *Care of the Soul* by Thomas Moore (excerpts from the introduction and Chapter one)

*...Fulfilling work, rewarding relationships, personal power, and relief from symptoms are all gifts of the soul. They are particularly elusive in our time because we don't believe in the soul and therefore give it no place in our hierarchy of values. We have come to know soul only in its complaints: when it stirs, disturbed by neglect and abuse, and causes us to feel its pain. It is commonplace for writers to point out that we live in a time of deep division, in which mind is separated from body and spirituality is at odds with materialism. But how do we get out of this split? We can't just "think" ourselves through it, because thinking itself is part of the problem. What we need is a way out of dualist attitudes. We need a third possibility, and that third is soul...*

*"Soul" is not a thing, but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart, and personal substance... we know what we mean, but it is difficult to specify exactly what that meaning is...*

**Sermon**  
**Spiritual Conscience in Community**  
**Reverend Carol Ann Taylor**  
**February 25, 2007**

**PART I**

Two weeks ago, my colleague and co-worker, Richard Speck, quoted Rev. Kaaren Anderson in his sermon when he said, "I like to think of church as a gathering place to bring our shredded and worn quilt pieces together to share." It is in this symbolic action of piecing our lives and stories together into one, in all our diversity, that will make this congregation whole once again.

In my sermon this morning I will ask that you "hear" the words "spiritual conscience" as the thread that can bind you together and ultimately make of you a stronger faith community than has been known here before now.

We live in a culture that is fast paced, efficient, practical, technically astute and rich with material things. The shelves of our grocery stores, the racks of our clothing outlets, the menus of our eateries all overflow with multiple choices. Television, at the touch of a button, brings the world into our homes 24 hours a day. Thanks to medical technology, body parts are replaced and people are enjoying more active and longer lives.

Yet are we enjoying our lives? We yearn excessively for power, intimacy, sexual fulfillment, acceptance, and more – and more – and more – and more.

Our children want to be entertained constantly, as do we, their adult counterparts.

We drop into bed exhausted. We begin again the next day, on too little sleep or sleep induced by pills and repeat the same frenetic pattern.

We hear complaints of emptiness, of meaninglessness, of disillusionment about loss of values, about broken relationships of all descriptions.

We suffer addictions and obsessions. We feel a vague depression, an underlying anxiety We live with a growing fear of violence, of abuse, of our neighbors, of the world.

We think we can find meaning, power, intimacy, and satisfying relationships by finding the “right job” the “right wife or husband” the “right therapist” the “right car” the “right house”.

All too often our approach to dealing with our issues is to eradicate them one by one by - Making more money Going to more therapy sessions Taking more pills Seeing a lawyer Having another baby Buying a bigger – better house.

I would like to share with you the possibility that these various life issues stem from a singular route source.

I would propose to you that it is precisely because of our fast pace, our concreteness, our technological prowess, our consumerism, our perfectionism that we either can't or don't want to recognize that we have a root problem that these are not separate issues.

Thomas Moore, in his book *Care of the Soul*, suggests that our singular route problem is “loss of soul”. It is a powerful statement to make about what is lacking in our society and also what the potential might be.

If you believe as I do that a strong, well cared for soul is at the heart of any healthy individual, institution or nation, then we could potentially crumble from the inside out.

Is Thomas Moore right? Have we lost our wisdom about the care of the soul?

A quick search of any telephone directory tells us that of the hundreds of specialists advertised, next to none are listed as “Spiritual Guide” or “Spiritual Director”, or Healer of the Soul”.

Our secular language contributes to our poverty of soul-ness. The soul is neither an instrument of the brain or the body – which could explain a lot. We don't have a common language to talk about “soul”.

## **PART II**

It seems essential to be talking with you about this business of nurturing the soul now because of the transition you are in and will be facing into the near future. There have been feelings of pain,



So how are the ways that you can integrate time, trust, patience and imagination into your day to day lives here at Mt Vernon into the foreseeable future? What would that look like from your perspective? What would you have to change about yourself or your habits and patterns in this community for time, trust, patience, and imagination to be present and practiced by all of you here in your house of worship?

I will suggest a few ways that come to mind for me. Then you will have time to explore within your selves some possibilities.

Here's my list

Arrive early for meetings and spend 5-10 minutes sitting in the quiet of this holy space.

If you are the chair of a committee, take the time the evening before the meeting to call those on the committee to see how they are and what they need at the meeting the following evening.

Trust your staff they, too, may be hurting and may not be functioning "up to speed" or they may be over functioning and may need a "mental health day" periodically. They will be okay. They just need you to trust them so they can feel safe taking care of themselves while they are caring for you.

Be gentle with one another when mistakes are made. None of us are perfect.

Speak softly and with concern when you don't understand what is going on. You might find yourself getting some wonderful responses to your concerns. Learn the difference between "reacting" and "responding".

Remember this isn't just about your person. It is about the health of the soul of this community manifested through its spiritual consciousness - and that it takes every ones best selves to keep the soul of this community in a healthy state.

Be patient with the healing process. It usually takes longer than you think it "should".

Allow your selves to live through your grief – everyone. It will take some longer than others patience is required.

Practice sitting still for 5 or 10 minutes each day and discover what is going on inside yourself. Listen as best you can to that interior self it has its own wisdom. When you are participating in an activity, a committee, an event, know that you carry some responsibility for the experience being a positive and uplifting experience for everyone.

Keep a pulse beat [be mindful] of your own level of wellbeing and back off if you need reflection time.

Those are 12 things that come to mind for me. Now it is your turn.

### **PART III**

First I invite you to sit in silence with each other and breathe into the energy present in this, your holy space. If it is easier for you to close your eyes to shut out your surroundings, then I invite you to close your eyes. A relaxed posture will help you reach into your selves. Keeping a space between yourself and those on either side of you, allows you to focus inward without distraction. I will time the silence for two minutes that is a long stretch. Practice patience and trust yourself to be able to sit that long allow your imagination an open door – for two minutes.

I will ring the chime three times when the two minutes are up.

### **TWO MINUTES OF SILENCE**

Ring the chime three times.

You were handed a 3x5 card with the Order of Service when you came in this morning. Use that card now to write down what your imaginations created as ways of practicing spiritual conscience or care of the soul of this holy space that is your religious home.

I will ring the chime at the end of a minute.

Another minute for the writing

Strike the chime three times

I invite you now to turn to your neighbor and share what you will from your card.

The ringing of the chime three times will signal closure.

Another minute -- ring the chime 3 times.

**PART IV** I suspect that if you practice even half of what you have shared with each other, you will be nurturing the spiritual conscience that is the soul of your religious home.

As a Unitarian Universalist congregation, you are a remarkable, unique congregation among many. You, as individuals, come to this congregation bringing all your human foibles and at the same time all that is divine about you.

Like the “quilter” or the “alchemists” of the middle ages -- you are engaged in the never-ending work of caring for the soul of this religious community. The work is circular in nature and requires a continual going over and over of the material of life.

You labor out of love, or commitment, or duty or passion, or compassion, or some combination of those four.

You come into a religious community in process and will leave it still in process -- because the work is never finished.

You are appreciated. You will be remembered in story, deed, and picture.

The soul of this Mt Vernon Unitarian Church is the collective spiritual Conscience of all of you at any given moment in history.

It is more than the sum of the collective you. It is more than the physical buildings and grounds. It is more than the religious education, the committees, the programs, the worship. It is the heart, the vision, the collective wisdom of all those who came before you, you now, and those who will come after you.

The soul of this “holy place” is cradled in your capacity to imagine the divine in every one of you through these next months of transition. I beseech you Attend to each stitch in remaking this quilt in a mindful, intentional way - and remember *time, trust, patience, and most significantly imagination.*

The soul of this Unitarian Universalist community will grow rich in abundance as its story is told and retold from the hearts of those doing the telling until one day that story will become the myth that contains the profound truths of the spiritual conscience of this community.

So may it be.