

30 December 2018  
Homily & Ritual Burning of Grudges  
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Burning is a symbol  
of release and transformation from one state to another,  
A symbol of cleansing, forgiveness, and letting go.  
And the fire makes it look so easy, doesn't it?  
Though madness and injustice make us rage  
We don't wish to be angry, bitter people  
But it's not easy  
And we need help  
We gather together as religious people  
To teach and learn from another in wisdom  
To join our voices in song  
To inspire and to aspire  
To breathe in and to reach  
To hold ourselves and one another accountable  
Faith and religion are aspirational  
We don't have it all figured out  
But we believe it's important to try, and fail  
and try again... Together  
We practice seeking and making meaning together  
Because our inner life can influence our outer experiences  
In the Christian New Testament, there is much written about the  
importance of forgiveness and letting go  
Colossians, Chapter 3, Verse 13 says  
Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against  
another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so  
you must also forgive.  
But this verse leaves out so much of the story. Yes, we need one  
other. We are interdependent

But we also hurt one another  
And we have an obligation to try to repair the harm we cause  
To try to fix it, not to deny or erase what has happened  
But to seek and be open to transformation  
There is a difference between the fire of righteous anger and the  
steady low burn of resentment  
Anger is  
The spark of our life force  
That informs us a boundary has been crossed  
Human dignity has been ignored  
This kind of righteous anger  
fuels our quest for justice  
But resentment and grudges don't give us energy  
On the contrary they drain us  
Throughout time, and across the world  
too many vendettas and wars have been waged  
from unhealed wounds, grief, resentment and bitterness  
These draining emotions can sneak up on all of us  
from time to time  
Have you ever experienced your grudges sneaking up on you?  
I was shopping in the grocery store recently  
When someone I saw in the aisles reminded me of a heavy  
experience that still lives in my heart  
I was pushing my cart through the aisles,  
Trying to remember my short list  
But my mind was elsewhere  
I started remembering how angry and hurt I felt years ago  
And how it didn't get fixed...there was no effort to repair  
My breathing got more and more shallow  
And I'm heaving my heavy cart around the corners  
It feels heavier and heavier with each turn,

like our grudges and resentments and hurts get heavier and heavier  
over time

and I was thinking about digging out my phone right there  
to call my friend and

tell them I was thinking about what they had said  
and it just wasn't good enough!

I saw the bottles flying across the air

before I ever heard the thud of my cart hitting the floor display  
bottles of shampoo went everywhere

bouncing across the floor

the kind that deep cleans, like the deep cleaning my spirit was in  
need of...

When we look our hatred in the face

It always tries to stare us down

To send us running back into the darkness

But where do we go from here?

How will we stand,

Without knocking over objects and people in our path

With our hurts and grudges?

How do we let others and ourselves off of the hook?

We begin with naming

Writing or speaking our hurts aloud

And we engage all of our senses

Sight, smell sound—these give us the possibility to be present.

To know the gift of forgiving self for shortcomings of yesterday

Ritual is an outward expression of growth we have made so far

And a hinge to open ourselves up to further growth

To keep breathing, inhaling Spirit moment by moment in the  
now...

And we practice, over and over again

Until forgiveness pours into us

Filling us up so our every word, every touch

Can only be Love  
Until we need to do it again, and yet again.  
Love waits for us...at the end of every road....

## **Burning of Grudges (by Reverend Heather Concannon)**

In a few moments,  
I will invite us into a ritual of burning grudges,  
as we enter into a new year.  
We pause at the precipice of another year—  
another year of experiences,  
regrets, hurts, accumulated anger, tension.  
While we cannot undo what has happened,  
We can choose how we carry our burdens  
And we can work to let go of things  
that keep us from responding to our lives  
in the ways we intend to.

It is important to say that  
you don't have to forgive people who have hurt you  
You don't have to let go of grudges  
that you aren't ready to let go of.  
This is an invitation to give a gift of releasing a burden  
Only to yourself  
And part of that  
is that you need to feel ready  
to let go of your grudge, your hurt, your anger  
And it needs to be ultimately *for you*  
Not because you think you should,  
or because someone else wants you to.

So to do this, this morning we will use burning as a symbol  
of release and transformation from one state to another,  
A symbol of cleansing, forgiveness, and letting go.

As you entered into the sanctuary,  
each of you were given a piece of flash paper  
and something to write with.  
If you need a piece of paper,  
please raise your hand,  
and an usher will bring one to you.

On this piece of flash paper,  
I invite each of you to write something – a word or a phrase—  
that you wish to release with 2018.  
It could be grudge you are holding that is slowly poisoning you  
While you wait for someone else to suffer from it,  
a forgiveness that you want to offer  
to yourself or to another person,  
an anger is weighing you down,  
or a regret, a hurt, or a habit,  
that you want to clear out  
in order to make space for something new.  
I invite you to write that now.

*(Pause while people write)*

In a moment we will sing Return Again,  
Which is hymn #1011  
and after we have sung it through twice  
I will invite each of you to come forward  
and light this flash paper,

symbolic of the release  
of that which you choose  
to let go of from the past year.  
Flash paper is also known as magicians' paper  
It is extremely flammable and also quite safe,  
it will light very quickly  
and burn without ash or smoke.  
I recommend that you fold it a few times.  
Once it catches flame,  
let go of the paper immediately,  
and it will burn out quickly.

*(demonstrate)*

I will be here at the front to help  
And can light the flash paper for you  
if you'd prefer not to do it yourself.

Now, I invite you to rise in body or spirit and sing "Return Again",  
Hymn # 1011.

Return again, return again  
Return to the land of your soul  
Return again, return again  
Return to the land of your soul  
Return to who you are  
Return to what you are  
Return to where you are  
Born and reborn again  
Born and reborn again

**Ritual**

After everyone is seated again:

## **Prayer**

As we turn to a new year,  
may what weighs us down be lessened.  
May we release those things  
that are holding us back from living our fullest lives.  
May we open ourselves with fresh hearts  
To all the future has to offer.  
May it be so, and amen.

To close our ritual, let us rise in body or spirit and sing Return  
again two more times

## **\*Closing Hymn #1011**

Return Again

Return again, return again  
Return to the land of your soul  
Return again, return again  
Return to the land of your soul  
Return to who you are  
Return to what you are  
Return to where you are  
Born and reborn again  
Born and reborn again

*Please join me in saying together our Call to Ministry printed in your order of  
service:*

### **\*Call to Ministry**

We go forth into the world in peace  
To act with works of love  
To affirm each person's dignity  
And to cherish the living earth.

### **\*Benediction**

Hear your freedom calling  
May forgiveness be a river sifting your silt  
Always moving towards life  
May Love hold a torch in your heart  
Giving you enough compassion  
To be a fool who keeps returning to yourself  
Be born in the now  
Return to who you are  
Inhale Spirit  
Return to your calling  
Ring in joy, joy, joy.