

“Embrace”

Rev. Mary Gear

Delivered Sunday, May 1, 2022

Introduction to Three Readings

Today we explore the spiritual theme of “embrace.” This is one word in the new OUUC mission to welcome and wonder, embrace and empower, bridge and become.

Embrace has two meanings; the first is to hold close, enfold, encircle, enclose. It means to literally take to heart, as in a hug.

The second is to accept or support willingly and enthusiastically, to take up gladly. It means to welcome, to take to heart an idea or belief instead of a person, or animal or thing.

To embrace involves (our hands and) our hearts.

Today we offer three readings that explore what it might mean for a faith community to embrace. These words invite us to embrace our past, our present, and our future.

First Reading

“Embracing Our Past,” by Rev. Mary Gear

We remember those who are no longer with us,
who remain in our hearts and in our memories.

We embrace their memory and the lessons they left us. We hold them in our hearts in
this moment.

We remember who we have been and where we have come from,
telling the stories of what has been and what we dreamed of.

We embrace all our stories and all our history. We hold all in our hearts in this moment.

We remember that this land is not ours; it was inhabited by the first peoples
who were removed by force, by disease, by laws not their own. Yet they are still here.
We embrace our neighbors as we share this land. We hold them in our hearts in this
moment.

We remember that we are of this Earth, part of the interconnected web of life.

A web that goes back millions of years, to the stardust from which we came.

We are embraced by the infinite web and we are not alone. We are held by all that is in
this moment.

We embrace our ancestors.

We embrace our history.

We embrace our neighbors.

We are embraced by the web.

Let's embrace a moment of silence together.

Second Reading

"A Litany of Wholeheartedness," by Dawn Skjei Cooley.

This is a responsive reading with a phrase we say together. The phrase is "We let go of who we ought to be and embrace who we are."

Because there have been times when shame has crushed our ability to be wholehearted

All: We let go of who we ought to be and embrace who we are.

Because we have not always had the courage to be imperfect

All: We let go of who we ought to be and embrace who we are.

Because we have struggled to have compassion for ourselves or others

We let go of who we ought to be and embrace who we are.

Because we have been afraid of our own vulnerability

We let go of who we ought to be and embrace who we are.

Because we are sometimes too scared to live authentically

We let go of who we ought to be and embrace who we are.

Because we want to be whole-hearted people, confident in our worthiness and our belonging

We let go of who we ought to be and embrace who we are.

Let's embrace a moment of silence together.

Third Reading

"Choose to Bless the World," by Rebecca Parker

Your gifts—whatever you discover them to be—
can be used to bless or curse the world.

The mind's power, the strength of the hands,
the reaches of the heart, the gift of speaking, listening, imagining, seeing, waiting

Any of these can serve to feed the hungry, bind up wounds,
welcome the stranger, praise what is sacred,
do the work of justice or offer love.

Any of these can draw down the prison door,
hoard bread, abandon the poor, obscure what is holy,
comply with injustice or withhold love.

You must answer this question:

What will you do with your gifts?

Choose to bless the world.

The choice to bless the world is more than an act of will,
a moving forward into the world with the intention to do good.

It is an act of recognition, a confession of surprise,
a grateful acknowledgment that in the midst of a broken world
unspeakable beauty, grace and mystery abide.
There is an embrace of kindness that encompasses all life, even yours.

And while there is injustice, anesthetization, or evil there moves a holy disturbance,
a benevolent rage, a revolutionary love,
protesting, urging, insisting that which is sacred will not be defiled.
Those who bless the world live their life as a gesture of thanks
for this beauty and this rage.
The choice to bless the world can take you into solitude
to search for the sources of power and grace;
native wisdom, healing, and liberation.

More, the choice will draw you into community, the endeavor shared,
the heritage passed on, the companionship of struggle,
the importance of keeping faith, the life of ritual and praise,
the comfort of human friendship, the company of earth
the chorus of life welcoming you.
None of us alone can save the world.
Together—that is another possibility, waiting.

Let's embrace a moment of silence together.