

Once Upon a Time

Sunday, August 13, 2023

Rev. Diana Johnson, with Intern Practitioner Chris Netto
and Chris Johnson, RScP



A Beloved Community
Practicing the Possible Through Prayer

Taizé

Call to Awareness – 3 Bells

Chris N - Opening Prayer

Rev. Diana – Welcome...if you're new with us here this morning, my name is Rev. Diana Johnson, and I am the Pastor and Spiritual Director of Mystical Heart Spiritual Center. We are an Interfaith Community that teaches Universal Principles and Practical Spirituality. I welcome you home to our Spiritual Community (should you choose it). I welcome you home to the Guidance and Wisdom of your own Mystic Heart.

Rev. Diana & Chris – Taizé Chants

 **Welcome Home to Your Mystic Heart**, written by Diana & Chris Johnson

 **Dropping Down**, written by Karen Drucker, Amt Bishop, & Gary Lynn Floyd

Rev. Diana – We take a moment to breathe together...as one living organism...breathing in the Peace that dwells in this space...and allowing that Peace to find a home in your heart, in your soul, and you exhale, sending that Peace back out into the room, into the world...and to honor the connection with our global family...We envision a web of consciousness that surrounds and infuses the planet...each of us, a radiant Light, shining within the web, reflecting the pure radiance of our Divine Nature...every human, every other-than-human creature, every plant, a shining expression of the One Light...the rocks and minerals, water and wind, stars and planets...each one a perfect and intentional creation, emanating from One Source...from the One Light.

As we come together this morning, we set an intention...to leave a positive imprint on human evolution and on the world, for all time...an imprint of Love, Compassion, Kindness, and Peace.

The flow of Taizé this morning reminds us that **Inquiring Minds Want to Know**...it points us in the direction of consciously creating the stories of our lives.

Once Upon a Time, in the very beginning of time as we know it, 13.7 billion years ago, all the energy and matter in the universe was condensed into a single point smaller than the head of a pin. Some kind of Life Impulse was present...must have been, because something cannot come from nothing. And that which is eternal in you...your Spirit...was part of that Impulse.

In an instant, a great cosmic “yes” exploded into existence, into the cosmic firestorm that had been burning for a million years. From the amorphous cloud of hydrogen and helium that remained, this same Life Impulse gradually created a hundred billion galaxies. And then somehow, inside those primal stars, the heat got so intense that they exploded into supernovas, giving birth to all the higher elements like carbon and oxygen, and scattering them across the galaxy.

These higher elements eventually became the building blocks of our home planet, and eventually gave birth to what’s been called the “second big bang,” the birth of the evolutionary process in which even more brilliant and nuanced and complex creativity took form as biological diversity through evolution...some 50 million different unfolding over billions of years.

And then about 35,000 years ago “the third big bang,” or the mind’s big bang—the moment when one of these creatures, one of these species became self-aware...began to reflect on its place in the cosmos, to make sense of life and death, to make sense of its own story. This is when artwork appeared on cave walls...ornate beads were created...people began placing flowers on the graves of the dead...in other words, human creativity was born.

From this moment forward, evolution began to accelerate at a much more rapid rate. Culture was born...the evolutionary dynamics that had been unfolding through biological evolution, suddenly begin to express themselves through the evolution of culture.

Humans moved from hunter-gatherer to agrarian societies...to the Industrial and Information Ages. Their organizing structure went from the family to the clan to the tribe to the city-state, to the nation state, to where we are now... reaching toward a global village. The evolution of technology grew from the simple hand-axe to the plow, to the crane, to the space shuttle, to the Internet.

Through all of time, the Spirit that you are has been present. Just feel your creativity on this upward spiral from the cosmos to the biosphere to the human-sphere, the sphere of culture and consciousness and this movement that’s been going on in which life emerged toward greater unity.

What is happening here? How and why did cooperating groups of self-replicating molecular processes come together to form the first cells...groups of individual cells form larger and more complex cells...groups of complex cells come together to create the first multi-celled organisms...and then these groups of multi-celled organisms like us combine to form clans and tribes and societies? And how and why did societies continue to reach toward widening circles of cooperation, higher orders of unity, cooperation, and complexity?

And now so recently in cosmic time, something new yet again is emerging... something beyond simple self-reflective consciousness. Humans are not only able to ponder their story and create meaning, but are awakening to their own Spiritual Nature. You are beginning to recognize yourself as an agent of change...to participate in conscious evolution.

What is it like to feel in the human heart this impulse to care for the greater good, to be love in action...to feel an impulse toward creativity, toward freedom and justice for all beings? Feel yourself awakening to a deep sense of caring...feel your desire to contribute to the elevation of the whole...

...into something that's never been. What does it feel like to be an individual human being, awakening to who you really are? What are you going to do with this life that you have in your hands? Now as an individual expression of this Divine Life, dare to make conscious steps toward spiritual awakening and evolution. Allow the part of yourself that cares for the whole of life, and for the future of our planet and species, to emerge. Call forth a new part of your being...a part that recognizes that what you do with this precious life really matters...a part that thrives on change and stepping into the unknown...the part that cares about the truth, that feels like truth needs to be spoken even when it's uncomfortable because it wants to be in integrity with Reality...the part that wants to be an expression of the highest possibility in this world.

Allow yourself to fully step into and identify with *this* part of the self as your deepest, truest Self. See how this part of yourself is none other than the Creative Force of the Cosmos, the Divine Impulse. This is Who and Whose you really are. (Adapted from Craig Hamilton's *Integral Enlightenment*)

Chris – Guided Meditation

“*Once Upon a Time...*” When we hear that phrase, we know what's coming... we know just where we are... we're at the beginning of a story... We don't know who we're about to meet... or what's going to happen next... We just know that *something* is coming... and so we lean in toward the storyteller...

The Rabbi Yeshua of Galilee was a master storyteller... He used parables, symbols, metaphors, and similes to point beyond what can be conveyed in words... There is no language that can express Spiritual Truth... words *define* – or make finite... the Nature of the Divine is boundless...

We tend to think of *Once Upon a Time* as being in the past... a long time ago... maybe even in a galaxy far, far away... But for the characters in the stories, the plot is unfolding in the present... they experience what happens in the here and now... Every moment of every day is *Once Upon a Time*...

Claiming our Spiritual Authority means that we are the author of our own life story... If there are parts of the story we don't like, we are free to take the plot in a different direction... or even to end Volume One and begin writing the sequel... And our *Once Upon a Time*... the opening of our story is *now*...

I invite us now to contemplate how we would like our life to unfold as we move forward in time... Do we want things to continue the way they have been?... or might we desire more Joy... greater Peace... deeper Love... increased prosperity... As we share our three minutes of Silent Contemplation this morning, let us *feel into* the vision we have

for our Life's Story... and cast it into the Field of Infinite Possibility that is the Spirit of Creation... Right here and now, it is our own *Once Upon a Time*...

Silence – 3:00

As we bring our awareness back into our *shared* story, unfolding in this time and place, we are grateful for the insights we have gained... and for the Spiritual Authority we have been granted to continually create and re-create our life in ever more empowering ways... Thank you, God, for everyone and for everything...

May we be vigilant so that we don't let our habitual thinking or negative self-talk write our story...

And may our faith in our Spiritual Authority grow ever stronger, as the Divine Creative Principle receives our New Story, embodies it, and is compelled to bring it into our experience...

As Taizé continues, we incorporate Rev. Diana's Spiritual Insights, Wisdom, and Inspiration into our writing as we each author our own Life Story... beginning today... on page one... *Once Upon a Time*...

Rev. Diana

Humans like to tell stories, and stories can be useful. There's nothing wrong with stories. It's how we communicate. We love mythic stories, metaphoric stories...we identify with the characters. And then there are the stories of our lives...my life was headed in a particular direction, and then it turned a corner...and then it went a radically different direction. These are stories about me. We love the stories of saints and sages, and we love the stories of demons, because we relate to them all...we recognize them in ourselves. Stories are teaching vehicles, and can be useful.

But once we get to the point of that which cannot be taught...to what cannot be learned...which is who you *are*, then at least for an instant, there has to be a discovery of what is *closer* than the story of you. This is not to diminish the story...it actually makes a much better story. When the stories come forth consciously, from who and what you are *being* in the world, they are coming from something that cannot be *told* about you. Your life story is infused with Truth...it becomes a living work of art, shining its Light on the world.

We see this in the story of Jesus...in the story of the Buddha...in the stories of Chief Joseph, Harriet Tubman, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Theresa, and so many others. These life stories are infused with what cannot be told, and with the Qualities that are alive in you, and in me, right now...

Closing Prayer

In this sacred moment, I Am at Peace. I feel and know the Truth of Who and Whose I Am...a perfect and intentional expression of the One Life, here on purpose...necessary to the unfolding of the Creation. The Life of Spirit would be incomplete without my

existence...my participation. And my life would be incomplete without my recognition that I am a Spiritual Being having a human experience.

Acknowledging the thread of evolution and my place in it, I step into a greater story. I allow my Being to inform my doing. My thoughts, words, and actions move into the world from my deepest, most conscious place. Spirit infuses every moment with Presence...Grace lifts and carries me through each and every day. The Qualities of Spirit shine through me, and flow through my relationships, bring a greater sense of Connection than ever before.

I Am so grateful for my growing Awareness, and for the Spiritual Community that supports my journey. Thank you, Spirit, for the Abundance in every area of my life, and for the Peace that fills my days. My life is showered with blessings, and for this, I give thanks.

I release this prayer, fully aware of its Power. Knowing all that unfolds from this moment forward IS my answered prayer, I turn it over to the Loving and Lawful Presence of the One...letting it be. And so it is! Amen!

Coming back into the awareness of our bodies...our senses...the atmosphere in the room, we open our eyes and allow our gaze to take in whatever is before you. Feel free to look around and say good morning to everyone who is here celebrating with you this morning.

This is your Spiritual Family...one of your support systems. These are some of the people who care about you, and are there for you if you need anything.

Rev. Diana – Offering

As we close our Taizé Meditation, we offer the opportunity for you to share of your financial good in support of the work we do should you choose to do so. If you're joining us online, you can find a Donate Button and our mailing address at mysticheart.org. And we thank you in advance for your gifts.

Offertory Music – *Long Before*, by Danny Barca

Rev. Diana – Blessing for the Offering

Rev. Diana & Chris – Taizé Closing Song

A Soul's Blessing, written by Chris Johnson

Conscious Conversation

Chris N – Opening Prayer

Rev. Diana – Good morning and welcome, or welcome back...welcome to those joining online. If you're new with us here this morning... my name is Rev. Diana Johnson, and I am the Pastor and Spiritual Director of Mystic Heart Spiritual Center. We are an Independent Interfaith Community that teaches Universal Principles and Practical Spirituality. We welcome you home to our Gathering Place and to the Guidance and Wisdom of your own Mystic Heart.

Rev. Diana & Chris – Opening Music

 **Welcome to the Mystic Heart**, written by Diana & Chris Johnson

 **One Big Family**, written by Robin Hackett & Gary Lynn Floyd

 **Woke Up This Morning**, Traditional Gospel

Rev. Diana – A Love-Soaked World

Calling Awareness to the Presence of Spirit in the body...join me in the embodiment of living in a **Love-Soaked World...**

...where all humans embody and live from Kindness, Compassion, Peace, Joy, Abundance and Generosity, Freedom and Justice as the Living Principles that guide our every thought, word, and action...where all humans honor and care for one another, for the earth that sustains us, and for every life form that shares this beautiful planet with us.

We are creating a world where all needs are met...where all beings are well-fed, and have the safety and comfort of home...

...where mental/physical health, education, and healthy relationships are ensured by social systems grounded in Wellness and Wholeness... where all beings Serve the greater community doing whatever feeds their souls and are well supported for their time and talent...and by their Service, each one finds a sense of belonging...

A world in which all beings are valued and respected for their uniqueness...where Authenticity and Integrity are the norm...where the Peace and Kindness we cultivate within shows up as a world free of hatred or violence.

With our growing Awareness, and by the Power of our collective intention, we are writing a new story...a story in which greed is a thing of the past, and there is abundance in having enough.

We *do not* lower our Vision, no matter the appearances in the world, knowing with our whole hearts that such a world is not only possible, but *inevitable*. We align our actions to support our vision, and a new world is being born.

We open our hearts, our minds, our doors, and our arms in Radical Welcome, erasing all lines of apparent separation. In keeping with our Vision, we create an open and loving community to which all are invited, and *in* which all have an equal voice. With deep faith

in the Great Mystery that acts upon this prayer, we accept its Graceful unfolding into form and experience, and in Sweet Gratitude, we release it now to the Living, Loving, Lawful Presence.

And so it is...Amen...Sathu...Ashay...Aho!

Let's take a moment to look around to say good morning to your Spiritual Family...some of the people who care about you...people you can count on when you need a hand.

If you were with us at Taizé this morning, you know that our topic this week is **Once Upon a Time**. We took a meditative journey through time, recognizing ourselves as one with the Eternal Spirit, the Life Impulse, that sparked the Big Bang, and continues to drive us forward. And we reflected on the human tendency to tell stories as our primary way of communication. Finally, we considered how much more powerful those stories are when they come forth consciously, from who and what we are *being* in the world. Only then does your story point to the Truth...it becomes a living work of art, shining its Light into the world.

We briefly mentioned Jesus, the Buddha, Chief Joseph, Mahatma Gandhi, and Mother Theresa as some of the notable examples of people who let their lives be their message. And I think it's valuable to have stories of people as examples. But there's also a flip side to having these stories.

As human beings, one of the ways we learn is by imitating. From the time we're born, we learn to imitate our caregivers. Later on, we might imitate our friends, or the popular kids at school. As we grow into adulthood, our church might tell us that we should try to live as Jesus lived...as Buddha lived...as St. Theresa lived. The media encourages us to imitate those 'beautiful people on the cover of...*name a magazine*. Our school system pushes us toward academic and financial *success* according to its own standards. Society is pushing us from every direction to be other than what we are.

So, what is the problem with this situation?

(We are left feeling like less than...not good enough, no matter who we are or what we are doing. Am I doing it right? Am I saying it right? Am I feeling it right? Am I understanding it right?)

Do you think that we're here to imitate someone else?

(we're not supposed to imitate anyone. We are here to be the best version of ourselves that we can...and this goes beyond what can be taught or learned or imitated)

How do you know?

(we're each absolutely unique)

When you are being who you truly are, you are at home.

What are the qualities of home?

(You can relax, you can be yourself, you can run around naked...no need for the covering we talked about last week. No need for pretense.

Being at home includes or allows all experience...the same is true of being at home in ourselves. When we're at home in our own skin, we can allow both success and failure without letting it puff us up or tear us down...we can include both joy and sorrow...acquisition and loss. We can allow openness and contraction to be part of our experience...the horrifying and the beautiful. Being at home in ourselves gives us the strength, support, and comfort to weather whatever comes.

Okay, let's turn a bit of a corner. **Is it fair to say that each one here, and those listening online this far into our Gathering are on a conscious Spiritual Search?**

Here's our dilemma...a conscious Spiritual Search usually begins with wanting to exclude something. What are we wanting to exclude?

(difficulties, suffering, misery...we might use retreats and meditation time to exclude the distractions...we might join a church, or adhere to a particular religion, which can exclude other perspectives and practices)

Gangaji warns us to pay careful attention to this trap...becoming one who lives in such a spiritual realm, that human qualities and emotions are excluded. She says "They wonder why they're still suffering. They are living in pseudo-transcendence, because actual transcendence excludes nothing. The moment one identifies oneself as a particular religion, tradition, political group, then all others are automatically excluded. This is fundamentalism...a fundamentalism of separateness from everything else."

Is the ability to exclude useful in our lives? How?

(very useful, but in a transitory way; our minds are hard-wired to see opposites...we are dualistic creatures. We see right or wrong, win or lose, happy or sad...that has its place, but only as a point of view, only for survival. And most of us are past basic survival; we want the dark forces excluded...

We want everything that bothers us to be excluded, but it's not - it's here...for a reason)

Exclusions are only steps along the way to welcoming everything as myself. What does that mean?

(each exclusion takes us closer to discovering our oneness)

Amazingly, if there is the fortitude and willingness to welcome what is here without denial, there is a discovery that cannot be spoken...it is the experience of oneness.

How does this tie back to our topic, Once Upon a Time, and our story theme?

Close by reading from *Hidden Treasure*, by Gangaji, pages 18-19

We have the capacity to release *all* stories. This is how Infinite Potential is revealed in our lives. When we stop holding onto *any* stories, new ones are free to come into being. Let's close in prayer...

Closing Prayer –

In this perfect and holy moment, we sit...we become silent...together, in the Presence of the Great Mystery... the one Life...the one Source of all that is. Feeling Presence coursing through our bodies, minds, and spirits, we can relax...let go of all stories about anything...and we can simply be...here...now.

Grateful for this reminder...that in any moment that we choose, we can let go of whatever story is not serving us...we move into the week ahead...refreshed and renewed by this time in friendship and Community...listening, reflecting, sharing, and learning from the experiences, insights, and wisdom of others. I give thanks for my growing awareness, and for the awakening of the human family.

We are reminded of how blessed we all are. We move into this week committed to the practice of Compassion and Lovingkindness, to ourselves and all those around us.

In the spirit of the Buddhist tradition...may we all be well, happy, and peaceful. May no harm come to us. May we all have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome the inevitable challenges in life.

May our parents, our teachers and mentors, our friends, and all living beings across the world be happy and peaceful. May no harm come to them.

May they also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome challenges.

Feeling the Power and impact of this prayer, I gratefully release it now to do its good work. It is done...And so it is. Sathu.

I invite you to bring your awareness back to your body, to your senses, to the atmosphere in the room. And when you are ready, open your eyes to re-enter the space. Welcome back.

Affirmation for the Offering

Each Sunday, we invite you to join in the celebration of the work we are doing in the world by sharing of your financial Good, should you choose to.

If you are at home, you can go to **mysticheart.org** to use our Donate Button or to find our mailing address.

We also have a Gracious Giving Program for those who would like to make a heartfelt monthly commitment of support so that we can more effectively plan for our growth. You can find more information on our website.

As we move into this time of giving, hold these words close to your heart and know how much we appreciate your gifts:

As I awaken to the God within me and all around me, I see Abundance everywhere I look. I consciously step into that flow of Abundance by this act of giving. I offer this gift freely in the spirit of Love, blessing and sending it forth to heal and prosper. It is evidence of my deep faith. It does good work in the world and blesses all of Creation. I give from a consciousness of Abundance! And so it is! Amen!

This beautiful song offers one way to write our stories differently. Enjoy!

Offertory Video – *Be Yourself*, by Narayan and Janet

Chris N. – Blessing for the Offering

Chris N. – Brief Invitations

♥ **The Mystic Heart Book Club** will be taking a week off this week.

♥ **Metaphysical Bible Study** will be taking a week off this week.

♥ **Saturday, August 19th, 10 am – noon**, Laurie Buckman will present a *Culinary Herbs Workshop*. Suggested donation: \$20. All materials provided.

Looking Ahead...

♥ **Tuesday, August 24th, 12:30-2:30 pm**, *Fast Track to Wellness* will be re-starting.

♥ **Saturday, August 26th, 1:30-4:00 pm**, **Cultivating Soil and Spirit**. Rev. Diana will be offering the second in this series of workshops...starting seeds for your Fall Legumes and more.

♥ **Common Threads of Truth, Tuesday, August 29th, 6:00-8:00 pm** – Amarjit Singh of the Sikh Tradition, and leader of the Anderson Sikh Centre, will be presenting.

♥ Please join Mystic Heart on **Friday, September 8th** for a joyous time of drumming and spiritual togetherness. Drumming will begin *promptly* at 6:30pm, led by April Jimenez; hosted by Laurie Buckman and James Massengale. Please RSVP for address. Contact April @ 562-440-3785 or Laurie @ 530-440-2924 for more info.

♥ Please take note of the two new classes starting this fall. Chris will be teaching ***Living the Four Agreements*** on **Wednesdays from 2-5 pm**. And Rev. Diana will be teaching ***The Universe is Calling*** on **Tuesday evenings from 6-9 pm**. More details are in your Bulletin. Please take one home and give it a read.

Prayer Requests, Practitioner available after service, Information Cards if new people

Rev. Diana & Chris – Closing Song

♥ ***Love Be With You***, written by Lainey Bernstein, RScP & Gary Lynn Floyd

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