

## Reflection on Genesis 1 by Rev. Huey

In 'The Luminous Web', Barbara Brown Taylor describes the shaping of the creation narrative of Genesis as a counter-cultural protest of the people of Israel against the creation story of their Babylonian captors. While their oppressors saw the origins of the universe as violent and bloody, the Israelites told their children a different story, a story rooted in goodness and blessing. Light came from the deepest night, they said, and order from chaos. The sun and the moon and the stars were set in the over-arching sky as signs of beauty and the changing of the seasons, providing light and direction and the keeping of time. God filled the earth with vegetation that was fruitful and nourishing, moved the waters back from the land and provided a home for the creatures that crawled across it, walked upon it, and flew over it. In the midst of this loveliness, humankind was tenderly placed and blessed and called to be caretakers and stewards. And God looked upon all this and found it good.



## "Faith for Life"

We need places to pray as if someone were listening;  
to study as if we might learn something worth writing on our hearts;  
to join with others in service as if the world might be transformed.

Churches are places to learn to practice, with others,  
a continual conversion of life, a permanent openness to change.

(Stephanie Paulsell from "Soul experiments," Faith Matters)

In her reflection on 2 Chronicles 15:12 ('They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and with all their soul'), Rev. Talitha Arnold wrote: "This May 22 at the church I serve, we celebrate the "Rite of Initiation and Confirmation" with six young people from the congregation. The service marks the end of a two-year journey for the young adolescents and also the beginning of their adult lives, or the "initiation to adulthood" as we call it. Right now the Youth Confirmands are working on their Statements of Faith to present to the congregation that Sunday. Each young person will share what they believe about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. Some of their answers are long, others quite brief. A youth once wrote about the Holy Spirit: "I don't know what it is or what it's supposed to do. Do you?" Whether their answers are long or short, and whether or not they choose to confirm their faith, and join the church, the Youth Confirmands are living into the kind of covenant with God that the Book of Chronicles records the people of Israel made centuries ago---a covenant not to obey God or follow God or even love God. It is instead, to seek God, "with all their heart and with all their soul." United's Youth Confirmands may not be ready, even after two years, to confirm their faith this May. That's okay. What we truly hope is that they will continue to seek God, with heart and soul. Thank you, God, for the journey and for the questions. Amen."

Here at First Church, Confirmation is a coming of age, Rite of Passage, which draws upon the rich faith traditions of both the United Church of Christ and the Unitarian Universalist Association. In our rite our teens affirm how immersion in our community of faith has helped them grow thus far in their faith in

the Holy Trinity: Jesus/God/Spirit. It's a time of covenant renewal in which our confirmands renew their covenant not only to seek God with all their heart and soul, but also with their mind and strength.

The biblical story that I like for this joyful rite in our church comes from Luke 2:41-52. It's the only story that we have of Jesus in his growing up years.

Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." "Why were you searching for me?" he asked, "Did you not know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Last Sunday, Emily and her Mom, the Deacons and I gathered together like Jesus and the temple teachers to talk about a list of confirmation questions.

1. What are the 10 Commandments of Moses? Which one claims your attention? Why is it important?
2. What are the First and Second Love Commandments of Jesus?

3. What are Jesus' Beatitudes? Which one speaks to you today?
4. What does the prophet Micah say that the Lord requires of you?
5. Can you recite psalm 23 by heart?
6. What is your favorite Bible story?
7. What is your favorite hymn?
8. What are the five different kinds of prayers? What event in your life might cause you to pray one of them?
9. Which church fellowship, educational, and mission programs have you participated in that have helped you be more patient, kind, and loving?
10. If you have visited other churches, what questions do you have about their worship, beliefs, or practices?
11. If you have visited a synagogue, temple, or mosque, what questions do you have about their worship, beliefs, or practices?
12. What do you like about our church? What questions about what we do or say here are you wondering about?
13. What are the two sacraments of our church? What do they mean?
14. Do you desire to continue in your journey of faith by participating in the life of either a Christian or Unitarian community of faith? In what ways do you intend to participate?

Since it was not a test, but rather an opportunity to mutually grow in faith and understanding, Emily got to choose the questions she would like to discuss and give her thoughts on the subject. After sharing, she invited everyone else to say what they thought. We never got to all the questions, but by the time we were done, I believe that we all had a better understanding of why Jesus told his parents that it was important for him to be in his Father's house.

Emily, today you are renewing your covenant to seek God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. It is with great joy that we celebrate your decision to be confirmed, and to continue on your journey of faith at First Church.