

Prelude: (From Bob)

Welcome and Announcements Linda Wilkes, Worship Associate

Good morning, and welcome to the Gloucester Unitarian Universalist Church.

We gather here in this sanctuary, as people have been gathering since 1806,

Whoever you are and whomever you love, you are welcome here.

However you arrived at this beloved sanctuary, whatever your heritage, wherever you are on your life's journey, you are welcome here.

If you are a visitor or newcomer and would like to introduce yourself, please stand and tell us your name and where you are from so we can welcome you.

If you'd like to get connected and learn more about our community life, please take a moment to fill out a green pew card, located on the back of the seat in front of you, or sign the guest book in the vestibule. We hope you will join us for refreshments downstairs in the vestry following the service so we have a chance to connect in person.

Announcements

Now let us deepen into worship

Introit (From Bob)

Opening Words Linda Wilkes

When Mark Twain first went on the lecture circuit, the billboards advertising his lectures said: “Doors open at 7 o’clock. The trouble to begin at 8 o’clock.” And, that is what Twain brought to his audiences: trouble – wrapped in satire, sarcasm, and outrageous humor. From the last quarter of the nineteenth century into the first decade of the twentieth century, Twain questioned the political correctness of the day. He found contradictions throughout the society in which he lived. And, with his genius for the turn of a phrase, he unleashed his unparalleled literary skills for social justice and religious tolerance. He never considered himself a Unitarian or a Universalist, though I think that he would have found kindred spirits in this church.

Opening Hymn: # 100 I’ve Got Peace Like a River

Chalice lighting and affirmation Linda Wilkes

In the Unitarian Universalist faith tradition, we enter into worship by the simple ritual of kindling our chalice. Our chalice will be lit this morning by Karen Lundh

We take a moment now to speak together the words of our affirmation. Newcomers and guests...the words are printed in the Order of Service if you'd like to read along with us.

In the light of truth, and the warmth of love,
We gather to seek, to sustain, and to share.
Life is a gift for which we are grateful.
We gather in community to celebrate the

Anthem-Old Man River, music, Jerome Kern, lyrics, Oscar Hammerstein II Choir

Introduction to Service Brent Wilkes

Mark Twain is most famous for “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” and “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.” Ernest Hemingway called “Huckleberry Finn” “the best book we have ever had. There’s been nothing before. There’s been nothing as good since.”¹ In his time, Twain was the most conspicuous man in America. Twain’s place in literary and cultural history stems from a wide assortment of popular novels and short stories, many of which you may have read in school. He is well known for his depiction

¹ Ken Burns, et al, “Mark Twain: An Illustrated Biography,” New York: Alfred A Knoff, 2001, from the book jacket

of American life in the mid to latter part of the nineteenth century. He is well known for his humor, and his gift to craft a story. But, Mark Twain was much more than a humorist or an author. He developed some very controversial and even blasphemous views on religion and social justice. He had a more sensitive side. He had a dark side. His writings on these issues are much more obscure. Many were not uncovered until well after his death, and were not published for decades. And yet, they are fascinating.

This morning, we are going to examine the views of Mark Twain through the eyes of a Unitarian Universalist. We will look at some of his writings that bear on religion, relationships between men and women, and war. They are much less familiar to the public, but they speak to UU's.

Joining me this morning is a reincarnated Mark Twain, played by Peter Berkrot. Peter, as Twain, is going to give voice to these writings. I must warn you that the excerpts that you will hear today are the actual words of Mark Twain. They have not been edited. They include terms more common to the turn of the century. Sometimes they include terms or words for effect. They are not necessarily politically correct. Some are quite blunt. They reflect views of Mark Twain some of which even he did not want made public until after his death. But, these excerpts contain the passion of Twain's perspective. And, they address issues that we continue to debate today, more than a century later.

A brief biographical sketch of Mark Twain will help put his writings into proper context. It has been said that humor is often born from grief and tragedy and that the ability to question commonly accepted beliefs comes from being spurned by them. Mark Twain's life was dotted with tragedy and misfortune.

Twain was born Samuel Longhorn Clemens in 1835. At the age of four, a sister dies and the family moves to Hannibal Missouri. In 1842, at the age of seven, a brother dies. In 1847, at 12, his father dies. Clemens begins to work at odd jobs, including an apprentice to a newspaper. Clemens leaves Hannibal in 1853 at the age of 18. He works as a journeyman printer. From 1855 to 1860, he trains and works as a riverboat pilot. He

loses another brother in 1858 in a riverboat accident. In 1861, with the outbreak of the Civil War, he spends two weeks with the Missouri National Guard. He does not take well to war. In 1862, he embarks on a career in writing, starting as a reporter for a Nevada newspaper. In 1863, he adopts the pen name of Mark Twain, a term from his riverboat days that reflects a safe river depth of two fathoms, or twelve feet. In 1870, he marries Olivia Langdon. Their first child, Langdon, is born prematurely. In 1872, daughter Susy Clemens is born. First-born Langdon dies. In 1874, another daughter Clara is born. In 1876, “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer” is published. In 1880, his third daughter, Jean, is born. Between 1880 and 1889, Twain writes and publishes many of his most popular works including “Huckleberry Finn” and “A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court.” In 1890, his mother dies and his daughter Jean has her first epileptic seizure. In 1891, he closes his home in Hartford down due to financial problems. For much of the 1890’s, Twain floats in and out of bankruptcy as his efforts to become an entrepreneur with a new typesetting machine fail miserably. He continues to write and lecture, but much of his income is used to offset his business losses. His wife is ill much of the time. In 1896, daughter Susy dies. In 1904, his wife dies and his daughter Clara is committed to a sanitarium. In 1909, daughter Jean dies. Twain himself is diagnosed with heart disease and he dies a year later on April 21, 1910 at the age of 74, survived by only one of his four children.

As a child, Twain was raised a Presbyterian. He claims to have read the entire Bible by the time he was fifteen. His ability to reference extensive excerpts would seem to support his claim. But, Twain was soon found questioning the religious teachings of his youth. On one hand, he wanted to believe. His wife and her family held firm Christian beliefs and he wanted to please her and them. On the other, his reasoning found many contradictions that he could not explain to his satisfaction. Given his literary skills, he wrote about his confusion and skepticism with satire and parody. He searched for most of his life for religious answers. Throughout his life, his writings on the subject reflect his confusion – some quite Christian in nature, some atheistic and blasphemous.

In his later years, with mounting personal and financial troubles, he seemed to seek spiritual comfort but never quite seemed to find what he wanted. As Twain himself once said: “It ain’t the parts of the Bible that I don’t understand that bothers me. It’s the parts that I do understand.”² At one point, in 1903, he discussed the creation of his own religion. But, the more institutionalized a religion was, the more Twain disdained it. In his notebook, in 1897, Twain wrote; “If Christ were here now, there is one thing he would not be – a Christian.”³

This morning, we are going to look at a few representative excerpts of Twain’s writings that address his search for truth and meaning in religion. We will first look at a written piece on the relationship between men and women, using the story of Adam and Eve as a backdrop. Second, we will sample Twain’s extensive writings on the Bible: the inconsistencies and the absurdity of some of it. Then, we will take a peek at Twain’s view of war. We will end with a piece that promotes the individual search for the right path of life. They all contain ample doses of Twain’s humor and satire, plus his great gift for telling a story.

Of all of Twain’s later writings dealing with Biblical themes, perhaps the most enduring are the collection of works built around the story of Adam and Eve. They include Extracts for Adam’s Diary, Eve’s Diary, Papers of the Adams Family, Eve Speaks, and Adam’s Soliloquy.

Taken together, they range from comic spoofs on the first three chapters of Genesis to blistering satires on basic Christian beliefs. But, as these excerpts from the diaries of Adam and Eve show, Twain also used them to explore the relationship between a man and a woman.

² Alex Ayres, ed., “The Wit and Wisdom of Mark Twain, New York: Penguin Books, 1989, p.24.

³ Ibid, p. 38.

Excerpts: “It Is a She” (from Adam’s Diary and Eve’s Diary) Peter Berkrot

ADAM: Monday. The new creature says its name is Eve. That is alright, I have no objections. . . . It says it is not an It, it is a She. This is probably doubtful; yet it is all one to me; what she is were nothing to me if she would but go by herself and not talk.

EVE: Wednesday. We are getting along very well indeed, now, and getting better and better acquainted. . . . I have taken all the work of naming things off his hands, and this has been a great relief to him, for he has no gift in that line. . . . He can’t think of a rational name to save him, but I do not let him see that I am aware of his defect.

Whenever a new creature comes along, I name it before he has time to expose himself by an awkward silence. In this way I have saved him many embarrassments. . . . When the dodo came along he thought it was a wildcat—I saw it in his eye. But I saved him. And I was careful not to do it in a way that could hurt his pride. I just spoke up in a quite natural way of pleased surprise, and not as if I was dreaming of conveying information, and said, “Well, I do declare if there isn’t the dodo!”

ADAM: Friday. She has taken to beseeching me to stop going over the falls. . . . I have always done it—always taken the plunge, the excitement, and the coolness. I supposed it was what the Falls were for. They have no other use that I can see, and they must have been made for something. She says they were only made for scenery—like rhinoceros and the mastodon.

EVE: Monday. He talks very little. Perhaps it is because he is not bright, and is sensitive about it and wishes to conceal it. It is such a pity that he should feel so, for brightness is nothing; it is in the heart that values lie.

ADAM: Wednesday. I found this place outside the Park, and was fairly comfortable for a few days, but she found me out. . . . In fact, I was not sorry she came, for there are but meager pickings here, and she brought some of those apples. I was obliged to eat them, I

was so hungry. It was against my principles, but I find that principles have no real force except when one is well fed. . . . She says it is ordered that we work for our living hereafter. She will be useful. I will superintend.

EVE: After the Fall. When I look back, the Garden is a dream to me. . . . The Garden is lost, but I have found him and am content. . . . If I ask myself why I love him, I find I do not know, and do not really much care to know; so I suppose that this kind of love is not a product of reasoning and statistics, like one's love for other reptiles and animals.

ADAM: Next Year. We have named it Cain. She caught it while I was up country trapping. . . . It resembles us in some ways, and may be a relation. . . . The difference in size warrants the conclusion that it is a different and new kind of animal—a fish perhaps, though when I put it in the water to see, it sank, and she plunged in and snatched it out before there was opportunity for the experiment to determine the matter. I still think it is a fish, but she is indifferent about what it is, and will not let me have it to try.

Ten Years Later: They are boys; we found it out long ago. It was their coming in that small immature shape that puzzled us; we were not used to it. There are some girls now. Abel is a good boy, but if Cain had stayed a bear it would have improved him. After all these years, I see that I was mistaken about Eve in the beginning; it is better to live outside the Garden with her than inside without her.

Hymn: #18 What Wondrous Love is This Linda introduces

Introduction: Brent Wilkes

Twain wrote extensively on the Bible, commenting on the literal interpretations of the Scriptures. The next few pieces are from an unfinished manuscript called “Letters from the Earth.” Twain understood the controversial nature of these writings and they were not published until decades after his death. “Letters from the Earth” was written from the perspective of an outsider observing what was going on and reporting back. In some

cases, the letters are attributed as being directly from Satan. In this excerpt of this first letter, Twain is discussing heaven as described in the Bible and in popular contemporary myth of the time.⁴

Excerpts from “Letters from the Earth” on Heaven Peter Berkrot

1. First of all, I recall your attention the extraordinary fact with which I began. To-wit, that the human being, like the immortals, naturally places sexual intercourse far and an away above all other joys—yet he has left it out of his heaven! The very thought of it excites him; opportunity sets him wild; to this state he will risk life, reputation, everything—even his queer heaven itself—to make good that opportunity and ride it to the overwhelming climax. From youth to middle age all men and women prize copulation above all other pleasures combined, yet it is actually as I have said: it is not in their heaven, prayer takes it’s place.

2. In man’s heaven everybody sings! There are no exceptions. The man who did not sing on earth, sings there; the man who could not sing on earth is able to do it there. This universal singing is not casual, not occasional, not relieved by intervals of quiet, it goes on, all day long, and every day, during a stretch of twelve hours. And everybody stays; whereas in the earth the place would be empty in two hours. The singing is of hymns alone. Nay it is of one hymn alone. The words are always the same, in number they are only about a dozen, there is no rhyme, there is no poetry: “Hosannah, hosannah, hosannah, Lord God of Sabaoth, ‘rah! ‘rah! ‘rah!—ssht!—boom....a-a-ah!”

3. Meantime, every person is playing on a harp—those millions and millions! whereas not more than twenty in the thousand of them could play an instrument in the earth, or ever wanted to.

⁴ Ken Burns, et al, op cit, p.

Consider further: it is a praise service; a service of compliment, of flattery, of adulation! Do you ask who it is that is willing to endure this strange compliment, this insane compliment; and who not only endures it but likes it, enjoys it, requires it, commands it? Hold your breath!

. . . Now then, in the earth these people cannot stand much church—an hour and a quarter is the limit, and they draw the line at once a week. That is to say, Sunday. One day in seven; and even then they do not look forward to it with longing. And so—consider what their heaven provides for them: “church” that lasts forever, and a Sabbath that has no end! . . .with all their simple hearts they think they are going to be happy in it! It is because they do not think at all; they only think they think. Whereas they can’t think; not two human beings in ten thousand have anything to think with. And as to imagination—oh, well, look at their heaven! They accept it, they approve it, they admire it. That gives you their intellectual measure.

4. The inventor of their heaven empties into it all the nations of the earth in one common jumble. All are on an equality absolute, no one of them ranking another. . . . Here in the earth all nations hate each other, every one of them hates the Jew. Yet every pious person adores that heaven and wants to get in to it. He really does. And when he is in a holy rapture he thinks he thinks that if he were only there he would take all the populace to his heart, and hug, and hug, and hug!
He is a marvel—man is! I would I knew who invented him.

5. Every man in the earth possesses some share of intellect, large or small; and be it large or be it small he takes pride in it. Also his heart swells at mention of the names of majestic intellectual chiefs of his race, and he loves the tale of their splendid achievements. . . .Lo, what the mind can do! He cries; and calls the roll of the illustrious of all the ages; and points to the imperishable literatures they have given to the world, and the mechanical wonders they have invented, and the glories wherewith they have clothed science and the arts. . . . And then he contrives a heaven that hasn’t a rag of intellectuality in it anywhere!

Is it odd, is it curious, is it puzzling? It is exactly as I have said, incredible as it may sound.

. . . Very well, the further we proceed the more will this curious fact be apparent. Make a note of it: in man's heaven there are no exercises for the intellect, nothing for it to live upon. It would rot there in a year—rot and stink. Rot and stink—and at that stage become holy. A blessed thing; for only the holy can stand the joys of that bedlam.

Letter V

You have noticed that the human being is a curiosity. In times past he has had (and worn out and flung away) hundreds and hundreds of religions; to-day he has hundreds and hundreds of religions, and launches not fewer than three new ones every year. I could enlarge that number and still be within the facts.

One of his principle religions is called the Christian. A sketch of it will interest you. It is set forth in detail in a book containing 2,000,000 words, called the Old and New Testaments. Also it has another name—The Word of God—the one I have been speaking of.

It is full of interest. It has noble poetry in it; and some clever fables; and some blood-drenched history; and some good morals; and some execrable morals; and a wealth of obscenity; and upwards of a thousand lies.

The bible is built mainly out of the fragments of older Bibles that had their day and crumbled to ruin. So it noticeably lacks in originality, necessarily. Its three or four most imposing and impressive events all happened in earlier Bibles; all its best precepts and rules of conduct come also from those Bibles; there are only two new things in it: hell for one, and that singular heaven I have told you about.

What shall we do? If we believe, with these people, that their God invented these cruel things, we slander him; if we believe that these people invented them themselves, we slander them. It is an unpleasant dilemma in either case, For neither of these parties has done us any harm. . . .

Introduction: Brent Wilkes

Mark Twain also struggled with the concept of a God as all knowing and all-powerful. Listen in.

Excerpt from “Letters from the Earth” on God as all-powerful Peter Berkrot

It is curious—the way the human mind works. The Christian begins with this straight proposition, this definite proposition, this inflexible and uncompromising proposition: God is all-knowing, and all-powerful.

This being the case, nothing can happen without his knowing beforehand that it is going to happen; nothing happens without his permission; nothing can happen that he chooses to prevent.

That is definite enough, isn't it? It makes the Creator distinctly responsible for everything that happens, doesn't it? . . .

Then, having thus made the Creator responsible for all those pains and diseases and miseries . . . which he could have prevented, the gifted Christian blandly calls him Our Father!

It is as I tell you. He equips the Creator with every trait that goes to the making of a fiend, and then arrives at the conclusion that a fiend and a father are the same thing! Yet he would deny that a malevolent lunatic and a Sunday school superintendent are essentially the same. What do you think of the human mind? I mean, in case you think there is a human mind...

. . . Man is without any doubt the most interesting fool there is. Also the most eccentric... He can seldom take a plain fact and get any but a wrong meaning out of it...

For instance, he concedes that God has made angels perfect, without blemish, and immune from pain and death, and that he could have been similarly kind to man if he had wanted to, but denies that he was under any moral obligation to do it.

He concedes that man has no moral right to visit the child of his begetting with wanton cruelties, painful diseases, and death, but refuses to limit God's privileges in this sort with the children of his begetting.

The Bible and man's statutes forbid murder, adultery, fornication, lying, treachery, robbery, oppression and other crimes, but contend that God is free of these laws and has a right to break them when he will.

Introduction: Brent Wilkes

Twain also struggled with what he felt were gross inconsistencies in the Bible. That God could preach one behavior and then command just the opposite. In this next piece, Twain quotes from two books of the Bible, Numbers and Deuteronomy and then compares it to the Beatitudes, daring someone to preach both from the same pulpit.

Excerpts from “Letters from the Earth” regarding contradictions of the Scriptures Peter Berkrot

Will you examine the Deity's morals and disposition and conduct a little further? And will you remember that in the Sunday school the little children are urged to love the Almighty, and honor him, and praise him, and make him their model and try to be as like him as they can?

Let me read a bit from Numbers, Chapter 31

1 And the Lord spake unto Moses saying,

2 Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites; afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people.

7 And they warred against the Midianites, as the Lord commanded Moses; and they slew all the males.

8 And they slew the kings of Midian, besides the rest of them that were slain

9 And the children of Israel took all the women of the Midian captives and their little ones, and took the spoil of their cattle, and all their flocks and all their goods.

10 And they burnt all their cities wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles, with fire.

And this goes on and on for 47 verses

The biblical law says:

“Thou shalt not kill.”

The law of God planted in the heart of man at his birth says:

“Thou shalt kill.”

The chapter I have just quoted shows you that the book-statue is once more a failure. It cannot set aside the more powerful law of nature.

According to the belief of these people, it was God himself who said:

“Thou shalt not kill.”

Then it is plain that he cannot keep his own commandments.

He killed all those people—every male.

Would you expect this same conscienceless God, this moral bankrupt, to become a teacher of morals; of gentleness; of meekness; of righteousness; of purity? It looks impossible, extravagant; but listen to him. These are his own words;

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God.

And if you've studied your Bible you know the rest

The mouth that uttered these immense sarcasms, these giant hypocrisies, is the very same that ordered the wholesale massacre of the Midianitish men and babies and cattle; the wholesale destruction of house and city; the wholesale banishment of the virgins into an unspeakable slavery.

The Beatitudes and the quoted chapter from Numbers ought always to be read from the same pulpit together; then the congregation would get an all-around view of Our Father in Heaven. Yet not in a single instance have I ever known a clergyman to do this.

Introduction: Brent Wilkes

On a more comical note, Twain pokes fun at the process of getting into heaven. Here is an excerpt of a list of do's and don'ts for successfully passing through the pearly gates.

Excerpts from “Etiquette for the Afterlife” Peter Berkrot

In hell it is not good form to refer, even unostentatiously, to your relatives in heaven, if persons are present who have none there. . .

Upon arrival in heaven do not speak to St. Peter until spoken to. It is not your place to begin. . .

Wait patiently in the queue till it comes your turn to apply for a ticket. Do not look bored, and don't scratch your shin with the other foot.

When applying for a ticket, avoid trying to make conversation. St. Peter is hard-worked and has no time for conversation. If you must talk, let the weather alone. St. Peter cares not a damn for the weather. And don't ask him what time the 4:30 train goes; there aren't any trains in heaven, except the through-trains for the other place, and the less information about them, the better for you.

Don't tell him you used to have an uncle named after him, “maybe you've met him.” He is tired of that.

You can ask him for his autograph—there is no harm in that—but be careful and don't remark that it is one of the penalties of greatness. He has heard that before. . .

Do not try to Kodak him. Hell is full of people who have made that mistake.

If you get in——If you get in—don't tip him. That is publicly. Don't hand it to him, just leave a quarter on the bench by him, and let on you forgot it. If he bites it to see if it is good, you are not to seem to notice it.

Leave your dog outside. Heaven goes by favor. If it went by merit, you would stay out and the dog would go in.

Keep off the grass.

If you get seasick and feel you must lean over the bulwarks, don't do it, for those poor damned people down below have enough to bear without that.

When you meet a friend, don't volunteer to call on the rest of the family; it could be embarrassing.

Offering Story: Linda Wilkes

Mark Twain was of two minds about money. In his life he made a fortune and lost a fortune, more than once. He was born in poverty; he was wealthy at the age of fifty, bankrupt at sixty, and wealth again at seventy. His life story was a story of rags to riches, yet there was always a part of him, like Huckleberry Finn, more comfortable in rags.

Mark Twain gave a name to the materialistic age he lived in: “The Gilded Age.” He savagely satirized plutocrats in print. Yet one his best friends, Henry Rogers, was a millionaire.

Once when Mark Twain was in Bermuda on a vacation with Rogers, a Bermudian remarked to Twain, “Your friend Rogers is a good fellow. It’s a pity his money is tainted.”

“It’s twice tainted,” said Twain, nodding knowingly. “Tain’t yours, and tain’t mine.”

Tainted or not, the morning offering will now be given and received.

Offertory Anthem: Shall We Gather At The River, Copeland Choir

Introduction: Brent Wilkes

Mark Twain was a social activist of his day. The lynching of African Americans in his day appalled him. He wrote the “The United States of Lyncherdom” as a protest. He was an anti-imperialist, opposing the Spanish American War. He promoted the cause of Native Americans and decried their treatment. And, he was an activist against war.

In 1903, Twain wrote a piece called “The War Prayer,” an attack on enthusiasm for war so scathing that it would not be published until after his death. In it, young troops about to march off to battle gather in a church, where the minister prays for their victory.

But then a stranger enters, wearing a white robe, and tells the congregation he has been sent from God to say He has heard their prayer and is willing to grant it – but only after the messenger explains what it really means.

God has actually received two prayers from the group, the stranger says: the one that the preacher spoke, but also a second, silent one that was in their hearts when they asked for victory. Then the messenger puts the unspoken prayer into words:⁵

Excerpt: “The War Prayer” Peter Berkrot

“O Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts, go forth to battle—be thou near them! With them—in spirit—we also go forth from the sweet peace of our beloved firesides to smite the foe.

“O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of their guns with the wounded writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with their little children to wander un-friended through wastes of their desolated land in rags & hunger & thirst, sport of the sun-flames of summer & the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring Thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it—for our sakes, who adore Thee Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask of one who is the spirit of love & who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset, and seek His aid with humble & contrite hearts.

⁵ Ibid, p

Grant our prayer, O Lord, & Thine shall be the praise & honor & glory now & ever,
Amen.”

“Ye have prayed it; if ye still desire it, speak!—the messenger of the Most High waits.”

A Time for Prayer and Meditation Linda Wilkes

Please join me in a time for prayer and meditation. First a reading, then silent mediation, and finally singing together. Take a moment now to open your teal hymnal to # 1031, May I be filled With Loving Kindness and hold it in readiness.

Words of Clara Clemens

Clara Clemens wrote the following on the day her father, Mark Twain, died:

“He awoke with mental clarity and vigor but not inclined to converse. Then he dozed off. I was sitting by the bedside, when suddenly he opened his eyes, took my hand, and looked steadily into my face. Faintly, he murmured, ‘Goodbye, dear, if we meet’ After that he sank into sleep that deepened and possessed him wholly. While the sun dimmed, the great soul of Mark Twain melted into that speechless state of majesty and calm he had so fervently yearned for. His face was illumined with smiling peace.”

Silence

Musical Response: # 1031 Filled With Loving Kindness

Introduction: Brent Wilkes

In his later years, Mark Twain was one of the most sought after speakers of his time. The press sought his opinion on just about any issue. He dined with President Theodore Roosevelt near his seventieth birthday.

This last piece titled, “A Severely Moral Life” reflects on the need for an individual path in search of meaning and fulfillment. He has long eschewed institutionalized religion. Here, he talks about how you have to figure it out for yourself, chart your own course, and do your own thing. This talk was given to a group of insurance executives and you will note the reference that he makes to them.

Excerpts from “A Severely Moral Life” Peter Berkrot

I have had a great many birthdays in my time. I remember the first one very well, and I always think of it with indignation; everything was so crude, unaesthetic, primeval. Nothing like this at all. No proper appreciative preparation made; nothing really ready. Now, for a person born with high and delicate instincts—why, even the cradle wasn’t whitewashed—nothing ready at all. I hadn’t any hair, I hadn’t any teeth, I hadn’t any clothes, I had to go to my first banquet just like that. . . .

It’s a long stretch between that first birthday speech and this one. That was my cradle-song, and this is my swan-song, I suppose. I am used to swan-songs; I have sung them several times. . . .

I have achieved my seventy years in the usual way: by sticking strictly to a scheme of life which would kill anybody else. It sounds like an exaggeration, but that is really the common rule for attaining to old age. When we examine the programme of any of these garrulous old people we always find that the habits which have preserved them would have decayed us; that the way of life which enabled them to live upon the property of their heirs so long. . . would have put us out of commission ahead of time. I will offer here, as a sound maxim, this: that we can’t reach old age by another man’s road. . . . We have no permanent habits until we are forty. Then they begin to harden, presently they petrify, then business begins. Since forty I have been regular about going to bed and getting up—and that is one of the main things. I have made it a rule to go to bed when

there wasn't anybody left to sit up with; and I have made it a rule to get up when I had to. This has resulted in an unswerving regularity of irregularity. It has saved me sound, but it would injure another person.

In the matter of diet—which is another main thing—I have been persistently strict in sticking to the things which didn't agree with me until one or the other of us got the best of it. Until lately I got the best of it myself. But last spring I stopped frolicking with mince pie after midnight; up to then I had always believed it wasn't loaded. For thirty years I have taken coffee and bread at eight in the morning, and no bite nor sup until seven thirty in the evening. Eleven hours. That is all right for me, and is wholesome, because I have never had a headache in my life, but headachy people would not reach seventy comfortably by that road, and they would be foolish to try it. And I wish to urge upon you this—which I think is wisdom—that if you find that if you can't make seventy by any but an uncomfortable road, don't you go. When they take off the Pullman and retire you to the rancid smoker, put on your things, count your checks, and get out at the first way station where there's a cemetery.

I have made it a rule never to smoke more than one cigar at a time. I have no other restrictions as regards smoking. I do not know just when I began to smoke, I only know that it was in my father's lifetime, and that I was discreet. He passed from this life early in 1847, when I was a shade past eleven; ever since then I have smoked publicly. As an example to others, and not that I care for moderation myself, it has always been my rule never to smoke when asleep, and never to refrain when awake. It is a good rule. I mean, for me; but some of you know quite well that it wouldn't answer for everybody that's trying to get to seventy. . . .

As for drinking, I have no rule about that. When the others drink I like to help; otherwise I remain dry, by habit and preference. This dryness does not hurt me, but it could easily hurt you, because you are different. You let it alone. . . .

I have never taken any exercise, except sleeping and resting, and I never intend to take any. Exercise is loathsome. And it cannot be any benefit when you are tired; and I was always tired. But let another person try my way and see where he will come out.

I desire now to repeat and emphasize that maxim: We can't reach old age by another man's road. My habits protect my life, but they would assassinate you.

I have lived a severely moral life. But it would be a mistake for other people to try that, or for me to recommend it. Very few would succeed: you have to have a perfectly colossal stock of morals; and you can't get them on a margin; you have to have the whole thing and put them in your box. Morals are an acquirement—like music, like a foreign language, like piety, poker paralysis—no man is born with them. I wasn't myself, I started poor. I hadn't a single moral. There is hardly a man in this house that is poorer than I was then. Yes, I started like that—the world before me, not a moral in the slot. Not even an insurance moral. I can remember the first one I ever got. I can remember the landscape, the weather, the—I can remember how everything looked. It was an old moral, and old second hand moral, all out of repair, and it didn't fit anyway. But if you are careful with a thing like that, and keep it in a dry place and save it for processions, and Chautauquas, and World's Fairs, and so on, and disinfect it now and then, and give it a fresh coat of whitewash once in a while, you will be surprised to see how well she will last and how long she will keep sweet, or at least inoffensive. When I got that moldy old moral, she had stopped growing, because she hadn't any exercise; but I worked her hard, I worked her Sunday's and all. Under this cultivation she waxed in might and stature beyond belief, and served me well and was my pride and joy for sixty three years; then she got to associating with insurance presidents, and lost flesh and character, and was a sorrow to look at and no longer competent for business. She was a great loss to me. . . . Threescore and ten!

It is the scriptural statute of limitations. After that, you owe no active duties; for you the strenuous life is over. You are a time expired man, to use Kipling's military phrase; you have served your term, well or less well, and you are mustered out. You are become an honorary member of the republic, you are emancipated, compulsions are not for you, nor any bugle call but "lights out."

. . . But I am seventy; seventy, and would nestle in the chimney-corner, and smoke my pipe, and read my book, and take my rest, wishing you well in all affection, and that when you in return shall arrive at pier No. 70 you may step aboard your waiting ship with a reconciled spirit, and lay your course toward the sinking sun with a contented heart.

**Closing Hymn: #162 Gonna Lay Down My Sword and Shield
Linda introduces**

Go down to lectern level to prepare to extinguish the chalice.

Closing Words Brent Wilkes

Mark Twain searched for meaning in life his own way. He challenged many of the morals upon which he was raised. He questioned. He mocked. He satirized. Much of this he did with great humor. I'm not sure that he ever found that place of spiritual contentment. But, he certainly lived a fascinating life trying.

May we all continue our own search with a keener eye and a sharper wit. Amen.

On Floor/ Extinguish the Chalice Linda Wilkes

Please join me in reciting the words for extinguishing our chalice. They can be found in your order of service.

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community,
or the fire of commitment.

These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Postlude