

July 23, 2017 Sermon by Rochelle Lockridge - [Unity Church-Unitarian](#), St. Paul, MN

Dancing with The Divine – A Process Theology

Newsletter Abstract: As Unitarians, we respect and honor the many paths toward enlightenment that are available to each individual. It is not a “one size fits all”. But Ballroom Dancing? Join worship leader Rochelle Lockridge and worship associate Bob Peskin as they explore the journey of enlightenment through the unfolding partnership with The Divine.

INTRO:

Why did you get up, get dressed and come to church this morning? Why do the [Fairlanes](#) come together and make the music that they do? Why am I up here at the pulpit preaching about the divine inspiration that ballroom dancing has provided? It's because we want an experience of transformation, hope, renewal, and connection to the divine, to be inspired, to understand life in a new way, and we can't do it alone. I hope that by the end of the service, we will all be moved to action by something new we experience here this morning.

DANCING WITH GOD:

I remember that day. It came out of a lack of integrity within and an attempt at aligning my heart and soul to the TRUTH. I was taking an energetic fitness walk through my suburban neighborhood. I'm coming down the hill on Snowshoe Lane. It's a beautiful Fall day. I'm contemplating life, a general inquiry into my state of being- A walking meditation of sorts. When all of the sudden I am struck with this thought, I want to “Dance with God”. What? Dance with God? What does that mean? My mind didn't get it, but the notion and sensations in my body, rang true. And this was at least three years before I ever stepped foot into a dance studio.

I really didn't know what this meant. I wanted to free myself of the bungee cords, my attachments to my past and automatic habitual reactions to life. I wanted to be able to listen, sense, respond, not just react. There was a super magnet pull on my heart to be in harmony with what IS. And somehow the image of dancing with God just fit. So much so, that the tagline on my mediation app profile became, “Practicing to dance with God.”

Then a few years later, ballroom dancing found ME. I thought I was just looking for a fun way to motivate myself toward better physical fitness by joining a group exercise class. That first night, when I accidentally walked into and embarrassed myself in an intermediate West Coast Swing class, I had no idea I was about to embark upon a physical manifestation of this “Dancing with God” thing.

A year later I found myself struggling with the decision to leave [my spiritual development group](#), [the Diamond Approach](#). After 20 years as a devoted student, I realized I couldn't afford the time,

It doesn't have to be the same note or in unison rhythm with me or the people sitting next to you. But... if what you've chosen feels off, experiment with another note. Keep experimenting until you find an alignment with the Hu, your heart, and those around you.

[\[Start Hu chant\]](#)

I hope that some of you felt it... What a group of Swedish researchers at the University of Gothenberg discovered in 2013. That singers in a choir unconsciously coordinate their breathing patterns, which leads to synchronized heart rates, especially during slow chanting. What did it feel like in your bodies to be in harmony? To be aligned? To feel in integrity with the moment?

[Pause for reflective feeling.]

I am sincerely glad that you chose to be here this morning, to share this moment of connection with one another.

PROCESS THEOLOGY:

Hmmm.... This "WE"... WE can't do it alone... I can't do it alone. And quite frankly, I don't want to do it alone. I want to be in partnership with others, I want to be in partnership with The Divine. But wait! That's blasphemous! Isn't God supposed to be the, patriarchal, all knowing, all powerful father and white guy with the long beard up in the sky who runs the show? Aren't I supposed to be the obedient child, passively following THE leader. And I'm contemplating a 50:50 partnership? I don't think so! "He's" in charge.

What a conundrum for those of us who found ourselves indoctrinated into a conservative religious faith as children. While my family of origin had a strong aversion to organized religion, I found myself, at the age of seven, hitching a ride into town to attend Sunday school at a Baptist church. Then as a teenager, the lure of singing in a church choir with my friends, (hmmm common theme.. That's what drew me to Unity....), landed me in a Nazarene church. Their religiously conservative theology became a part of how I knew myself and interacted in the world.

But that eye-opener, that wanting to "Dance with God" revelation I had on that brisk Fall walk was unraveling my childhood views of God. That white guy in the sky who I was to obey was no longer working for me. I didn't feel that God was in charge of it all. It just didn't make sense when bad things happened. If God was all powerful and loving, how could he let bad things happen? My theology evolved, my mind reasoned that people could act on their own free will. That when we aren't aware of our oneness, our EGOS take charge and we can do "bad" things to others and our planet. One concept rationalized; but what about this equality piece? That was a real stickler.

Then I heard one of our co-ministers refer, in a sermon one Sunday morning, to a theological concept called, [Process Theology](#). The lights went off. The bells started ringing. That's it! You mean there is a name for what I've been feeling and experiencing? Other people think this way too?

A few days later in her office she not only confirmed that I'm okay, that my views weren't blasphemous, she shared with me a book by [Catherine Keller: "On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process"](#). I voraciously read the book, with a bible in one hand and my mobile device in the other for vocabulary and Wikipedia research. Almost in passing, she often draws upon supporting evidence for her arguments that I have no reference in which to relate.

Yes, this is what I believe. This is ringing true for me. God unfolding, all of creation held in the "arms" of love. Living in an unfolding now.

Some Being in the sky in charge of it all? Predestination? Nope, doesn't fit anymore.

LEAD & FOLLOW:

Time to shift back to the physical manifestation of all of this heady stuff. In the ballroom dance world a choreographed dance (a predestined experience, if you will) with my partner isn't my cup of tea. I enjoy the improvisational nature of social dancing. The dance is being created in every moment, with every new partner, every new song, every new dance floor, and every new night. There's infinite potential unfolding. How exciting is that! Living in the moment, dancing with the intention of discovering harmony with your partners on the dancefloor.

[Argentine Tango, a partner dance I'm obsessed with these days](#), incorporates a structure that lives this out wonderfully. The [Tango Tanda](#) is a string of three to five songs that are danced together at tango [dance parties called Milongas](#). Dancing the set provides an opportunity to learn how to dance comfortably and enjoyably with each new partner. It acknowledges the need and acceptance of the process to find alignment and harmony with your partners. A dance-in-progress looks something like this:

*Song 1: Get to know one another, the music, and the dance floor.

*Song 2: Practice and try things out.

*Song 3: Time to DANCE!

*[Cortina](#): A short song segment played at the end of each Tanda; letting you know it is complete and time to find a new partner.

I love these words from my Argentine Tango coach: *"I dance my dance, you dance your dance, we dance with each other, the music, and the room."*

ON LEADING AND FOLLOWING:

Remember that uneasy feeling I mentioned earlier about the discomfort of wanting to experience a 50:50 relationship Dancing with the Divine? Wanting to "free myself of the bungee

cords of my past and automatic habitual reactions to life. Wanting to listen, sense and respond, not just react.”

Dance has shown me that the more we bring to the now, as individuals, released from those bungee cords of our history and past wounds, the freer we are to experience authentic harmony and create the MOST beautiful dance possible in each moment. It’s not just 50:50 I’m after. And it’s not the 0:100 submissive following required of my childhood theology. It’s an equal, full potentiated 100:100.

As a follow, who’s been learning to lead ballroom dances over the last year, I’ve become aware of the different qualities a follow can bring to a dance partnership: Some helpful, some not so helpful.

1. *Passive/submissive*: When a follow is mostly “mushy”, doing the steps, but there’s not much of a sense of dancing together.

2. *Back leading/trying to do it all on our own*: The follower knows the steps, anticipates the leaders next move and moves herself. Often pushing and pulling her partner to do what she thinks they are supposed to do next.

3. *Active/responsive*: This is when I feel we are truly dancing together. Both the lead and follow know the steps. They are aware and attuned to one another, the music, and the dance floor. The lead invites. The follow actively engages in response to the leads invitation to take the next step. The lead invites again.

CONCLUSION:

[Martha Graham, an icon of modern dance](#), in our reading said:

“There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression is unique.... You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep yourself open and aware to the urges that motivate you. Keep the channel open.”

Just like on that walk five years ago, my inquiry continues. Am I keeping those channels open? Where is my “Dance with the Divine” taking me today?

I mentioned that I’ve been learning to lead over the past year. And last week.... While practicing to [lead a twinkle](#) with my dance practice partner, (I still giggle at the name of this basic Waltz and Foxtrot step.) she let me know that she felt we had lost our connection. “I don’t mean physically, I mean emotionally. I didn’t feel you were there.” Sure enough, I had been concentrating so hard on how to execute the step, the fact that I was dancing with a living, breathing human being with feelings and emotions had fallen off my radar. I adjusted. We

started again. And I can't tell you how different the feeling was. We were dancing. Really dancing together, and it was only one step.

Then In a recent lesson with my private teacher, I initiated a step and he hesitated. I asked, "Why did you hesitate when I lead the move?"

"I didn't feel that you were committed."

I started asking, "Where else in my life are these scenarios possibly being played out?"

My recent endeavor to become a high school chemistry teacher is one possible place. Allowing myself to live out and express fully my personal values in my future classrooms has been tough to wrap my head around. My version of [Unitarianism](#) includes a deep-seated belief in not imposing my values on others. But maybe I could use these dance related experiences to approach this challenge as one in which I am making a clear invitation to join me. I'm not imposing anything. But I am clear and committed in myself and my invitation to join with me is clear. Not "mushy" or disconnected.

I invite you to be open to what is emerging in and around you. Be attentive to the leads being given, invitations to dance your dance with the divine. Inquire, respond, actively follow. Find harmony and align with the unfolding potential that is now.

May it be so. And amen.

Service Supporting Readings:

Responsive Reading:

Try to Love the Questions Themselves

By [Rainer Maria Rilke](#), translated by Stephen Mitchell

Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart

and try to love the questions themselves

as if they were locked rooms

or books written in a very foreign language.

Don't search for the answers,

which could not be given to you now,

because you would not be able to live them.

And the point is, to live everything.

Live the questions now.

Perhaps then, someday far in the future,

you will gradually, without even noticing it,

live your way into the answer.

Prayer:

Adapted from: [Part of a Larger Life](#) By [John Saxon](#) + [Prayer of Co-Creation](#) By [Lyn Cox](#)

Creative spirit, source of life and love:

We don't know who or what you are or even whether you can be called a who or what. Our words fail us. Our minds fail us when we ponder the enormity, diversity, complexity, wonder, and beauty of the universe and this world. And yet we sense, more than know, that our lives are part of a larger Life, that we are indeed connected with everyone and everything in one interdependent web of being, and that there is something, both immanent and transcendent,

that nurtures and sustains our lives and Life itself: something that calls us and all life to greater wholeness and harmony.

We give thanks this morning for the beauty of this day and for the company of those assembled here.

Thank you for the breezes of change, clearing our heads and bringing fresh ideas. May they cleanse our minds of the oppressions and isms that divide us.

Thank you for the flame of hope, the heat of righteous anger, the warmth of compassion, and the fire of commitment. May they bubble the cauldrons of transformation.

Thank you for oceans of love, rivers of connection, tears of relief, and pools of serenity. May healing waters flow over us and through us and among us, wearing down the sharp rocks of despair to bring joy in the morning.

Thank you for the good earth beneath us, around us, and within us. May we take this clay and co-create a new realm of justice and beauty.

Thank you for all these and more. We accept our gifts and commit to building, sculpting, painting, singing, and dancing them to life; to abundant life.

So be it. Blessed be. Amen.

Reading 1:

[Our mutual immersion](#)

By *[K Balachandran](#)*

You are cyclic like
the change of seasons
in your reinvention;
robust is your passion,
a mountain brook
that embraces hills
plains, fields and ravines
without any restriction.

Instantly you would imbibe
any message, air, wind or water

sends through flashes of intimations,
nature's child you are, a woman
in sync with the moon in your veins
and the sun that seeks you from my loins.

I only follow the music your heart strings play
that in my psyche resonates, every moment,
it makes easy navigation in this planet my right.

You and I move through the waves rowing
shoulder to shoulder, singing spiritedly barcaroles.
The feminine in me is under your tender care,
I let my masculine self be in communion with yours,
all merging in harmoniously, resulting in only ONE.

Reading 2:

As quoted in *The Life and Work of [Martha Graham](#)* by [Agnes de Mille](#)

“There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all of time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and it will be lost. The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine how good it is nor how valuable nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly, to keep the channel open. You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep yourself open and aware to the urges that motivate you. Keep the channel open.”

Benediction:

[BLESSED IS THE PATH](#) By [Eric Williams](#)

Blessed is the path on which you travel.
Blessed is the body that carries you upon it.
Blessed is your heart that has heard the call.
Blessed is your mind that discerns the way.

Blessed is the gift that you will receive by going.

Truly blessed is the gift that you will become on the journey.

May you go forth in peace.