



God

The life of a congregation is a rich community tapestry of people, programs, ministries and worship. We lift up the patterns of this tapestry at Unity Church with the threads of monthly themes woven through our worship and programming. These themes deepen our understanding of our own faith and strengthen our bonds with one another in religious community. We explore each theme in worship and in our newsletter; in covenant groups, guided writing sessions and Wednesday evening programming; and in our community outreach ministries, our literary journal and programs, and many other opportunities. The February theme is God.

In the biblical story, Jacob is sleeping outside in the desert alone when a stranger approaches. He and this stranger—God in disguise—wrestle all night. No one wins this wrestling match. It ends in a draw. As dawn breaks, God renames the exhausted Jacob, Israel which means "the one who strives with God," and gives Jacob a blessing. However, Jacob's hip is hurt is the wrestling match. God leaves him with a permanent injury. Jacob, now known as Israel, walks with a limp for the rest of his days.

Wrestling with God carries with it great risk as well as the potential for blessing and transformation. Maybe that is why we Unitarian Universalists are sometimes hesitant to wrestle with God.

God can be a tricky topic for us. It is not a word that comes up in coffee hour conversation. This *commUNITY* will probably use the word God more often than the previous year's worth of issues combined. In some of our churches, speaking "God" during worship can cause tension and conflict. We hesitate to say God, not wanting to cause discomfort to ourselves or others, not wanting others to assume that we believe in the God that so often appears in our culture, the God that is invoked to justify hatred, oppression, and discrimination.

When Unitarian Universalist minister Forrest Church, who served All Souls Church in New York City, encountered people who said, "I don't believe in God," he always responded, "tell me about the God you don't believe in. I probably don't believe in that God either." When we do believe in God, it is not the old bearded man on a cloud. Our God is harder to describe than that.

Somehow, music makes the wrestling easier. We regularly sing about God. Maybe music turns our wrestling into dancing. In January, we sang that "sisters and brothers anointed by God may then create peace" in the hymn *We'll Build a Land*. We sang of the "God of our weary years, God of our silent tears" in *Lift Every Voice and Sing*. Every week at the Wellspring Wednesday worship service, we sing that "what we know about God is a piece of the truth."

What we know about God is a piece of the truth, a truth that comes from wrestling, lost sleep, and transformation. Some of us know that there is a God; some of us know that there isn't. Some of us take comfort in the belief that we cannot possibly know the full truth of God.

We wrestle with where God is and is not. Some of us know that God is especially present in places we hold sacred—nature, places of pilgrimage, holy sites. Some of us believe that God is everywhere, even at the SuperAmerica, the landfill, the nuclear power plant. Others see God's absence in certain parts of our world, in situations of violence, suffering, and oppression. "Can God be part of pain?" we cry out, echoing the generations before us who also wrestled with this issue.

We wrestle with how to describe the God we believe in. For some of us, traditional language obscures God; for others, using the words that others have spoken for generations is illuminating. We use analogies, symbols, and metaphors in our attempt to get a firmer grasp on God. God is love. God is a still small voice. God is a fractal. God is in relationship. God is a process. God is a friend. God is mystery. God is unknowable. God is found when we stop to think about God. God is creation and transition.

In the month ahead, and in all months ahead, may we wrestle with God. May we dance with God. May we strive with God. And may we emerge transformed.

— Rachel Lonberg
Hallman Ministerial Intern

God Resources

BOOKS

Old Turtle by Douglas Wood is a children's book in which animals, rocks, water, and trees argue about the nature of God.

For Lovers of God Everywhere: Poems of the Christian Mystics edited by Roger Housden is a collection of poems from the Christian mystical tradition, spanning the Eastern and Western church and ancient and contemporary sources.

I and Thou by Martin Buber lays out a framework for deep and meaningful relationship between people and between people and God deeply rooted in the Talmudic tradition. The epilogue is especially recommended.

MUSIC

A Love Supreme, by John Coltrane, is an album-long, beautiful, complex hymn of praise.

MOVIES

Oh God!, a 1977 movie in which God appears to an assistant grocery store manager and asks him to spread a message. Hilarity ensues.