

**The First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia**  
A Unitarian Universalist congregation established in 1797



***Wehltam fo Lepsog Eht***  
*A Poetic Passion Play*

Sunday, March 16, 2008



*Worship Associates*

**Lesley Anderson** has studied comparative religion throughout her life, and describes herself as a mystic, a poet, a painter, as well as a singer and a songwriter. She does healing work through readings, Reiki and meditation groups, and says she is looking for new ways to express spiritual seeking and finding in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

**Virginia DeRolf, M.Div.** is a Unitarian Universalist rooted in liberal Christianity. The Bible stories learned in her childhood continue to illumine and inspire her life. As she matured in her spirituality, the myths, legends and stories of all cultures called to her. Virginia believes strongly in the power of shared story to inform and transform individual and collective understanding. She is thrilled to be participating in *Wehltam fo Lepsog Eht* for its fresh perspectives contained in a retelling of an ancient story.

**Katie Ford, M.Div. , MFA,** is new to Philadelphia and new to Unitarian worship. Her roots are in Norwegian Lutheranism. She is a poet teaching at Franklin & Marshall College, and has written two books, *Deposition* and *Colosseum*. In the first, she wrote poems attending to each of the Stations of the Cross. Living in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, her second book is about modern forms of ruin--governmental, environmental, and in individual lives. She doesn't know what to feel about Easter and is grateful to be a part of this worship service.

**Kimya Imani Jackson, Ph.D.,** loves being a member of The First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia because it's where she can grow and serve. She was born in Champaign, Illinois and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. In Philadelphia (her new home), she works as a gerontologist and professional dance artist. Her most favorite things in the world are Velcro, candy corns, and Hello Kitty.



**Processional**

All Children are invited to gather in the back of the sanctuary for the Spiral Dance

**Call to Worship**

“All Our Relations”  
Adapted by the writings of Ulali

- Nate: Good morning! (Good morning). Our call to worship comes from the writings of Ulali, entitled “All Our Relations.”
- Kimya: We dedicate this day to our Elders who teach us of creation, who teach us of our past, so we may preserve Mother Earth for ancestors yet to come” we are the land.
- Leslie: We dedicate this time to our relatives before us, thousands of years ago, and to the one hundred and fifty million who were exterminated across the western hemisphere in the first 400 years time, since 1492.
- Katie: To those who have kept their homeland, and to the nations extinct due to genocide, slavery, deportation and disease unknown to them, and to the ones who are subjected to the same treatment today.
- Virginia: To the ones who have survived the relocation, and the ones who perished along the way. To those who carried on traditions and live strong among their people. To those who left their communities, by force or by choice, and for generations who no longer know who they are.
- Kimya: To those who search and never find. To those that turn away from the so called non-accepted. To those that bring us together, and to those living outside, keeping touch, the voice for many.
- Leslie: To those who make it back, to live and fight, the struggle of their people. To those who give up, and those who do not care. To those who abuse themselves and others, and those who revive themselves again. To those who are physically, mentally or spiritually incapable, by accident or birth.
- Katie: To those who seek strength in spirituality, and those who exploit it, even our own.
- Virginia: To those who fall for the lies, and join the dividing line that keep us fighting amongst each other.
- Kimya: To the outsiders who step in, good or bad, and to those of us who don't know better.

Leslie: To the leaders and prisoners of war, politics, crime, race, and religion,  
innocent or guilty.

Katie: To the young, the old, the living, and the dead, to our brothers and sisters  
and all living things across Mother Earth, and her beauty we have  
destroyed and denied the honor that the Creator has given each  
individual...

Nate: In the name of *all our relations*, we say simply,

All: Welcome home.

### **Dedicating the Chalice**

### **Welcoming Visitors**

### **Sharing of Names**

### **Meditation**

### **Shared Responsibility**

### **Poetic Passion Play**

Performed by Lesley Anderson, Virginia DeRolf,  
Katie Ford and Kimya Jackson with music by Jan  
Jeffries

### **Extinguishing the Chalice**

*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.*

### **Benediction**

### **Postlude**

All invited to dance with drums



### **Greeters**

Amy Fraatz and Ginny Beier

### **Ushers**

Mark Pryzby and Paul Vazuka

### **Flowers**

In loving memory of Ned's father, Ted Motley, on his birthday, March 22, 1914.

## Introduction

The following poem, *Wehltam fo Lepsog Eht*, consists of 13-stanzas, which retell Matthew's gospel from the Christian New Testament. The letters within each name were reversed in order to tell the story without any religious language (see Table 1). Each stanza in the poem uses a particular poetic form (Table 2) to emulate the chiasmic structure found in the book of Matthew (Table 3).

Table 1. Name Translation		
Name	Reversal	Pronunciation
Jesus	Suseg	Sue-Sage
Messiah	<i>Haissem</i>	Ha-Seam
Christ	Tsirch	Tis-ear-ick
Emmanuel	Leunamme	Loo-Nammy
The Gospel of Matthew	Wehltam fo Lepsog Eht	Way-tam foe Lep-Sog Eight

Table 2. Poetic Forms [ <sup>1</sup> ]	
Allegory	A story, character, happening that has another meaning.
Chant	Poem of no fixed form where one or more lines are repeated over and over. Chants will be used for the prelude and the epilogue.
Ballad	Originated as a folk song that tells stories about fatal relationships. In this poem four-lined ballads with rhymes will be used at the end of every-other line. Ballads will be used for the narrative sections of the chiasm.
Blank Verse	Poems without lines that end in rhymes are inseparably joined to drama and storytelling. This poem will use 10 syllable lines. Verse will be used for the five discourses (table 3).
Ode	An ode is a lyric poem that addresses a thing or a person not present. These four-lined rhymes close with a shortened last line. Each ode will express a parable, distinguishing chapter 14 as the heart of the chiasm.

Table 3. Chiasmic Structure of the Gospel of Matthew [ <sup>2</sup> ]							
Form	Content	Chapters					
A Prologue	Infancy	1-2					
B Narrative	First appearance in Galilee		3-4				
C Discourse 1	Sermon on the Mount			5-7			
D Narrative	Ten miracle stories				8-9		
E Discourse 2	Mission of the twelve					10	
F Narrative	Growing opposition						11-12
G Discourse 3	Parables						13
F Narrative	Miracles and discipleship						14-17
E Discourse 4	Community order and discipline					18	
D Narrative	Journey to Jerusalem				19-23		
C Discourse 5	Little Apocalypse			24-25			
B Narrative	Passion story		26-27				
A Epilogue	Resurrection; great commission	28					

<sup>1</sup> Padgett, R. The teachers & writers handbook of poetic forms. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2000. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative.

<sup>2</sup> Duling, D.C. The New Testament: History, Literature and Social Context. 22003, Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth.

## **Wehltam fo Lepsog Eht**

*A Poetic Passion Play*

By Nathan C. Walker

### **Infancy**

( ) now the birth took place in this way  
Still cries: ancestors of Susej the *Haissem*

Born to lost woman from desert tribe  
Still cries: ancestors of Susej the *Haissem*

*Leunamme* her name - with us today  
Still cries: ancestors of Susej the *Haissem*

Many diseased but one child survives  
Still cries: ancestors of Susej the *Haissem*

The *Haissem* is born – prepare the way  
Still cries: ancestors of Susej the *Haissem*

### **Emerge**

still she lies beneath the water  
silence pierces pain, stains now released  
Susej the *Haissem* breaches for air  
hearing faintly: with you i am

well pleased she fasts for forty days  
‘til tricks of the mountain lurk near  
for the mirror of those who lived  
do tempt her native way. she says

not here while my people suffer  
not here where we wail and wallow  
slaves to oil slaves to bottles  
yes they hear and great crowds follow

### **Message**

From the stark plateau the shaman chief  
Nurtures the poor, the hungry, the meek  
The pure of heart come from miles away  
Following signals of smoke, longing

For the day to be at-one with all  
Who mourn all who cry let her rise  
From barren lands and say, forgive  
The warriors who intrude forbid  
Not those different from you mother speaks  
Simply then returns to the bare remains

### **Heal**

of despair to a people slain  
diseased broken by dice crippled  
paralyzed while two men lay blind  
from pesticides in migrant fields

crowds triple as *Leunamme* heals  
saying, rise up, nothing is owed  
to you or to me we are one  
with the earth with our enemies

rise from your knees bring me the child  
bring me our elder's last bloodline  
listen, we cannot trade your tears  
for giggles or your pain for joy  
but laugh at fear's oasis watch it

### **Quest**

Evaporate in the deserts the quest begins  
Serving as one they must mend their sorrow  
They must ease the quaking bitterness  
By relieving the resentment that  
Plagues the heart and foretells of danger

### **Nightfall**

that eve she makes clear if the way  
is followed one's burden will sooth  
all that corrodes the mind await  
the time when by force countries will

contest and betray their own laws  
so walk gently my friends wisdom  
smiles at him and knows no bounds  
let this be written in our veins

no one can deny love was born  
the night when spirit and earth rose  
from the blaze of those who soar  
from the hot plains to cool plateaus

### **Riddles**

happy the child whose seeds of true love  
sew kinship, life's returning echoes  
reaping the everlasting beauty  
of the thornless rose

blessed are those whose wisdom dances  
on the curt pulse of the grieving heart  
taming wild passions one waits, listens  
and then never parts

happy the child sent as a shaman  
whose prophecies written by scribes  
returns not as honored woman  
not in her own tribe

### **Trust**

from solitude the medicine  
woman on lake went further out  
giving thanks to creation while  
reflecting she asks herself why

did you doubt your worth and your gifts  
for healing the maimed were made whole  
the blind now see, the lame walk strong  
settle now, breathe crisp air for the

prophecy is clear: the pale man will kill  
and rape with inked pen powerful  
will question our native way but  
on the third moon i too will rise

### **Vision**

through your words and be relived through your deeds  
when you gather one two three in my name  
Susej the *Haissem Leunamme* calling  
the ancient mother earth dancing howling  
she transcends his politics and pride

### **Passage**

that justify stripping her truth  
through waterboarding no more lies  
from on high the greatest knows to  
embrace the broken as oneself

for there is but a simple and  
honorable goal – protect life  
for many are called yet few choose  
to love as if this is their last

words threaten the chief who rides  
the sky with stealth jets, such hypocrites!  
*Susej, Tsihc* will not tell  
by what authority she speaks

### **Reveal**

she is mother she's wisdom joy and pride  
combined her prophecies prevail: nation  
will rise against nation lightning coming  
from the east – flashes as far as the west  
neon comes at an unexpected hour  
until then the calm creator knows when  
i was sick and crippled on my knees you  
nurtured you replenished me when i was  
without shelter you built a fire for  
warmth this i know matters as time draws near

### **Extinguish**

come our last meal together give  
thanks honor those who came before  
do this for them for you for me  
waiting to be forced on scabbed knees

drink once more avenge not they know  
not what they have been killing for  
on her right and on her left the  
cries of ancestors can be heard

no more. bodies. darkness. ashes  
to ash, dust. to trust that she will  
soon rise with the *Leunamme* moon  
calling us calling us calling

## Commission

( ) now her death took place in this way  
Still cries: ancestors of Susej the *Haissem*

One clear desert night when red met white  
Still cries: ancestors of Susej the *Haissem*

*Leunamme* her name - with us today  
Still cries: ancestors of Susej the *Haissem*

Vengeance eclipsed and yet she survived  
Still cries: ancestors of Susej the *Haissem*

*Haissem* calls us to prepare the way  
i am with you always, to the end  
of the age

