

PROGRAM OF SECOND UNOSZ VIRTUAL SERVICE
January 30, 2021

Hosted by Zsófia Sztranyiczki, Executive Director, IWC

Organ Music: *Prelude in Classic Style* by Gordon Young
Dr. Imre István Strausz, organist and senior lecturer, Marosvásárhely

Opening Words/Program Presentation: Rev. Júlia Jobbágy, Assistant Minister,
First Church Kolozsvár

Greetings: Csilla Dimény, UNOSZ president

1st song (#352 in the U.S. hymnal): “Find a Stillness”
Hajnal Imola Szabó, music director of the Bolyai St. Unitarian Church in
Marosvásárhely (vocal and organ)

Prayer: Rev. Adél Nagy, Unitarian Church of Recsenyéd

2nd song (#255 in the Hungarian hymnal): “*Merj, élni merj, föld gyermeke...*”
(Hungarian setting of the poem “Go Forth to Life” by Samuel Longfellow)

Sermon: “With or For”
Rev. Ágnes Zita Péterfi, Unitarian Church of Sepsiszentgyörgy

Organ Music: Tomaso Albinoni’s *Adagio*
Dr. Strausz

Closing Hymn: “**Come sing a song ...**” (In Hungarian and English)
Ms. Szabó and Dr. Strausz

Closing words: Rev. Jobbágy

Greetings by Csilla Dimény, UNOSZ President

January 30, 2020

Dear Sisters, Dear All!

I greet you all in the name of love. I am grateful that 2020 is behind us! The past year challenged our strength and faith, but at the same time it offered the gift of time to reflect on ourselves and to spend precious moments with our loved ones. We are grateful for the spark of hope which gives us the strength to plan, to dream, and be confident that soon we will be able to meet in person.

One of the most important messages of the year ahead is that we only discover true freedom when we are able to confront our fears and live our lives strengthened in our faith.

Tests and tasks will always be part of our life, but it is up to us whether we choose to feel fear or to believe in God and in the power of love. We are living through a period when we all experience similar struggles, and we all try to find the best and safest path in our journey.

I wish for each of us to walk on the path of faith, courage, love, compassion, peace, and hope. Let us believe that everything happens for a reason and for a goal; and that every event or happening serves to fortify us spiritually. This power, the power of love, light, and hope, helps us on our life path, “for God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” (2 Timothy 1:7)

May God’s rich blessing and caring love be in the lives of all of us this year!

Prayer by Rev. Adél Nagy, Recsenyéd Unitarian Church

We come together in this virtual space that for many of us is so unknown, so intangible. A space in which we are still learning to get around, and search for possibilities to connect with others. This has been our home in the past months, the path that led to each other. We are so different, yet we are so much alike.

Thank you, God, for making this virtual space holy and in this encounter today You make your presence felt. Our rooms, personal spaces become sanctuaries for the moment given and though we are grateful for online opportunities, we are so much longing to finally meet with each other physically, to hold each other's hands, and to dive in each other's gaze. And we strongly believe that this day will soon come.

When loneliness and despair besieged us, You were our hope and inspiration and You whispered in our ears to move forward. We are grateful for that.

Please, continue to walk with us on the path of this journey inward. Let us see the little joys in each and every moment and stay with us in times of sorrow.

You created us from the dust of love and gifted us with talents, so that we will always have the capacity to love and to nurture, to heal and to help, to dream and to create, to never sit still and move forward.

Let us understand these times of trouble and chaos and uncertainty, let us see the possibilities these days offer and carry the responsibilities we have with strength and wisdom. Give us the capacity to share the dreams, the visions, the hope we foster and help us truly believe that our mission is to make this world a better place.

Embrace us so that we can embrace others.

Love us so that we can love others dearly.

Shape us so that we can shape the world surrounding us.

Heal us so that we have the power to heal others.

Inspire us so that we can become a source of inspiration for others.

Comfort us so that we can comfort others. Amen.

2nd song (#255 in the Hungarian hymnal) – “*Merj, élni merj, föld gyermeke...*”
(Hungarian setting of the poem “Go Forth to Life” by Samuel Longfellow)

Go Forth to Life

by Samuel Longfellow

Go forth to life, O child of earth,
Remembering still thy heavenly birth,
Thou art not here for ease or sin,
But manhood's noble crown to win.

Though passion's fires be in thy soul,
Thy spirit can their flames control;
Though tempters should beset thy way,
Thy spirit is more strong than they.

Go on from innocence of youth
To manly pureness, manly truth;
God's angels still are near to save,
And God himself doth help the brave.

Then forth to life, O child of earth!
Be worthy of thy heavenly birth!
For noble service thou art here;
Thy brothers help, thy God revere!

“With or For”

Text: Luke 10:38-42

Sermon Delivered By Rev. Ágnes Zita Péterfi, Sepsiszentgyörgy Unitarian Church

At the Home of Martha and Mary

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

It may be unbelievable, but nowadays the Bible is still a bestseller, meaning that it is still selling in large numbers all around the globe. We are talking about a book which never ceases to amaze us: it seems that it never runs out of messages. Even if we feel that we know most of the stories, the texts from the Bible seem to be constantly renewing; from time to time we find that some phrases are describing our exact situation, the exact state of spirit in which we find ourselves.

In the past few months, I've found myself resonating with today's reading. In my personal life, and in my congregation as well, I've got such impulses which wrapped my head around the story of Mary and Martha.

It's not a secret that I am at the very beginning of my motherhood. My whole life as I knew it has changed. Everything is in a constant state of change. I'm trying to find balance in my life, and often the biblical stories are those which help me.

But let's go back to our story, in which we find Jesus with two women.

Martha acts like a real homemaker. She is working hard in the kitchen to be able to serve the guest properly so he will sense the attention and care. There is plenty of food and drink available. She perfectly matches the profile of a hostess, as was required in biblical times, as well as nowadays.

Mary, on the other hand, is not behaving as a homemaker. She is not cleaning the house just because she has a guest. She sits at the Lord's feet, listening to him. With this simple act she becomes a disciple. Actually, the phrase "to sit at the Lord's feet" means to become a disciple.

"Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

We may take issue with Jesus, thinking that he is criticizing Martha: after all, there is work to be done! Someone must cook, clean, take care of the family, and work. But actually, Jesus is not judging. He does not judge Martha and the work she has done. He does not say that Martha's work is unimportant, that one shouldn't meet their responsibilities; he does not say that Martha's efforts are in vain. He only points out that in that moment, Mary is the one who has chosen wisely. He does not judge Martha, and he does not belittle the work done by her. It seems more likely that he aims to make a point: we need to recognize our opportunities; we need to be able to choose wisely in the present.

It's not all the same. We all know, as we all schedule, we try to keep track of our time: to do as many things as possible on short notice; we plan, we prioritize, we schedule and then again, we reschedule, hoping to make the best out of our limited time. But most often we fail. We just run from one task to another,

angered by the simple fact that time just passes by and does not forgive. Most often we make the huge mistake of choosing “the other way.”

What happens in the story of Martha and Mary is that one of the sisters lives in “kronos” and the other one in the “kairos.” The ancient Greek language provides these two forms to define the notion of time.

Kronos means the measurable, linear time, in which we all live. The minutes, the hours which are passing by in a ruthless manner, in exactly the same way for everyone. It is not endless and it is most certainly irreversible.

Kairos, on the other hand, is the exact opposite. It is the time within us. It is the time filled with opportunities where we can choose to live this life fully; the precious moments which live in us. It is the time in which we enrich ourselves.

We have both kinds of time at our disposal. There are times when we know which to choose, but there are times when we choose unwillingly. There most definitely are cases when we know that our time investment was useless: a movie, a show, a service, or even a meeting. But there are times when we aren't so sure whether it was worth it or not. What is certain is that we do recognize the difference between those times when we feel fulfilled – when we have spent it with loved ones, having quality time – as opposed to those times when we live our life in the “kronos way,” allowing time to simply pass by.

In the story, Martha realizes that she has chosen the wrong way. That is why she gets angry. She is able to understand that Mary has made the right choice: she has chosen to learn, to be enriched, to create something in her allotted time. But Martha has allowed a precious moment to pass by: she has let the opportunity slip between her fingers.

I believe that this is the message for us from this story.

But there is another very important message. The WITH or FOR idea.

Which is more important? Which is more important for you?

You learn WITH someone or you learn FOR someone?

You embrace a journey WITH someone or you embrace a journey FOR someone?

You live it WITH someone or you are living it FOR someone?

You wake up WITH someone or you wake up FOR someone?

You dream WITH someone or you are dreaming FOR someone?

You are doing it WITH someone or you are doing it FOR someone?

We can only have the right answer if we are able to understand the situation, the environment, and also the moment in which we find ourselves. Because obviously the circumstances mean a lot and can make the difference.

The quest is to find the right balance, as I asked at the beginning...

But how?

Perhaps we could replace the word WITH with AND instead.

Listen to it now:

You learn it for and with someone.

You dream it for and with someone.

You do it for and with someone.

You wake up for and with someone.

You embrace it for and with someone.

Just keep it in mind: you have to choose which kind of time, because they are not the same.

May the Creator of all give us wisdom in the time that lies before us, to be able to always choose the better way. May we be brave and open enough to understand the signs of the times, and the opportunities of the times we live in, to be able to always choose the best.

Amen.